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## JOB READINESS OF SOCIAL WORKERS SERVING INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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JOB READINESS OF SOCIAL WORKERS SERVING  
INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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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  
Danielle Marie Orozco

June 2019

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Approved by:

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## ABSTRACT

The present study explored advance year Master of Social Work (MSW) candidates and graduated social workers perceived preparedness to serve individuals with developmental disabilities (DD). There has been minimal of studies that have explored perceived preparedness in serving individuals with DD, more specifically in the field of social work. Due to the lack of research on the topic and the recent growth of the DD population, the present research was an exploratory project that utilized qualitative techniques. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews that analyzed advance year Master of Social Work candidates and graduated social workers perceived preparedness serving individuals who are developmentally disabled. The findings of this study suggested that Master of Social Work candidates and graduated social workers are not prepared to serve the DD population. Based on the qualitative analyses, four themes emerged about social workers serving the DD population. The implications of this study include the need for reevaluation of the Council on Social Work Education accreditation standards and ethical standards put forth by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

*Keywords:* social workers, developmental disabilities, qualitative research

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I like to thank my Mom and Dad, family and friends for always supporting me in life especially throughout the grad school process. Moving 400 miles away for grad school was not an easy decision, but you all were always one call away to give me encouragement, love, and support. I couldn't have done this without you.

Grandpa, your unconditional love and support especially through my educational endeavors have kept me going. I know every day you're shining down on me.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge those individuals who made this research project possible such as CSUSB school of Social Work faculty, my research advisor, Dr. Davis, and research participants.

## DEDICATION

To the most amazing and misunderstood population and their families who never stop advocating. The developmental disabilities population showed me firsthand what bravery and resiliency means and looks like. Working with this population encouraged me to learn, research, and advocate ensuring they get the proper care and resources they deserve. I hope this project sheds light on the population.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Formulation

Developmental disabilities (DD) is defined as a chronic and severe disability that is caused by a mental or physical impairment that begins before an individual reaches adulthood (California Department of Developmental Services, 2013). These disabilities include intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy, and disabling conditions closely correlated to intellectual disability or requiring similar treatment (California Department of Developmental Services, 2013). Disabilities appear before the age of 22 and are likely to be lifelong (AAIDD, 2010). Additionally, individuals who have DD are considered to be apart of the venerable population and often encounter various barriers that are persistent, such as daily living skills, unemployment, poverty, discrimination, and co-occurring mental illnesses (United States Census Bureau, 2012).

Laws have been implemented to enhance the quality of life for said population, such as the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 and Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Act (Mary, 1998). Although laws such as these are a step forward for the DD population to live independent lives, without proper training and knowledge, these laws are counterproductive. For example, if social workers feel unprepared working with said population, the code of ethics comes into questioning. Thus, giving social

workers the potential to breaking National Association of Social Workers (NASW) ethical codes, such as commitment to clients, competence, and cultural awareness and social diversity (National Association of Social Workers, 1999). Therefore, it is imperative social workers are adequately qualified to serve individuals who have DD.

There are various populations that social work students choose to focus on and work with. Most accredited universities offer concentrations in different areas such as child, youth, and family welfare, aging, and mental health. However, there are some populations that are not offered as a concentration or even focused on during graduate school. In a study conducted exploring 50 accredited master's programs, only three universities provided the DD concentration (Laws, Parish, Scheyett, & Egan, 2010). Yet, in the 2010 United States Census Bureau, one in five Americans reported having a disability (United States Census Bureau, 2012). Although this statistic is specific to the broad definition of disability, it illustrates how many people are disabled in some capacity (United States Census Bureau, 2012). Whereas in DD specific statistics, the CDC found an 1.23% increase in American children aged 3-17 years old who were diagnosed with DD from 2014 to 2016 (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). Implicating a high probability that a social worker will serve a DD individual in some capacity at least once in their career. However, regardless of the amount of individuals who are in the DD population, very few schools offer DD content in their curricula (DePoy, 1996).

Despite having little to no training offered at many universities, the NASW has social workers comply with the code of ethics. The code of ethics is standard of values and principles that social workers must practice (National Association of Social Workers, 1999). This could be detrimental to social workers, but most importantly their clients who will receive inefficient care and inadequate services. It is vital for social workers to understand the magnitude of working with the DD population, but a level of readiness must be achieved. Identifying social workers who feel unprepared to serve individuals within the DD population need to be provided with education, supervision, and training.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to gain insight and understanding of job readiness of social workers serving individuals with DD. Social workers ethical principles set them apart from other helping professions; social justice, service, dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (National Association of Social Workers, 1999). However, if the level of preparedness for social workers is inadequate to work with said population, steps need to be taken to ensure a level of competence and ethical principles are being met and upheld (Deweaver & Kropf, 1992). In order to begin addressing the problem, research was conducted in finding the level of perceived preparedness of social workers serving individuals with DD.

The research method that was utilized in the present research study was a qualitative design. The research was collected via face to face interviews with social workers who are familiar with the DD population to help gain insight and understanding the current beliefs regarding the state of social workers readiness in serving individuals with DD. Additionally, advance year Master of Social Work candidates were also interviewed to understand social workers perceived preparedness and what could be done to improve social work preparedness to serve the said population.

