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CHILD WELFARE SOCIAL WORKERS' PERSPECTIVE ON FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE LONGEVITY

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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

Veronica Betancourt-Perez

June 2019

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Approved by:

Dr. James Simon, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Dr. Janet Chang, Research Coordinator

ABSTRACT

The child welfare sector has been dealing with the issue of turnover for many years and it has yet to implement effective solutions to mitigate the problem. In this study, the researcher used a post-positivist approach to examine contributing factors that affect job longevity in child welfare. The researcher reviewed literature as well as used motivation and organizational support theory to determine what potential factors influence job longevity among child welfare social workers. The researcher gathered demographic information and qualitative data from ten interviews with child welfare social workers employed by the County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) with five or more years of experience.

The researcher conducted a content analysis of the data and identified three common themes that influence job longevity; supervisor support, self-gratification as a child welfare social worker, and self-care. Results showed that the impact of longevity at DCFS is strongly influenced by supervisor support and self-gratification suggesting a strong desire of child welfare social workers to willingly want to do the job and that supervisor support is one contributing factor to longevity. In addition, nearly all the participants identified self-care as having a positive impact on child welfare social workers. These findings suggest that child welfare social workers need additional trainings, individual time with their supervisors, and self-care to increase longevity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project took a lot of work and a significant amount of time. Its implementation would not have been possible if I did not have the support of my family. Therefore, I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank my husband, children and youngest sister for their support.

I am also grateful to have had such dedicated professors, that with their expertise they helped me make this three-year journey possible. Plus, my cohort, co-workers and friends who were there to support me along the way.

And finally, last but by no means least, the social workers that participated in the study.

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CHAPTER ONE

ASSESSMENT

Introduction

In this chapter the researcher focuses on explaining the reason for this study. The emphasis of this study is why child welfare social workers remain in their positions for five years or more including, the factors that influence their longevity. Further, it presents the reason why a post-positivist approach was chosen for this study. Moreover, literature review that is pertinent to job retention of child welfare social workers on a macro and micro level is discussed. Last, the theoretical orientation is introduced as well as a description of how this study contributed to the knowledge of social work practice.

Research Focus and/or Question

The identification of factors influencing child welfare social workers to remain in their position for long periods of time is the researchers' focus and their perception about the turnover issue of child welfare social workers. Data was obtained from applicable studies and interviews from social workers from the County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

To understand the factors that influenced child welfare social workers from this study, it was first necessary to understand what child welfare practice is. Essentially, child welfare practice consists of social workers that supervise

children in foster care and tasks related to their cases, including case plans toward reunification or permanency efforts toward adoption (Smith & Donovan, 2003). Thus, child welfare social workers emphasize their practice to maintain family structures within their professional environment by investigating child abuse and neglect, providing children and family with family reunification and family maintenance services, coordinating interventions within the community and facilitating permanency through adoption or legal guardianship (CDSS Programs, n.d.). Most child welfare agencies require that the social workers document case goals and progress in a case plan. That documentation typically includes court orders and case plan activities that family members are anticipated to complete. For the most part, child welfare social workers focus on developing and monitoring families' case plans. In addition, they complete activities such as, referring foster children and biological parents to court ordered services, visiting foster children in their placements, consulting with service providers to monitor service progress, and preparing court reports including, petitions for court hearings (Smith et al., 2003).

Most importantly, social workers in the child welfare field are expected to be the forefront in the ongoing crisis of child neglect and abuse (National Association of Social Workers, 2013). In the United States, child welfare social workers are responsible for the welfare and safety of our most vulnerable population (National Association of Social Workers, 2013).

It is also essential to recognize that burnout among child welfare social workers' as well as resignation has become all so common due to the demands of the job (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2006). Freudenberger first applied the definition of "Burnout" as what occurs when a practitioner such as, a social worker becomes progressively "inoperative" (Smullens, 2012). According to Smullen, Freudenberg described burnout as warning signs that can present in many different forms particularly, an increasingly state of inoperability. For example, a person that is quick to get angry and irritable and shuts down to any input and reasoning (2012). It is well known that in the child welfare system social workers experience burnout because of stress caused by high caseloads that limit time spent on the preexisting caseload (Smullen, 2012).

Nonetheless, changes in practice are continuously occurring. Unfortunately, most of the changes usually occur after some form of class action lawsuit and settlement agreement due to damaging oversights of a child welfare case (Dawson & Berry, 2002). However, this has contributed to child welfare agencies reducing the treatment timeframe for helping an individual family in that the number of cases closed must match the number of cases received. Plus, a practice model focused on strategies to enhance family cooperation and engagement (Dawson et al., 2002). According to Dawson, those families that participate in both treatment planning and agree with treatment plans have more positive case outcomes (2002).

