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## **BURNOUT AMONG BILINGUAL SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS**

Marlene Reyes

*California State University - San Bernardino*

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# BURNOUT AMONG BILINGUAL SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

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

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

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by  
Marlene Reyes

June 2018

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by  
Marlene Reyes  
June 2018  
Approved by:

Dr. Erica Lizano, Ph.D., Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Dr. Janet Chang, Ph.D., M.S.W. Research Coordinator

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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on burnout among bilingual Social Service Providers (BSSPs) and examines their thoughts and beliefs on the interconnection of their bilingual/bicultural skills and higher risk of burnout. The findings from this study have significant ramifications for the social service field on both Macro and Micro levels. At a Micro scale, the data validates the additional responsibilities of BSSP's, while bringing more awareness to this group of professionals. Additional findings contribute to new policies regarding BSSPs job responsibilities; for example, accurate job descriptions and training for positions that require translation and interpretation. An exploratory study using qualitative data was utilized in order to best address the issue at hand. In order to appropriately analyze the data collected, the researcher examined the data collected through thematic analysis. Several themes emerged which include: proficiency, length of service, Spanish speaking caseload percentage, familiarity and knowledge of burnout, burnout experience, emotional overextension, impersonal response towards clients, decreased feelings of competence/successful achievement, and more effort when providing services in Spanish. subthemes include: burnout experience, attitude towards caseload and length of service and burnout.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents for instilling in me the drive and motivation to push further and obtain my wildest dreams. My husband, for believing in me and encouraging me in my weakest moments. My siblings for initiating my purpose in this field. My little sister, Leslie, you are my everything. My mother for making the sacrifice of traveling to a foreign country, learning a new language and culture and giving up your childhood for the purpose of providing us with a promising future. My mother crossed borders for me because she saw my potential before I ever did and then she taught me to dream. I would ultimately like to thank God, for proving me with a calling that turned into my career.

## DEDICATION

To all first-generation children of immigrant parents, for navigating new territory and facing adversity from both worlds. Yet, somehow, we are all out here thriving and making moves for the first time in our family tree. All because our parents dared to dream big.

“I can, and I did” -Gina Rodriguez

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Formulation

Due to the higher demands put on bilingual social service providers (BSSP), there is an increased burnout risk (Engstrom, Gamble & Won, 2009). Providing services and culturally competent practice to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) consumers present challenges past those typically confronted, usually falling disproportionately on BSSPs (Engstrom & Min, 2014). Burnout can be defined as extreme fatigue, which is characterized by physical and mental symptoms resulting from the excessive demands of work (Freudenberger, 1974). Moreover, people who experience the negative effects of burnout encounter enthusiastic depletion, depersonalization of customers, and decreased awareness of individual achievement (Maslach, 2005). It is pivotal to study burnout among BSSPs for the purpose of bringing more awareness to the issue and the consideration of implementation of compensating the burnout of bilingual social service providers.

#### The Roles of Social Service Providers

Social service providers (SSPs) play important roles in client's lives. Findings explain that an SSP can work with a single individual, an entire family and/or groups (Engstrom & Min, 2014). The role that a social service provider takes in a client's life can include: advocate, counselor, lobbyist, therapist, mediator, enabler, researcher, educator, case manager, facilitator, community

change agent and broker (1987). In addition to the roles that SSPs have in a client's life, they are responsible for a great deal of administrative duties. These duties can include: documentation, strong organizational skills, answering and making phone calls, properly and ethically maintaining files, and a high deal of correspondence (1987). Consequently, SSPs have many roles that they have in a client's life; however, these roles increase when an SSP is bilingual. Additional roles that a BSSP might have are translation, interpretation and higher caseloads (Engstrom & Min, 2014).

#### Additional Stressors for Bilingual Social Service Providers

Added stressors on BSSPs include higher caseloads, document translation and translation of client responses, non-bilingual colleague consultation, and an increase of self-awareness (Engstrom & Min, 2014). As mentioned before, higher demands expose bilingual social service providers to a higher risk of burnout. Although there has been extensive research on burnout and whom it affects, there is a lack of research on higher risks of burnout among BSSPs. Liu (2013) found that bilingual social service providers require expanded help in providing successful administrations to LEP consumers. Engstrom et al., (2004) found that bicultural/bilingual social workers reported that they regularly ended up educating customers about American culture and norms, laws, and social services.

## Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research study is to examine and understand the thoughts of BSSPs beliefs on the interconnection of their bilingual/bicultural skills and higher risk of burnout. This study allows the opportunity of increased awareness to the issue and the consideration of implementing a compensation for the burnout of bilingual social service providers. This study contributes to the overall job satisfaction of BSSPs and brings awareness to different approaches that BSSPs may take to decrease the likelihood of burnout.

The overall research method that was utilized in this study is an exploratory design with qualitative data. This study involved a series of face-to-face interviews focusing on collecting data from BSSPs. The BSSPs were recruited from Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties. This research design was chosen because it will allow for the interviewer to pick up on non-verbal cues and expressions. Qualitative research is often used to bring specific trends to light and further explore the issues at hand (Patton, 1990).

## Significance of the Project for Social Work

The findings from this study can have critical ramifications for the social service field on both Macro and Micro levels. At a Micro scale, the data can validate the additional responsibilities of BSSP's, while bringing more awareness to this group of professionals. Furthermore, this study will be able to provide compensation suggestions for social workers that have added responsibilities due to their bilingual skills. Chng, Rodgers, Shih and Song (2012) found that

employees' level of engagement and sense of fulfillment increases when compensation levels increase.

Additional findings will possibly contribute to new policies regarding BSSPs job responsibilities; for example, accurate job descriptions and training for positions that will require translation and interpretation. Most employment descriptions will state that being bilingual is a requirement, however, they fail to add the expectations of translation and interpretation functions (Bok, 2015). Bok (2015) reported that if there is an expectation for social service providers to translate or interpret for clients, this ought to be particularity expressed in sets of responsibilities and financial compensation should be provided. In the case that the NASW were to grasp these ideas, managers would be required to use the suggestions in order to guarantee that clients receive culturally competent services and social service providers are given the appropriate recognition within the workplace for their bilingual/bicultural competence (Bok, 2015).

The phases of the Generalist model that this study will utilize are Engagement and Assessment. Roberts (1993) reports that engagement involves the interaction between social worker and client and the assessment stage is when the social worker utilizes their abilities to restate what was said for the purpose of clarifying what was said. The face-to-face interviews that were utilized in this study allowed the engagement of the client for the purpose of increasing the opportunity of accurate and honest responses. Also, the study involved the

assessment of the client in order to clarify that the client is clear on what the response was.

If BSSPs understand the reason behind their increased risk of burnout, prevention, and possible compensation, they will live a higher quality of life and not experience burnout as often. All things considered, the research question for this project was the following: Do bilingual social service providers (BSSPs) believe that their bilingual/bicultural demands contribute to a higher risk of burnout?



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The literature review focuses on burnout, particularly on Bilingual Social service providers (BSSPs) who have the responsibility of serving clients in two different languages and cultures. The discussed sections include studies focusing on burnout involving BSSP's, the explanation of burnout, bilingualism, cultural competency and the increased need for BSSPs. The final section examines the following theories that are relevant to burnout among BSSPs: Social Cognitive Theory and Job Demands and Resources theory.

#### Studies Focusing on Burnout Involving BSSPS

Presently, there is not much research on BSSP's and their increased risk of burnout. This study reviews two articles that focus on burnout and the demands for BSSPs and address burnout, bilingualism, cultural competency and increased burnout among BSSPs.

In a sample study, Bok (2015) wanted to study the experiences of Asian and Latino social workers that serve a community with LEP and their job expectations about their bilingual/bicultural skill set. Additionally, Bok (2015) wanted to investigate the participant's current workplace guidelines to improve their experience. With this study, Bok was able to broaden the standards for the working environment and employment problems for bilingual social service

providers and bicultural social workers (BSSPs/BCSWs). This study was conducted by mailing out 130 questionnaires to members of the National Association of Social Workers in Connecticut with a Latino and Asian last names. The data was based on questionnaires that were given to fifty-five social workers listed on the NASW-CT membership database. The survey was anonymous and self-administered; once the survey was completed the participants returned it to the NASW-CT (Bok, 2005).

Findings of Bok's (2005) study show that BSSPs and BCSWs reported an increased workload. Respondents reported that they were frequently asked to be a translator to clients and forms from English to Spanish and noticed that their tasks increased due to their bilingual skills. It should be noted that these workers reported that the added responsibilities had not been noted on the initial job interviews or added into evaluations, and they were usually not given compensation for the added responsibilities. Respondents reported that their burnout was related to the higher caseloads due to their additional responsibilities (Bok, 2005).