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work

The need to conduct this study ascended from the lack of literature on the DD population, moreover, on the perceived preparedness of social workers serving the said population. There are many barriers that the DD population faces daily and having a social worker that lacks the skills and experience would be detrimental to the client. Being skilled and experienced is important for any population, but especially for the DD population whose numbers are expected to increase; thus, having a dramatic impact on the need for services (Ouellette-Kuntz, Martin, & Mckenzie, 2016).

It was hypothesized the findings of this study will inform social work practice on a micro and macro level. On a micro level, these findings would assist social workers to recognize their level of preparedness when serving the DD population. While on a macro level, this study would bring awareness to

universities the importance of including other areas of concentration in social work such as the DD population. More specifically, this study can be an importance to the generalist intervention process. For instance, the study can provide CSWE assistance to reevaluate current accreditation standards to understand if social work programs are meeting CSWE and competency-based education standards.

The findings from this study would assist agencies to develop and implement evidence-based practices for their employees to become better equipped to serve the said population. In addition, the findings of this study would be relevant to macro social work in maintaining the NASW ethical standards such as commitment to clients, competence, and cultural awareness and social diversity (National Association of Social Workers, 1999).

The question the current study addressed is: What are advance year Master of Social Work candidates and graduated social workers perceived preparedness to serve individuals with developmental disabilities?



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter comprises of an analysis of literature and research relevant to the DD population such as the knowledge and training mental health disciplines receive. The subsection will include an examination of the accreditation standards for social work programs set forth by Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The final section will focus on the Ecological Systems Theory, which is relevant to the said population.

#### Importance of Developmental Disability Education

Developmental disabilities (DD) are a group of various disabilities that cannot be outgrown or cured (California Department of Developmental Services, 2013). Recent estimates show there are approximately 4.92 million individuals in the United States living with an intellectual disability (ID), DD for broader terms, which is about 17% of the U.S. population (Braddock, et al. 2015). As a result, the federal government has recognized the importance of identifying children with DD as early as possible to provide appropriate services to help these children reach their potential, to provide families with training and support, and to prevent new difficulties from evolving (Holtz & Fox, 2008).

Although the federal government recognizes the importance of providing appropriate services to the DD population, it is still questioned whether social workers are properly prepared to serve the population. CSWE was implemented to ensure a quality level is upheld in social work education. Accreditation standards will be examined to learn if the CSWE criteria are aligned with preparing social workers to serve the growing DD population.

### Accreditation Standards

According to CSWE (2017), the Commission on Accreditation (COA) is accountable for establishing, promoting, and executing the accreditation standards for baccalaureate and master's degree programs in social work (Council on Social Work Education, 2016). The standards are comprised in the CSWE 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). The EPAS clearly states competency-based education such as diverse and oppressed populations must be integrated and applied in social work programs within knowledge, values, and skills (Council on Social Work Education, 2016). In addition, the NASW has implemented ethical codes such as commitment to clients, competence, and cultural awareness and social diversity that the EPAS abides by (National Association of Social Workers, 1999). Therefore, it is practical to infer that universities must provide students with intensive training on topics such as the DD population to meet the standards put forth by the EPAS and NASW. Otherwise, it is contradictory that the CSWE EPAS and NASW prioritize competency-based education (Laws, Parish, Scheyett, & Egan, 2010).

## Studies Focused on Developmental Disabilities Training in Mental Health Disciplines

Weiss, Lunskey, & Morin (2010), explored psychology graduate students in Canada and the education received on the DD population. In short, researchers were interested in this topic because no study as such has been conducted. Researchers conducted an online survey which asked participants various questions such as previous experience with the DD population, clinical and educational experience with the DD population, views to improve DD training (Weiss, Lunskey, & Morin, 2010).

Researchers found that 55.6% students rated DD training as “somewhat important” while 38.1% viewed DD training as “very important”. 85% of participants agreed that DD training would be beneficial to providing psychological services to other populations (Weiss, Lunskey, & Morin, 2010). However, despite the high percentage of participants indicating that DD training would be beneficial, 70% of participants indicated they have not taken an elective or mandatory DD course for graduate training. Out of all the participants in the study, 40% indicated they felt they were sufficient to work with the DD population after taking a DD related course. However, participants expressed the need for more training. Overall, researchers found that 54.5% of students rated their education in the DD population as poor.

This study highlights the perceived preparedness of clinicians from another field besides social work. Although the study does not go into detail

about what the DD courses entailed, it is important to note that's students who did take DD course felt more ready to work with the population. It is evident from this study that programs from other mental health fields need to adequately train their students to be ready to work with the population. A limitation of this study is that it cannot be ascertained if those responded were more concerned about the DD population than those in another discipline. Nevertheless, this articulates that these gaps of education are across the clinical field and need to be addressed.

Sanders et al. (2008) explored the importance of incorporating DD training for nurse practitioners (NPs) students. According to the researchers, most NPs reported that they received little or no clinician education in the field of DD (Sanders, et al., 2008). Therefore, researchers put together a multidisciplinary team to complete two virtual patient cases, one involving an infant born at 26 weeks gestation and the other, and child with Down syndrome (Sanders, et al., 2008). Researchers hypothesized once the completion of the two patient cases was done, the knowledge and comfort level for NP student working with DD patients would increase.