Throughout the years, it has become evident that the reason that child welfare social workers resign from their jobs is a result of high caseloads (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2006). The National Council on Crime and Delinquency reports that, the most common motivation child welfare social workers expressed for leaving their job was feeling overwhelmed by the never-ending tasks of the job and high demands of every caseload. Moreover, poor leadership was also stated as a reason for resigning by a reasonable number of child welfare social workers (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2006). In addition, poor management practices were another reason for frontline workers to leave their jobs. Since services were not delivered in an effective manner, task distribution was done unfairly, there is constant changes in policy, and there is no consideration of caseworkers input when creating policy (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2006). Being that these are legitimate factors, it is interesting to learn why child welfare social workers remain in their positions for long periods of time under these circumstances. According to Williams, Nichols, Kirk and Wilson, turnover rates for public child welfare agencies as high as 45% were found in studies nationally (2011).

Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

The post-positivism paradigm was applied in this study. According to Morris, post-positivism takes the positivism paradigm as its starting point and

overall and accepts a particular philosophy of the world only in relation to objective reality (2014). This study began by focusing on influential areas in the child welfare workforce that contribute to job longevity of child welfare social workers. Thereafter, qualitative data was gathered by interviewing seasoned child welfare social workers and coding and comparing conclusions from the data with the literature and the conclusion of the interviewees. This was accomplished by engaging the interviewees in a naturalistic setting and the researcher awareness of her own bias. The researcher also used her own experience as a child welfare supervisor to contribute to the study.

Literature Review

This study's literature review presents a background of the child welfare system in the United States and gives specific details about child welfare practice in California. It also present statistics of California's child welfare workforce. Additionally, this section discusses influential factors for employment longevity in the field of child welfare as well as causes for resignation and burnouts. Lastly, a summary of the literature review is provided.

<u>Background</u>

The United States child welfare system is considered by many to be in a state of crisis since the late 1960s (Strolin-Goltzman, 2008). The Administration for Children and Families of the Department of Health and Human Services presented, in a report, specific numbers that show an up and down growth of the

children that enter foster care after being removed from their homes. The report

detailed the fluctuation of the number of children in foster care from 2002 to

2016. In 2002, child welfare agencies had the highest cases of children in foster

care with 524,000 children in foster. By 2012 this number had decreased to

397,000, to later increased by 40,500 in a four-year period totaling the number to

437,500 (Gonzalez, 2017).

Further statistics from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and

Reporting System (AFCARS), indicated that 273,539 children were placed in

foster care in 2016 while 250,248 children exited. Fifty-one percent of children

who entered foster care in 2016 returned home to their parent(s) or primary

caretaker(s). The remaining 49% were either adopted, emancipated, exited to go

live with a guardian, exited to go live with another relative or had other outcomes

(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017).

In California, child welfare practice is monitored by The Child Welfare

Policy and Program Development Bureau (California Department of Social

Service). The bureau analyses, develops and implements policies and

procedures statewide as well as regulations for interventions approaches

connected to child welfare and prevention. The bureau includes in its policy the

Family Maintenance (FM) intervention program that is provided by child

protection agencies and the Department of Probation. The bureau also monitors

the CWS Emergency Response (ER) program that investigates allegations of

child abuse and neglect and conducts evaluations of families that require the

intervention of child protection agencies. In addition, the bureau is responsible for making sure policies are in regulation with state and federal laws including, the Indian Child Welfare Act. (California Department of Social Service, 2019).

Furthermore, the bureau has three additional units known as, the Pre-Placement Policy Unit, the Child Safety Unit and the Child Trafficking Response Unit that assist county child welfare agencies, tribes and stakeholders with the organization of policies and program development. Moreover, all three units provide guidance in ongoing improvement of best practice and policy implementation (California Department of Social Services, 2019).

To be specific, the Pre-Placement Policy Unit concentrates on Emergency Response (child welfare investigations), Family Maintenance services and managing the Statewide Safety Assessment System. Its main responsibilities are policy development, technical assistance and promoting evidence-based approaches that can assist social workers to safely keep children with their parent(s)/caregiver(s) and in their communities. The unit is involved with policy interpretation, the Critical Incident Disclosure Process, the Safely Surrendered Baby Program, and coordinating and supporting the Children and Family Service Division (CFSD). Moreover, the unit engages county agencies through a workgroup that meets quarterly to discuss strategies for best practices and interventions including, information about policy implementation and development (California Department of Social Service, 2019).