A gap in this literature includes how compensation for BSSPs and BCSWs can positively impact social workers and their practice. A limitation of this study is that it was conducted in Connecticut where bilingual social service providers may be limited. Connecticut's population for foreign language speakers stands at 22% while California is at 45% (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). Another limitation that was found in this study is the bilingual/bicultural assumption was made based on

surnames. The assumption of individuals being bilingual or bicultural is unrealistic as there are factors such as marriage or multiple generations. This study addresses the gap by raising the question of how the BSSPs/BCSWs quality of practice will increase if there was compensation. The limitations will be addressed by the following: sampling in California where there is a larger population of bilingual/bicultural consumers and by conducting a proficiency evaluation on bilingualism before participation.

The second study by Engstrom, Gamble and Won Min (2009) explored experiences of bilingual social work graduate students who worked with limited English proficiency (LEP) clients in their internship. The data was collected from the 55 bilingual social work graduate students through an online survey. Respondents stated that serving LEP clients required more time and energy in comparison to English speaking clients (Engstrom et al., 2009). The participants reported that there was no proper training for adequate translation from one language to another and experience higher rates of fatigue when it comes to working with two or more languages (2009). Furthermore, respondents reported that the agencies they were placed at did not have all of the required documents translated from English to Spanish and 25% reported that being a bilingual intern negatively impacted their field education (2009).

A gap in this literature includes the data collection approach. Since the data was collected on a web-based survey, there was no opportunity for verbal or non-verbal cues to be examined. Limitations in this study include: the low number

of respondents and the sample only being specific to social work graduate students. The limitations indicate that this study was not representative of all social workers. The intended study will address the gap by collecting data in a face-to-face interview instead of a survey. The intended study will address the limitations by it being more representative of the population and interviewing a larger sample.

### Burnout

The idea of burnout popularized in the 1970's, as it was a characterization of adverse reactions to one's work, particularly to the field of human services (Soderfeldt & Warg, 1995). Burnout is characterized as a mental reaction to the stressors and can incorporate feeling cynical, depleted and inadequate in accomplishments (Green, Albansese, Shapiro & Aarons, 2014).

Truchot and Deregard (2001) identified different causes of burnout and grouped them into three categories: individual, referring to personality characteristics; interpersonal, referring to conflicts between professionals and client's; and organizational causes which include role conflict, work ambiguity, and workload. They also found that social workers that constantly deal with other individual's problems directly in a face-to-face situation are considered at higher risk of burnout.

### Bilingualism

Some researchers in the field of linguistics have defined the term bilingualism as the use of a language by an individual or speech community

(Ellis, 1997). There is a vast difference in simply using a language on a daily basis versus assisting clients in the understanding of the terminology utilized in social services. Challenges emerge when exploring the matter of being perceived as bilingual by others. Danbolt (2011) reports that challenges such as accurate interpretation and increased pressure to assist monolingual (English) speaking co-workers may arise when one identifies as bilingual. An attempt to identify an inclusive, representative, useful and adequate definition of being bilingual has been a difficult task because the phenomenon has taken an interdisciplinary approach (Arriaza, 2013). As the population in the U.S. has progressively grown in diversity, cultural competence should be a pre-requisite among social service providers in order to maintain effective services (Min, 2005). However, Bok (2015) reports that individuals who are bilingual should still not be considered culturally competent. This results in the idea BSSPs need to be bilingual and culturally competent to adequately serve a client.

Cultural Competency. Simmons, Diaz, Jackson and Takahashi (2008) report that cultural competence is the means in which people and systems react with respect to individuals of different races, religions, nationalities, social classes, sex, legal status and other various elements in a way that values and affirms individuals, families, and communities, while protecting and preserving the dignity of each. Given this information, it is suggested that all social service providers should have a certain level of cultural competence. However, SSPs

that are bilingual are often held to a higher expectation because of the services provided to a monolingual population (Liu, 2013).

### Increased Need for Bilingual Social Service Providers

Today, the need for BSSPs is evident in our multilingual democracy (Engstrom et al., 2009). Even though English is the primary language in the United States, the number of individuals that identify as having limited English proficiency (LEP) has greatly increased in the past twenty years. Although more than 20% of individuals that live in the United States communicate in other languages besides English, there are insufficient numbers of social service providers that can speak to the client in their native language (Melles, 2012). The results indicate an increased need for BSSPs.