The researchers found there was a significant increase in student's comfort and knowledge after completing the virtual patient cases. A limitation of this study is that researchers did not conduct a baseline of NPs level of comfort before virtual patient cases were conducted; instead, the NPs reported they received little to no training. Nevertheless, this study highlights the importance of training and the increasing comfort and knowledge achieved once completing

virtual patient cases on the DD population. Although this is a rudimentary concept, many mental health disciplines have minimal training or courses that are offered to the population.

Laws, Parish, Scheyett, & Egan (2010), explored the teaching of the DD population at 50 CSEW accredited social work programs in the United States. They explored what certificate programs, courses, and programs social work schools offered in relation to the demands of the growing DD population (Laws et al., 2010). The collected data via internet-based review which included questions regarding if the school offered any certification or concentration in DD education, courses specialized in DD akin topics, the wide-ranging nature and content of those courses, and if the program employed staff with research experience in the said field (Laws et al., 2010).

Laws et al., (2010), found that 58% of schools had at least one faculty member with research experience in the DD realm. Researchers discovered that none of the school examined in the study offered certifications in DD studies. Additionally, 6% of the schools that participated in the study offered DD concentrations. However, these concentrations were not DD specific. Moreover, 37% of schools in the study provided at least one course tailored to the wide-ranging study of disability.

Although Laws et al., (2010), study was an influential exploratory study highlighting the urgent need for DD classes at CSEW accredited schools, one limitation of the study was the researchers only investigated 50 accredited

schools of social work when there is currently 255 in the United States (CSWE, 2017). Another limitation of the study is the need to examine universities field sites to see if students gain any firsthand practice with the DD population.

The most profound results of the research reviewed were the evident need for training across various mental health disciplines. Many disciplines reported that there was little training or classes available or none regarding the DD population. These findings indicate a need to investigate social workers perceived preparedness in regards to serving clients within the DD population and to understand if CSWE accreditation standards and NASW code of ethics are being met. This may provide a better forum for addressing possible benefits of adding DD training or classes into social work curricula.

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

One theory used to conceptualize the ideas in this study is the Ecological Systems Theory. As outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1977), provides a framework for understanding that development reflects the influence of several environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The systems are comprised of five environmental structures that an individual interacts with. These five systems include chronosystem, macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). A key element in this theory is that each environmental system has a complex layer, however, each layer has an effect on the lifespan.

This theory helps to frame the process of a social workers level of preparedness while serving individuals in the DD population because it puts each level into perspective. For example, not only is the social worker serving the client, but the services they provide are being impacted on various levels in the client's environmental systems. Aforementioned, the DD population is considered a venerable population, facing various obstacles daily. Therefore, a social worker must be knowledgeable of this theory and incorporate it while working with the said population.

Lastly, this system theory relates back to the CSWE EPAS in facilitating social workers attainment in competencies. This theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding the social environment and human behavior. This theory can help develop skills for a social worker to become more competent in the DD population as well as integrate the theory into practice.

### Summary

This study will explore the advance year Master of Social Work candidates and graduated social workers perceived preparedness in serving individuals with DD. Laws have been implemented to enhance the quality of life for the DD population; however, it is often questioned if social workers have the proper training and knowledge to work with the said population. The CSWE was implemented to ensure a standard of education is upheld in the social work field. Moreover, social workers must follow ethical codes put forth by the NASW

making it imperative social workers are properly trained to serve individuals with DD. Nevertheless, with these standards put forward, there is little literature identifying if social workers are prepared to serve an individual with DD.

However, other mental health disciplines and the knowledge and training have been identified in the literature. Ecological Systems Theory can help social workers serving individuals within the DD population to better understand this population. This study seeks to discern social workers perceived preparedness in the DD population, as well as to improve existing accreditation standards.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This chapter comprises of the details on how the study was conducted. The sections that will be discussed in this chapter are the study design, sampling, data collection, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study is to identify, illustrate, and evaluate the perceived preparedness of social workers serving individuals in the DD population. The present research is an exploratory research project due to the limited amount of research on DD, more specifically from a social workers perspective. The research that was conducted will increase the understanding of social workers serving individuals within the DD population; therefore it will be a qualitative study. The researcher utilized on one and face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions to collect data from subjects.

A benefit of using an exploratory, qualitative approach with one on one and face-to-face interviews is that the subject is allowed to give a detailed explanation without any interruptions, additionally, the researcher is allowed to capture verbal and non-verbal cues. Since there is little research on social workers perceived preparedness in serving the DD population, one on one

interviews allowed subjects to provide insight on examining and re-evaluating the current standards set forth by CSWE. Furthermore, this approach is beneficial because it allows interviewees to express their own opinion in their own words, which is something that quantitative research does not offer.

A limitation of using one on one, face-to-face interviews is the interviewer must ensure there are no biases when the questions are being asked. If any biases come across during the interview, it may persuade the subject to give a desirable answer and can skew the data being collected. Additionally, another limitation of this method is it is very time-consuming.

### Sampling

This study utilized a non-random snowball sample of social workers that serve individuals with DD, as well as advance year Master of Social Work candidates. This specific sample was chosen due to the nature of the study. With a snowball sample, participants were able to refer other social workers in the field who are serving the DD population to take part in the study. The social workers participating in the study were recruited via social workers networks. Additionally, the advance year Master of Social Work candidates from California State University, San Bernardino social work program were be recruited via snowball sample. Approval was granted from the Chair of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino to interview Master of Social Work candidates. The sample was comprised of 10 participants, 5 Master of Social Work Candidates

and 5 graduated social workers that completed one on one face-to-face interviews.

### Data Collection and Instruments

Qualitative data was collected via live, audio-recorded through one on one face-to-face interview. Each interview began with an informed consent which comprised of the introduction, description, and purpose of the study.

Demographic information was collected prior to the interview where information of the participant's gender identification, age, ethnicity, field experience, licensure status, years serving individuals with DD, and social work specialization were identified.

The researcher conducted a one on one, face-to-face interviews that are outlined in the interview guideline sheet in Appendix C. The interview guideline sheet was utilized as a tool for the current study and helped the researcher to gain insight of social workers preparedness to serve individuals within the DD population. The interview guideline sheet was comprised of various questions that will be answered during the time of the interviews that was developed by the researcher with the assistance of Dr. Thomas Davis. Some of the topics that were addressed when the interviews were conducted were if participants feel that the CSWE and NASW are incorporating knowledge, values, and skills about the DD population in Master of Social Work programs, if they believe the profession of social work is prepared to serve individuals with DD, and what

traits, skills, or methods do they think can help when working with the said population.

### Procedures

A handout was created describing the purpose, description, need for participation, confidentiality, and goals of the study. The researcher solicited Master of Social Work candidates via word of mouth. Graduated social workers were solicited via social workers networks. The date, time, and location of the interview were determined by the participant to ensure it best suited their schedule. Qualitative data was collected via audio recording via Voice Memos application on an Apple iPhone 7 and was later transcribed onto a Word Document. Prior to recording, the interviewees signed the informed consent form that provided consent to take part of the study and consent to audio record the interview. Participants were notified the interview recording will be used only for the motivation of the present research and will be stored in confidentiality. Once consent was agreed upon, participants were giving a demographic form to complete prior to the start of each one on one face to face interview, which will consist of age, gender identification, licensure status, and the number of years with serving the DD population. When all the necessary forms were completed, the interview was conducted. The one on one face-to-face interview ran approximately 8 to 25 minutes. At the conclusion of the interviews, the participants were thanked for participating in the study.

## Protection of Human Subjects

The identity of the participants during the study is entirely confidential. All interviews were conducted in a private closed room. Participants were given pseudonyms during the recorded conversations. Additionally, participants were required to sign an informed consent form with an X prior to participating in the study allowing the researcher to conduct the interview and audio recording. Once the data was collected, audio recordings was transferred and stored on a password encrypted USB stick that was kept in a locked desk. Once the audio recordings were stored on the USB stick, the researcher deleted the audio recording from the iPhone 7. All documentation that is signed prior to the study were kept in the locked desk as the audio recording's. During the transcription process, each participant was identified as "respondent". After one year after the study being completed, all the information collected such as the informed consent and audio recordings will be deleted.

## Data Analysis

The data collected from the one on one face-to-face interview were transcribed and analyzed for themes. Nonverbal cues and verbal responses were documented in the transcription. The researcher utilized thematic analysis, where recurring theme in the data were categorized. A complete explanation of the themes that were emerged during the study is provided in chapter four.

## Summary

The purpose of this study is to identify, illustrate, and evaluate the perceived preparedness of social workers serving individuals in the DD population. Participants in this study provided demographic information and answered open-ended question. Once data was collected, the research was transcribed and analyzed where recurring themes emerged.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter comprises of two vital parts of the study. The first part that is presented is the demographic information of the study participants. The second part of this chapter covers emerging themes that were discovered and identified during the interviewing process.

#### Demographic Information of Study Participants

Demographics of the participants are presented below in table 1. As seen in table 1, the sample size consisted of 10 participants, two of whom were male and eight were female. Participants varied from ages 20 years of age and above. A total of two participants fell within the 20-25 age range, three within the 26-30 age range, two within the 36-40 age range, two within the 41-45 range, and one fell in the 46 and older range. In terms of ethnicity, six participants identified as Hispanic or Latino, three identified themselves as White or Caucasian, and one identified as African American.

Participants varied in number of the years of field experience ranging from 2 to 20 years. In regards to licensure status, five participants reported they were not licensed, two reported they were pre-license, and three were licensed. Participants varied in the number of years they served individuals within the DD

population, ranging from 1 to 20 years. Five participants reported their social work specialization was mental health, whereas the other five reported other.