Currently, agencies and organizations progressively desire individuals who can speak more than one language, especially within professions that involve providing services with high demands for human interaction like social work (New American Economy, 2017). Given these results, BSSPs are in high-demand as LEP populations continue to grow.

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Even though there are no specific theories stated in the research examined, there are patterns in research that suggest two common theories: social cognitive theory and job demands and resources theory as we are looking at increased burnout risk among bilingual social service providers. Robinson

(2012) reports that burnout consists of mental, social and ecological components that work with one another to create the effect of burnout.

Social cognitive theory is learning by observation and modeling and is an approach to gain social abilities and numerous nonsocial practices (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2006). Originally social learning theory was defined as perception and impersonation until Albert Bandura perceived that cognitive learning isolates people from other species of animals that learn through imitation (Bandura, 1989). Additionally, it highlights the importance of environment, affects and alternate characteristics that have a vital role in life outcomes (Bandura, 1989). Social cognitive theory is very similar to systems theory as it aligns with the idea of burnout because it suggests that there are various elements of an individual's life and environment that contribute to a specific result. In this case, that result is burnout among bilingual social service providers.

The theory of Job Demands and Resources is a potent theoretical framework to apply to the concept of burnout among BSSPs. This theory argues that as an employee there will be a range of demands that require balance. These demands are balanced by obtaining a proper toolbox of resources that include sustainability, encouraging feedback, and self-determination (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Maslach and Jackson (1981) developed a theory and measure conceptualizing burnout as having three pivotal components. The three components present in burnout are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decrease in individual achievement.

## Summary

This study examines the difficulties that bilingual social service providers experience because of their bilingual and bicultural skills and how these elements increase their chances of burnout. Additionally, the study suggests proper compensation and training for social service providers that have bilingual/bicultural skills. Lastly, this study adds the Bilingual Social Service Provider's approach on higher burnout risk to the literature, and solutions for improved service utilization.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

The study explores burnout, particularly among Bilingual Social service providers (BSSPs) who have the responsibility of serving clients in two different languages and cultures, and additionally identified prevention mechanisms and compensation for BSSPs. The discussed sections include the study design, type of sampling procedure, data collection and instruments, procedures, the protection of human subjects and an overall summary of this chapter.

#### Study Design

The type of study design utilized was exploratory using qualitative data in order to best address the issue at hand. Using the qualitative approach was an efficient and productive way to quickly identify any relationship between self-identifying as a bilingual social worker, an increase in burnout risk, common themes among BSSPs and provides a voice for the BSSP population. This qualitative approach decreased the possibility of biased answers due to its individuality and confidentiality of the interviews. Utilizing an exploratory study allowed for an accurate profile of the group, a clear description of the process and provided verbal results.

A qualitative data approach allowed for the identification of non-verbal cues and a more personalized interview. The bilingual social service provider

participants were able to identify their own barriers, provide their own ideas of compensation suggestions, and provide their own personal definition of burnout. The individual interview allowed for the privacy of the participants (anonymity), which also allowed for transparency and high-quality answers.

This study answered the following question in regards to bilingual social service providers: Do bilingual social service providers (BSSPs) believe that their bilingual/bicultural skills and demands contribute to a higher risk of burnout?

### Sampling

The study utilized a non-probability snowball sample of bilingual social service providers that provide mental health and case management service to monolingual-Spanish speaking clients in the Los Angeles and San Bernardino County area. The sample included BSSPs that are employed in Los Angeles and San Bernardino County. In consideration of the anonymity of the BSSPs, no agency approval was required or utilized. There was a total of eight participants that participated in individual face-to-face interviews with the researcher. In order to avoid limitations, a filtering process was utilized in order to recruit BSSPs that work with primarily monolingual (Spanish) clients and have been in the field for more than two years. This is where the question such as “what percentage of your caseload are monolingual-Spanish speaking clients?” was utilized as a filtration tool.

## Data Collection and Instruments

Qualitative data was collected through individual face-to-face interviews with each participant in March 2018. These interviews were audio-recorded; which were consented to prior to the start of the interview. The audio recorder was placed on the table between the facilitator and interviewee for the purpose of clear and concise audio. Each interview began with an introduction on the full description and purpose for the study. Prior to the individual face-to-face interviews, demographic data and consent forms was collected. The information consists of gender, age, ethnic background, professional title and educational level.