Table 1. Demographic Information of Study Participants

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Field Experience</i>	<i>Licensure Status</i>	<i>Years Serving Individuals with DD</i>	<i>SW Specialization</i>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Male	20-25	Hispanic/Latino	2	Not License	3	Mental Health
<b>Participant 2</b>	Female	20-25	Hispanic/Latino	4	Not License	3	Other
<b>Participant 3</b>	Female	26-30	Hispanic/Latino	2	Not License	2	Mental Health
<b>Participant 4</b>	Female	26-30	Hispanic/Latino	6	Not Licensed	2	Mental Health
<b>Participant 5</b>	Male	26-30	Hispanic/Latino	5	Not License	1	Mental Health
<b>Participant 6</b>	Female	46 and above	White/Caucasian	20	Pre – License	20	Other
<b>Participant 7</b>	Female	36-40	White/Caucasian	15 - 20	Licensed	13	Other
<b>Participant 8</b>	Female	41-45	African American	18	Licensed	20	Mental Health
<b>Participant 9</b>	Female	41-45	White/Caucasian	3	Pre-License	6	Other
<b>Participant 10</b>	Female	36-40	Hispanic/Latino	14	Licensed	14	Other

## Presenting Findings

The research question being explored in the current study is the perceived preparedness of Master of Social Work candidates and graduated social workers serving individuals with DD. Four major findings emerged when analyzing the interview data: limited knowledge and training taught in MSW programs, increased changes in the way the media portrays the DD population, knowledge of the DD population inquired through the participants own research or experience, and the need for DD focused training. Each theme is explained below.

### Limited Knowledge and Training Taught in Master of Social Work Programs

The participants agreed that there is limited knowledge and training about the DD population that is taught in MSW programs. As a result, participants, both Master of Social Work candidates and graduated social workers reported they do not feel prepared to serve the DD population. Master of Social Work candidate's thoughts about this theme are listed below:

*I would say I did not obtain any relevant knowledge and training. No*

*(Participant 1, Personal Communication, October 2018).*

*I would say maybe that's an area that the department can improve on. At least not in my courses I haven't really had a focus or emphasis on people with disabilities (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 2018).*

*I've seen minimal to none about the developmental disability population preparation here in the MSW program. We covered it maybe, briefly. Or we talk about it; classmates talk about it here and there. But it's not really something that's in the curriculum (Participant 5, Personal Communication, February 2019).*

Whereas graduated social workers had similar thoughts when they attended their Master of Social Work program:

*There was not specific information about development disabilities that I remember (Participant 7, Personal Communication, February 2019).*

*I'm pretty sure I attended a class I can think of one class in particular, but I can't tell you what I what I took away from it (Participant 8, Personal Communication, March 2019).*

*No, straight up answer... it's just not available. And the generalist model doesn't really add it. At least when I took it, we were the first year going into the generalist model. We were the guinea pigs (Participant 10, Personal Communication, March 2019).*

### Increased Change in Media Portraying the Developmental Disabilities Population

Participants in the study expressed the DD population has a history of being misrepresented in the media. As a result, this can affect people's thoughts

and ideas about the population, which leads to stereotyping. However, many participants stated they have noticed a shift in pop culture and the media.

Participants stated the media has recently started to show the DD population in a more accurate and positive view, which allows individuals to gain awareness of the population. Participants shared their thoughts on the current climate and how pop culture is changing the way it portrays the DD population:

*I think they only ever show you the extreme forms. I think we are getting a lot better with it but in general, I think they just stick to the stereotypes* (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 2018).

*I've noticed in the last couple of years that definitely there has been an increase in awareness for D.D.'s and there are several T.V. show* (Participant 4, Personal Communication, January 2019).

*I think a lot of the older stuff has a lot of common stereotypes but I am noticing a trend now where TV shows are taking realistic approach to presenting developmental disabilities rather than just the happy ending story* (Participant 5, Personal Communication, February 2019).

*You really don't see as many, uh, TVs really now. There's a good doctor, he has autism. And so showing that - I mean, so I guess it's there's a little*

*change, but it's slow* (Participant 8, Personal Communication, February 2019).

### Knowledge of the Developmental Disabilities Population Inquired Through Research or Experience

Participants reported they learned most of the information they knew about the DD population through their own research or experience. Some participants mentioned they learned about the DD population because they have family members who are apart of the population. One participant stated:

*Actually, my son has autism so I've done several researches on intellectual disability* (Participant 4, Personal Communication, January 2019).

Additionally, participants stated how they also contribute to their knowledge of the DD population through Regional Centers, whose primary goal is to serve individuals with DD and their families.

*Honestly, a lot of it was in the field with meetings at regional center and working directly with the staff at regional center to find out specifically what they do. It was from hands on experience and working with patients and visiting patients in the facilities, in the homes and the differences and understanding that that population* (Participant 6, Personal Communication, February 2019).

*Well, I work at the Inland Regional Center as a Service Coordinator and that is where I learned pretty much everything that I understand about developmental disabilities (Participant 7, Personal Communication, February 2019).*

Finally, other participants reported they learned their knowledge about the DD population through firsthand experience such as having job or field experience where they worked directly with individuals who are in the DD population. The following participants stated their experience:

*Through my jobs working in University Center for Developmental Disabilities, and then for Autism Learning Partners. So, I worked at the center and then I worked doing ABA in the homes. So, both of those companies taught me a lot of knowledge within the DD population (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 2018).*

*The majority I've learned here at the hospital, I worked here for 14 years. So you encounter different types of disabilities throughout just the day-to-day work. And that's when I get to dig in more and figure out what each type of disability is, what it entails, how it affects the patients, and yeah*

*just pretty much in my day to day job function (Participant 10, Personal Communication, March 2019).*

### Need for Developmental Disabilities Focused Training

There was a common theme throughout the interviewing process with the participants, which was the need for additional courses and training throughout schools of social work and agencies. All participants throughout the interviewing process expressed the desire to attain additional training, seminars, or courses either in the social of social work or their place of work to gain knowledge and familiarity with the DD population. Participants provided with innovated and forward-thinking ideas to implement additionally courses and training throughout their schools and/or jobs:

*I think if we were able to get provided with even a one-day conference or something like that where they focus on the different D.D. diagnosis and teaching us what types of resources are out there or how we can approach them that would be very beneficial (Participant 4, Personal Communication, January 2019).*

*I think more training around the techniques and interventions utilized within the field will definitely be beneficial. I worked in the field for a year and I was utilizing all these techniques but didn't know or I can't even remember the definition attached to them but I think social workers should*

*be aware because the population is growing (Participant 5, Personal Communication, February 2019).*

*I think it'd be a great idea if they could connect or coordinate with an organization that specifically serves the population like maybe regional center, they can have someone from regional center come out and give them an overview or a training on you know the population do's and don'ts. Just what, you know, what they should know that will be extremely helpful (Participant 8, Personal Communication, February 2019).*

### Summary

This chapter provides the demographics and major theme findings that emerged in relation to advance year Master of Social Work candidates and graduated social workers perceived preparedness to serve individuals with developmental disabilities. The study utilized a qualitative approach using one on one and face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions to have a better understanding of the participant's perspective. Through analyzing audio transcription, four themes emerged that were discussed in this chapter.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

The following chapter discusses the emerging themes that were presented in the previous chapter. The chapter will also examine the implications for social work. The limitations of the study are also discussed in this chapter. Lastly, the recommendations for social work practice, policy and research are explored.

#### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore advance year Master of Social Work candidates and graduated social workers perceived preparedness to serve individuals with DD. Four central themes emerged through one on one face to face interviews.

Limited DD focused knowledge and training taught in social work programs was a recurring theme with the study participants. Master of Social Work candidates and graduated social workers reported there is a lack of knowledge provided in social work programs such as DD focused classes or training. During the interviewing process, many participants did not give an in-depth about DD focused knowledge or training taught in social work programs. Many participants simply stated there was none. However, when participants did

give a detailed response they reported DD was only covered in their classrooms because students from their cohort brought up the subject.

This is similar to the findings found by Laws, Parish, Scheyett, & Egan (2010), who examined 50 CSEW accredited social work programs in the United States and discovered 6% of the schools that participated in the study offered DD concentrations and 37% of schools in the study provided at least one course tailored to the wide-ranging study of disability (Laws et al., 2010). The findings of this study can be inferred that social work programs do not offer a curriculum that aims and values social work profession that meets venerable, diverse, and underserved population.

The CSEW is slowly incorporating disability studies by having a Council on Disability and Persons With Disabilities and host webinars such as “Building Skills to Integrate Disability-Competent Practice Into the Social Work Curriculum”, which provides a foundation for integrating disability content into social work courses (Council on Social Work Education, 2019). However, this council is focused on the wide-ranging study of disability and not DD specific. Additionally, these webinars are social work facility and educator focused. Ultimately, it is up to the educator if they want to incorporate such studies in their classroom curriculum.

The recent change in the way the media portrays the DD population was another theme that emerged. Participants in the study reported the media has a history of portraying individuals with disabilities as objects to be pitied or

helpless; instead of showing individuals with meaningful stories and lives that should be shared. As a result, this often does a disservice to the viewer because it giving false information and establishes stereotypes that are perpetuated. However, despite the history of negative media portrayal, participants agreed, within the past couple of years, the media is changing the way DD is portrayed. Shows such as Born This Way, The Good Doctor, Netflix Original Atypical, and Special are depicting accurately the lives of individuals living with DD including, Down syndrome, Autism, and cerebral palsy.

The media needs to be recognized for the strides being made for the positive portrayal of the DD population. However, there is still a lack of actors who have DD that are playing these roles. Instead, most of these shows have able-bodied actors playing DD characters. This is evident implication there is blatant discrimination against individuals within the DD population, which needs to be improved on. There is limited research about DD and the way the population is portrayed in research. Therefore, this is a starting point and something that should be explored. Since social work programs aren't providing sufficient knowledge and training about the said population; social workers can gain knowledge through the media. Thus, giving social workers a sense of feeling more preparedness to work with the population.

Another key finding that pertains to the study was participant's knowledge of the DD population was inquired through their own research and experience. Some participants reported they have personal ties to the population such as

having a family or friend who has a DD diagnosis. While the other participants stated they learned about the DD population through their own practice such as one on one experience through field placement, agencies, or research. This implies that participants go beyond their social work program or agency to receive knowledge they will evidently need.