## Procedures

Due to the study utilizing the snowball technique, the participants were solicited through personal contacts of the researcher. These personal connections made contact with other participants within the BSSP field. During solicitation period each participant was contacted via phone and provided a brief description (see Appendix C) of the study in preparation to decide whether or not to participate in the study. Once the intended individual accepted to participate in the study, the researcher set up individual appointments with each participant. Each participant had the opportunity to select dates and times that were most convenient to him or her.

Face-to-face interviews were suggested; however, the researcher informed the participant about the option to video chat the interview. The video

chats allowed the researcher to access body language. The application Facetime was utilized with those participants that opted for the video chat. Each interview was approximately 8-15 minutes in duration. The finalized dates and location was provided to them via email for the purpose of documentation. Participants were provided with the required informed consent and approval for audio recording form prior to the individual interviews.

### Protection of Human Subjects

The identity and demographics of the study participants was completely confidential. Each participant read and signed the informed consent form (Appendix D) prior to participating in the interview. Consent for the audio recording was read and signed by the participants as well. All signed documentation including informed consent and release forms are kept in a locked safe at facilitators home. The individual face-to-face interviews were held in confidential locations with complete privacy. Confidentiality was emphasized to the participants for the purpose of increasing the transparency and honesty of the answers. Participants were advised to maintain their participation confidential and to refrain from discussing the interview details with colleagues. The recorded audio is kept on a password protected USB drive in the researcher's locked safe. Each participant was provided with a pseudonym number for the transcription; this is for the purpose of keeping the participants information confidential. The recorded audio and documentation will be destroyed a year from the completion of the study.

## Data Analysis

All data collected for the individual face-to-face interviews has been analyzed using thematic analysis, which consists of the researcher familiarizing him or herself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes and producing the report.

The audio recordings were transcribed into written form. Once transcribed, the data was read three times in order for the researcher to become familiar with the data. Individual participants were assigned a numeric number during transcription in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participant. All comments, including both supportive and opposing, were documented on the transcription. Non-verbal activities were also noted.

Statements were categorized by potential themes. All statements were labeled into relevant words, phrases, sentences or sections. Categories consist of actions, activities, concepts, opinions, and processes. Major themes and sub-themes were identified under each category and assigned a code; then logged onto a master code list. The researcher read and reread transcripts to be certain of themes and subthemes assigned. Individual statements were assigned under their corresponding category and entered into an excel document under their assigned code.

## Summary

The study explores burnout, particularly on Bilingual Social service providers (BSSPs) who have the responsibility of serving clients in two different

languages and cultures, and additionally seek to identify prevention mechanisms and compensation for BSSPs. The individual face-to-face interviews provided anonymity for the purpose of increased accurate data. Using the qualitative approach was an efficient and productive way to quickly identify any relationship between self-identifying as a bilingual social worker, an increase in burnout risk, common themes among BSSPs and provides a voice for the BSSP population. An exploratory study with qualitative data best addressed the study question.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The following is a summary of the major themes that emerged from the qualitative data. The presentation of the author's findings will be reviewed and presented in this chapter. This will include a description of the study sample and the qualitative themes.

#### Presentation of Findings

##### Sample Description

The study sample consisted of eight participants, all whom identified as having Latino(a)/Hispanic ethnic background. All of the participants reported that they were employed by Los Angeles County, however, they all maintained their agency anonymous. Each participant filled out a demographic data sheet that consisted of gender, age, ethnic background, professional title and educational level. The results were as follows: seven female participants, one male participant, the median age was 30 years old, five participants had bachelor's level education while three participants had graduate level education (See Table 1). No names were collected in this study to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

| Demographics | Participant 1     | Participant 2   | Participant 3     | Participant 4     | Participant 5   | Participant 6   | Participant 7     | Participant 8     |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Age          | 28                | 25              | 28                | 23                | 54              | 27              | 31                | 28                |
| Gender       | Female            | Female          | Female            | Female            | Male            | Female          | Female            | Female            |
| Race         | Latino            | Latino          | Latino            | Latino            | Latino          | Latino          | Latino            | Latino            |
| Education    | Bachelor's Degree | Master's Degree | Bachelor's Degree | Bachelor's Degree | Master's Degree | Master's Degree | Bachelor's Degree | Bachelor's Degree |

### Qualitative Analysis

A key-words in context technique was utilized to find and identify key words. The rest of the transcription was systematically searched for the identified key words. Each time a phrase or specific work was found, the author highlighted with its corresponding color. Themes were denoted by using a specific color coding technique. The major qualitative themes derived from the data include: proficiency, length of service, Spanish speaking caseload percentage, familiarity and knowledge of burnout, burnout experience, emotional overextension, impersonal response towards clients, decreased feelings of competence/successful achievement, and more effort when providing services in Spanish. subthemes include: burnout experience, attitude towards caseload and length of service and burnout.