This finding aligns with the research Braddock et al. (2015), who discovered there are approximately 4.92 million individuals in the United States living with an intellectual disability (ID), which is about 17% of the U.S. population (Braddock, et al. 2015). This is an alarming statistic considering that cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy, and spina bifida are not included. The likelihood of a social worker that will serve a DD individual at least once in their career is evident. Therefore, it appears social workers that took part of the present study are aware of this and seek the knowledge on their own.

The last theme that emerged during the present study was participants expressed the need for DD focused training. This is similar to Weiss, Lunskey, & Morin (2010), findings on psychology graduate students who expressed the importance of having DD specific training, yet struggled to obtain adequate experiential and didactic opportunities (Weiss, Lunskey, & Morin, 2010). Correspondingly, participants in the current study expressed they were unsure of what kinds of resources and techniques to utilize while working with someone who is a part of the said population.

Additionally, participants in the current study shared their openness to receiving training or attending conferences to improve their current knowledge of the DD population. This finding is consistent with the previous research which indicates 80% of the participants would like to have more clinical contact with people with DD, more current content on DD in classes, have guest lectures by specialists in DD, and have more curriculum dedicated to DD content (Weiss, Lunskey, & Morin, 2010). Participants in the current study reported they believe schools of social work or employment sites should offer at least one day of training, which they believe would make them feel more equip to identify and conceptualize with the DD population.

Another study that is similar to the emerging theme in the current research and illustrates the evident need for DD focused training in some capacity was a study conducted by Sanders et al. (2008). According to researchers, most NPs reported that they received little or no clinician education in the field of DD (Sanders, et al., 2008). Once NP students complete two virtual patient cases on the DD population researcher noticed a significant increase in student's comfort and knowledge. This study is another example that illustrates to successfully feel comfort to work the DD population; individuals must be exposed and trained to serve the population. When trainings are provided, not only are social work programs or job sites preparing the social worker to work with the DD population, it is also ensuring NASW ethical standards such as commitment to clients, competence, and cultural awareness and social diversity are being upheld

(National Association of Social Workers, 1999). Social workers need to be properly prepared through DD focused training to serve the population in some capacity.

### Limitations

The present study was conducted with some limitations. The first limitation of the study is the relatively small sample size. The data collected in this study was limited to California State University San Bernardino Master of Social Work candidates and social workers in the San Bernardino County area. Therefore, one of the limitations of this study is that the results may not properly reflect all social worker and wider sample size would give a better representation of social workers.

A second limitation in the study is the restricted amount of diversity in the sample, as pertains to race and gender. The sample was overwhelmingly made of Hispanic/Latinos, with racial groups such as African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and Middle Eastern not being included. Also, there was a disproportionate ratio of male to female, having input from more of the male population would give the study a more balanced and diverse representation.

The last limitation was the snowball sampling method, which the researcher used to collect data. With this method, there is a risk of oversampling from a specific network and may bias some of the emerging themes. These limitations compromised the extent and detail of the data, which may have

excluded key aspects of advance year Master of Social Work candidates and graduated social workers perceived preparedness to serve individuals within the DD population.

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

There is limited amount of research on social workers perceived preparedness to serve individuals with DD. Therefore this research can provide insight for agencies and schools of social work to develop and implement DD specific learning opportunities for their employees and students to become better equipped to serve the said population.

#### Social Work Practice

Based on the findings, it is recommended for schools of social to reconsider their curriculum and incorporate classes or fieldwork on the DD population. This should be considered because the NASW set forth ethical standards that social workers are supposed to abided by such as commitment to clients, competence, and cultural awareness and social diversity (National Association of Social Workers, 1999). The current study suggests that social workers are breaking these ethical standards because there is a lack of preparedness to serve the population.

#### Policy

This study also provides implications for social work policy. One recommendation for policy would be for the CSWE to include more education

towards DD in social work practice. According to EPAS, in order for social work programs to be in accordance with accreditation standards, they must integrate and apply competency-based education such as diverse and oppressed populations within knowledge, values, and skills (Council on Social Work Education, 2016). It is imperative for social work programs to integrate DD education in the curriculum due to the DD population being a venerable and growing population that encounters barriers daily. Social work programs need to equip their students with knowledge, skillset, and competencies to ensure the said population is being adequately served. More importantly, CSWE should consider integrating DD education in the curriculum to ensure EPAS is being upheld; otherwise, it is contradictory to prioritize specific standards.

### Research

There is a limited amount of research about the DD population, more specifically in the field of social work. Further research should examine this population to gain more insight and knowledge, more specifically social workers eagerness and willingness to work with the said population. Another possible area of research could explore if DD specific courses and training change workers perceived preparedness. Based on the findings of this present study, future longitudinal or correlational research can examine which evidence-based practice is most effective with the DD population may be thought-provoking.