### Proficiency

One of the major themes that emerged in this study was the participants proficiency of the Spanish Language. When asked the question, “How do you consider your Spanish speaking skills to be?” 8 out of the 8 participants (100%)



reported fluency. These participants used statements such as “very proficient” and “Very fluent.” Out of those 8 participants, only 3 of them (38%) were required to take a Spanish Proficiency test before being able to provide Spanish speaking services. In addition, participants 1 through 8 (100%) reported that they speak Spanish on a daily basis. Participant #2 stated “My parents are only Spanish speaking as well and I speak to them in their own language at home” and participant #8 states “I also speak it [Spanish] on a daily basis at home and work. Participants 2, 4 and 6 (38%) reported that Spanish was their first language.

#### Length of Service

Another major theme was length of bilingual service. 50% of participants stated that they have been providing bilingual services for over 8 years. Participant #5 reported that he has provided bilingual services for 20 years, participant #8 reported she has provided bilingual services for 12 years, participant #1 reported that she has provided bilingual services for 11 years and participant #3 reported that she has provided bilingual services for 8 years. Participants 2, 4, 6, and 7 reported that they have provided bilingual services for under 3 years.

#### Caseload Percentage

The third research question explored bilingual social service providers caseloads in which they utilized their bilingual/bicultural skills. Participants 1, 4 and 5 (38%) reported that they utilized their bilingual/bicultural skills on 75% of their cases. Participants 2, 6 and 7 (38%) reported that they utilize their

bilingual/bicultural skills on 90% of their cases while participant 3 (12%) reported 95% and participant 8 (12%) reported 100%. Overall, 8 out of 8 (100%) participants reported that their caseloads are made up of 75% or more cases in which they utilize their bilingual and bicultural skills.

### Attitude Towards Caseload

When asked about their attitude towards their higher caseloads 50% of participants used terms like “Very overwhelming,” “high caseload,” “it’s harder” and “demanding.” Participants 2, 3, 4 and 8 reported that their caseloads were higher in comparison to non-Spanish speaking colleagues. Participant #2 stated “[Being] a Spanish [speaking] therapist, also requires you to do extra work sometimes, like translating for someone who comes into the clinic. They usually go to the Spanish speaking therapists first even if they are busy.” Participant #8 stated “We are expected to interpret on various setting such as meeting, other employee’s sessions and with client’s families, so [essentially] you are working in various roles.”

### Defining Burnout

When the participants were asked if they were familiar with burnout, 8 out of 8 (100%) participants answered yes. When asked to define burnout, participants utilized the following terms: overwhelmed, drained, tired, physical, emotional, nightmares, excess of work, neglect, overworked, cynical, jaded, stressed, sleepy and difficulty getting up for work. The term “overwhelmed” was utilized the most as it was used by 3 out of the 8 participants, while the rest

utilized similar words such as stressed and overworked. Participant #6 reported “you go home and you’re in bed and you’re still thinking about it [workload] or even having nightmares. That does exist [nightmares].”

### Experience with Burnout

When asked if they had experienced burnout, 7 out of 8 participants (88%) reported they have experienced burnout. While most of the participants reported history with burnout, participant #1 reported that she has not experienced burnout, stating “If I am feeling that I’m starting to get a little bit overwhelmed, I’ll reach out for help or put some things on the back burner for a while and prioritize.” Participant #1 also reported over 11 years of experience providing bilingual and bicultural services. Participants 2-8 reported experiencing burnout in which participant #2 is currently reporting symptoms of burnout. Participant #2 stated “I think I am actually in that stage [burnout] right now where I am experiencing it. I think I became aware of it when I started to notice that simple tasks were becoming difficult, such as paperwork and I get very distracted, tired and oversleeping.”

### Length of Service and Burnout

Participants #5 reported having over 20 years of experience in providing bilingual and bicultural services while participant #8 reported 12 years. Both participants reported that they have experienced burnout during their career, however, reported that they have not experienced burnout in their current employment. The oldest participant, participant #5, stated “ I think early in my

career, I was so eager to do a lot that it lead to burnout but post that I think that I've learned to balance work and my home life" and "I think it was a matter of figuring out the balance between one and the other [work and home life]."