## Conclusion

This study aimed to explore advance year Master of Social Work candidates and graduated social workers perceived preparedness to serve individuals with developmental disabilities. Data was collected through one on one face-to-face interview with 5 Master of Social Work Candidates and 5 graduated social workers. From the participants' qualitative responses, major themes emerged such as a limit knowledge and training is taught in MSW programs, increased change in the way the media portrays the DD population, knowledge of the DD population has been inquired through the participants own research or experience, and there is a need for training focused on the DD population in schools of social work and the workplace. Through this research, schools of social work and agencies can develop and implement DD specific learning for social workers to increase perceived preparedness.

APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

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

Researcher(s) Danielle Marie Orozco  
Proposal Title Job Readiness of Social Workers Serving Individuals  
with Developmental Disabilities  
# SW1856

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.

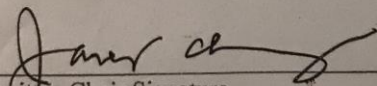
-----  
Proposal is:

- 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)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Chair Signature

4/10/2018  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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

APPENDIX B  
INFORM 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 assess social workers perceived preparedness of social workers that are serving individuals with developmental disabilities. Danielle Orozco is conducting the study, MSW student under the supervision of Dr. Thomas Davis, professor in the School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. 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 advance year Master of Social Work candidates and graduated social workers perceived preparedness to serve individuals with developmental disabilities.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked questions regarding their preparedness, willingness, and eagerness toward serving individuals with developmental disabilities, and some demographic information will be collected.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or withdraw your participation at any time without having to give any reason.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY:** Your confidentiality is ensured with all data collected within this research project. No personal information will be disclosed to individuals outside of the project's research team. Your information will only be published in pseudonyms form, that is, all personal information will be removed so that you and others cannot be identified.

**DURATION:** It will take up to 1.5 hours to complete the face-to-face interview.

**RISKS:** There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

**BENEFITS:** There will not be any direct benefits to the participants but your participation is likely to help researchers find out more about how to understand the perceived preparedness of social workers to serve individuals within the developmental disabled population.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Thomas Davis at (909) 537-3839 (email: [tomdavis@csusb.edu](mailto:tomdavis@csusb.edu)).

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library Scholar Works (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu>) at California State University, San Bernardino after December 2019.

I agree to be tape recorded: \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

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 • Sonoma • Stanislaus

APPENDIX C  
DEMOGRAPHICS

## DEMOGRAPHICS

- 1) Gender
  - Male
  - Female
  - Other
- 2) Age
  - 20-25
  - 26-30
  - 31-35
  - 36-40
  - 41-45
  - 46 and above
- 3) Ethnicity (mark all that apply)
  - a. African American
  - b. Hispanic/Latino
  - c. Asian/Pacific Islander
  - d. Native American
  - e. White/Caucasian
  - f. Middle Eastern
  - g. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Field experience \_\_\_\_\_ years.
- 5) Licensure Status
  - Not Licensed
  - Pre-License
  - Licensed
- 6) Years of experience serving individuals with developmental disabilities? \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) What is your social work specialization?
  - a. Physical and Mental Disabilities and Rehabilitation
  - b. Child Welfare
  - c. Mental Health
  - d. Gerontology
  - e. Substance Use
  - f. Other

Developed by Danielle Marie Orozco

APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW GUIDE



## INTERVIEW GUIDE

Opening statement before starting the interview: “Thank you for participating in this study. For the purpose of the study, I am assessing the readiness of social workers to serve individuals in the developmental disability (DD) population. Before I start the interview, I would like to define developmental disabilities. DD is characterized by both intellectual and adaptive limitations. This includes intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy, and/or spina bifida.” (State of California Department of Developmental Services, 2013). State of California Department of Developmental Services. (April 18, 2013) . Information About Developmental Disabilities. Retrieved from [http://www.dds.ca.gov/general/info\\_about\\_dd.cfm](http://www.dds.ca.gov/general/info_about_dd.cfm)

1. Can you explain to me what you know about the DD population and where did you learn it?
2. Do you have any family members within the DD population? If so, what is the relationship?
3. Can you explain to me about what you know about the DD through pop culture? (Such as TV shows, movies, and/or books)
4. Can you explain if you have any stereotypes about the developmental disabilities?
5. Could you talk about your opinion on social workers that serve the DD population?
6. Could you talk about what your experience with the DD population before entering a Masters of Social Work program?
7. Can you share your thoughts about the current social work profession regarding serving individuals with DD?
8. In your opinion, what are the pros and cons of learning about serving the DD population?

9. Could you talk about the professional obligations that social workers have such as competence, cultural awareness, and social diversity while serving the DD population?
10. Could you discuss the extent to which the schools of social work are offering the knowledge, values, and skills to help the individuals in the DD population?
11. In the curriculum you have learned thus far in your MSW program, can you explain if you received knowledge and sufficient training to serve the DD population?
12. Can you talk about where you have received the information about serving individuals within the DD population?
13. In your opinion, what do you believe are the most effective ways and strategies to serve clients within the DD population?
14. What kind of courses or training would you find beneficial in your MSW program to improve your preparedness in serving the DD population?
15. Can you talk about how agencies might provide different types of training or classes for social workers to be better equipped to serve individuals in the DD population?
16. Any final thoughts, comments, or questions?

Researcher plans to ask probing questions as needed.

Developed by: Danielle Marie Orozco

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