### Emotional Overextension

All of the participants, (100%) reported that due to their bilingual and bicultural skills, they have felts symptoms of emotional overextension.

Participants provided the following terms: "more work", "time consuming" and "draining." Participants #6 and #7 reported that they will often be pulled away from their current duties to translate for another colleague or front office staff. Participant #4 stated "There might be times in which a colleague will ask for a quick translation in the middle of my own workload. Then this quick translation turns into a 30-minute session with the client and my colleague."

### Impersonal Response Towards Clients

When participants responded to question #9, Six out of eight participants (75%) reported experiencing an impersonal response towards clients due to burnout. Participant #4 stated "There's so much that goes into it [providing services in Spanish] that my train of thought just starts spiraling off when I should be focused on the client and I'm not. I am tired. I am looking tired. I am feeling tired. I am thinking about going home."

### Decreased Feelings of Competence and Successful Achievement

When participants responded to question #10, five out of eight participants (63%) denied experiencing a decreased feeling of competence or successful achievement. Out of those specific 5 participants, a common trend was that even though they do experience symptoms of burnout, they still feel competent and successful as a bilingual social service provider. Participant #2 stated “To me, I feel it makes me feel more accomplished” and participant #6 stated “if anything, I feel more accomplished because I am able to provide services to people that I identify with.”

### More Effort when Providing Services in Spanish

Most of the participants (88%) reported that there is more effort required when providing services in Spanish versus in English. Common terms utilized by Participant #1, #2, #3, #4, #6, #7 and #8 were: “translating forms”, “translating calls”, “clinical terms” “cultural education” and “more effort.” Participant #1 stated “It takes a lot more time; I think it definitely take my Spanish interviews a lot longer than my English interviews.” Participant #7 stated that “because most of my clients are undocumented [the parents of clients] I have to do double the work by explaining what mental health is.” “Often times, you will not only have one client [the child] because if there is rapport built, the parents will always call you if they need any help.”

## Summary

This chapter presented a description of the study's participants and discussion of the major and minor qualitative themes that emerged. The participants' demographic characteristics included: Age, Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Level. The emergent themes included: proficiency, length of service, caseload percentage, attitude towards caseload, defining burnout out, experience with burnout, and length of service and burnout. Overall, perceptions and experiences were derived from eight interviews which were used to draw the findings presented.

The stated results suggest that all of the bilingual social service participants share a common experience with burnout. The participants share a common identity in which bilingual social service providers often have to step in for non-speaking social service providers, have experience with burnout, hold a higher caseload and have to provide education to their mono-lingual Spanish speaking clients.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter will discuss the major findings that were presented in previous chapter. In addition, this chapter will discuss the relevance of the current study findings to previous studies, limitations of the current study, recommendations and implications of the current study findings for social work practice, policy, and future research.

#### Discussion

This research study examined the thoughts of BSSPs beliefs on the interconnection of their bilingual/bicultural skills and higher risk of burnout. The findings from this study provide the opportunity of increased awareness and understanding to the issue. Additionally, the findings might help guide future efforts to increase the job satisfaction of BSSPs. The type of study design utilized for this research was exploratory using qualitative data which consisted of one-on-one interviews with BSSPs. The researcher examined the data collected using a thematic analysis approach.

The results from the thematic analysis revealed 12 themes. The following themes were identified: #1 Proficiency, #2 Length of Service, #3 Spanish Speaking Caseload percentage, #4 Familiarity and knowledge of Burnout, #5 Burnout Experience, #6 emotional overextension, #7 Impersonal Response

towards Clients, #8 decreased feelings of competence/successful achievement, #9 more effort when providing Spanish services. Subthemes include: #10 burnout experience, #11 Attitude towards caseloads and #12 length of service and burnout.

When examining the results, it was revealed that the findings were consistent with previous related literature (Bok, 2015). Findings of Bok's (2005) study showed that BSSPs and BCSWs reported an increased workload. Respondents reported that they were frequently asked to be a translator to clients and forms from English to Spanish and noticed that their tasks increased due to their bilingual skills. It should be noted that these workers reported that the added responsibilities had not been noted on the initial job interviews or added into evaluations, and they were usually not given compensation for the added responsibilities. Respondents reported that their burnout was related to the higher caseloads due to their additional responsibilities (Bok, 2005).

### Limitations

Limitations of this study include: limited generalizability, small sample size, diversity and gender.

#### Limited Generalizability

The bilingual social services providers interviewed for this research study were selected through a snowball sample technique; which is a non-random sampling technique. The interviews were administered to eight bilingual social service providers were all located in and employed within Los Angeles County,



however, the findings may not be representative of all BSSPs within Los Angeles County.

#### Small Sample Size

For this research study, there were eight participants interviewed which decreases the validity of the results. The validity of the research question that was asked for this study may be increased if a larger sample is collected.

#### Diversity

In this research study, the lack of diversity among the BSSPs is also a limitation. All participants self-identified as Latino. However, due to California's geographical location this may be reflective of the ethnic majority in the area.

#### Gender

Lastly, there may be limitations due to the disparity in gender representation in the study sample. Seven out of the eight BSSPs identified as female. This may also be reflective of social service provider field, as it is dominated by females.

### Recommendations for Social Work Practice

#### Implications

The findings of this study suggest that having bilingual and bicultural skills may increase the probability of burnout among social service providers. On top of the responsibilities that social services providers usually have, BSSPs eventually indirectly inherit added responsibilities such as translation and cultural education.

### Micro Recommendations

After analyzing the results from this study, it is recommended that steps be taken by agencies to prevent burnout among BSSPs, proper compensation be provided for any additional responsibilities not included in the job description, certification and training availability, case load control and diverse population assignments.

### Macro Recommendations

Recommendations for future research within BSSPs and burnout is to improve the following: interview a larger sample size, sample a more diverse population (different region) and recruit more male participants.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examines bilingual social service providers' beliefs about the interconnection between their bilingual/bicultural skills and higher risk of burnout. All of the participants (100%) correctly identified symptoms of burnout; Most of the participants reported experiencing burnout within their career and all participants reported that 75% or more of their caseload consisted of monolingual Spanish speaking clients. This study added to the limited literature on burnout among bilingual social service providers. Future studies should conduct a larger sample mixed methods study to improve current and previous research. Hopefully, this study will provide knowledge of burnout among bilingual social service providers and improve the prevention and compensation options.

APPENDIX A  
DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Ethnicity
4. Level of Education

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your professional title?
2. How proficient do you consider your bilingual skills to be? Why?
3. How many years have you provided bilingual services?
4. What percentage of your caseload consists of providing bilingual services?
5. What is your caseload like in comparison to your non-bilingual colleagues?  
What is your perspective of this?
6. Are you familiar are you with burnout? How do you define burnout?
7. Do you feel that you have experienced burnout?
8. Do you believe that providing bilingual services contributed to feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by your work?
9. Do you believe that providing bilingual services contributed to measures of an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's service, care treatment, or instruction?
10. Do you believe that providing bilingual services contributed to decreased feelings of competence and successful achievement in your work?
11. Do you feel there is a difference in effort when providing services in English versus Spanish? If so, what are they?
12. What do you believe are the most tiring parts of your job responsibilities?

Interview questions were developed by Marlene Reyes

APPENDIX C  
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT MATERIAL

Recruiting Script:

Hello,

My name is Marlene Reyes. I am a current MSW graduate student at California State University, San Bernardino in the Social Work Department and I am conducting research on burnout among Bilingual Social Service Providers. I am inviting you to participate because you are a bilingual social service provider.

Participation in this research includes participating in an individual face-to-face interview about your experiences with burnout and how it relates to your bilingual skills. This private interview will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at (909) 215-3175 or [reyesm@coyote.csusb.edu](mailto:reyesm@coyote.csusb.edu)

Thank you,

Marlene Reyes



APPENDIX D  
INFORMED CONSENT



California State University, San Bernardino  
Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee  
APPROVED 2/23/2018 VOID AFTER 2/21/2019  
IRBS SW1850 CHAIR [Signature]

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 burnout among bilingual social service providers and the factors that contribute to it. The study is being conducted by Marlene Reyes, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Erica Lizano, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee at CSUSB.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the study is to examine the difficulties that bilingual social service providers experience because of their bilingual and bicultural skills and how these elements increase their chances of burnout.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked to a few questions of their bilingual skills, their caseload compared to other non-bilingual workers, their perception of burnout, identifiable symptoms, ideal compensation, and some demographics.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is completely 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 an individual face-to-face interview.

**DURATION:** It will take 30 to 40 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 contact Dr. Lizano at (909) 537-5584.

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2018.

I agree to be tape recorded:  YES  NO (required if you are recording interview for qualitative or mixed method study)

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

Place an X mark here

Date

909.537.5501

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 - Santa Barbara

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