The Child Safety unit develops policy about disproportionality and CACI/cross reporting. Plus, has the responsibility to provide technical assistance to agencies, including counties agencies, regarding the implementation of strategies. The integrated strategies include in home services (Family Maintenance) for children and families that help them address their needs such as, child maltreatment and the cycle of domestic violence. Moreover, early intervention which include, substance abuse treatment, educational interventions, and transitional care. The unit is also to ensure compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act through technical assistance provided to counties and tribes (California Department of Social Services, 2019).

In 2014, The Child Trafficking Response Unit (CTRU) was created with the goal to implement the Commercially Sexually Exploited Children's Program (California Department of Social Services, 2019). The unit oversees grants for commercial sex trafficking intervention and prevention programs and workgroups related to child labor trafficking. Further, in collaboration with the parties that helped create this unit, CTRU does work that involves child abuse-related activities (California Department of Social Services, 2019).

California Child Welfare Workforce

Child welfare agencies are confronted with recruitment challenges and high turnover rates at a national level (U.S. Government Accounting Office, 2003). The California child welfare system has approximately 12,000 social

workers and supervisors combined (California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership, 2017).

Per the U.S. Government Accounting office, 30-40% of child welfare social workers who have been in the field for less than two years leave their job annually nationwide (2003). In California, there is a turnover rate for child welfare agencies that ranges between 20% to 40% (Child Welfare League of America, 2017).

A 2016 CalSWEC Workforce Study that included 502 participants from 10 California counties with a mix of large and small counties showed that although the participants reported that they were confident about their professional contributions such as feeling efficient and compliant, the majority reported negative feeling about their agencies' culture and climate. Participants reported these negative feelings to be associated to the agency's communication, openness to change, and autonomy (California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership, 2017). According to Glisson & Green, the climate of a child welfare system is the perceptions of the psychological impact and own functioning that caseworkers have about their work environment (2011). Glisson and Green explain that the ability of a caseworker to help maltreated children depends on organizational climate (2011). The authors further explain that increasing job related stress negatively affects the relationships caseworkers develop with their clients and influences motivation and retention (2011). The finding of this study indicated that to address caseworkers' negative feelings changes needed to be

made to their organizational climate such as, supervisor support, and appreciation for work well done (California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership, 2017).

Moreover, recent research emphasized that through verifiable observations in many studies, supervisor support has influenced both retention and/or turnover (Chenot, Benton, & Kim, 2009). Such studies have had finding that concluded supervisor support to have a meaningfully and certainly connection to retention specifically, for early-career social workers (Chenot et al., 2009). Moreover, another study presented a model that showed the logistic regression between supervisor support and retention. The model revealed specific correlations between these two factors. For example, the amount of supervisor support increasing the probabilities of retention by 46%, (Chenot et al., 2009).

Influential Factor for Longevity

Research indicates that there are several factors that encourage longevity in child welfare social workers. One factor is known to be professional commitment. According to Landsman, professional commitment tends to promote longevity because it is strongly influenced by the intention to stay and driven by professional values and needs of the workplace as well as culture professional values (2001). Another factor is known as psychological empowerment. Authors Lee, Weaver, and Hrostowski, defined psychological empowerment as the capability to understand the factors that affect children and their families such as

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cultural norms, expectations and socio-economic status (2011). Lee, Weaver, and Hrostowski explain that, social workers that achieve psychological empowerment are better able to identify their own needs and the difficulties of their role in serving the most venerable children and their families resulting in a minimal risk of resignation. In addition, they develop a sense of knowledge and expertise that promotes psychological empowerment and effective practice that helps them reduce stress (2011).

Furthermore, research also identifies self-care as a primary factor in employment longevity. According to Smullens, individuals who adhere to self-care techniques, such as strict boundaries between their professional and personal responsibilities and who understand the importance of physical and mental wellbeing in their professional practice have an increased probability to remain in the field (2012). In addition, Smullens reports that social workers who receive support from mentors or support groups, practice techniques to reduce stress, and who engage in personal endeavors (religious activities, family vacations, sports etc.) are more likely to remain in their profession for a long period of time. For example, religious activities that provide social workers with a spiritual force that gives them a level of trust, strength and support in unmanageable variables (2012).

Causes for Resignation and Burnouts

It is without doubt that high caseloads are a cause for child welfare social workers burnouts and resignation. A caseload can consist of 12-15 children

assigned to a social worker regardless of the difficulty and safety concerns of the case. Caseloads include responsibilities such as, face to face client contact, case plan, child supervision, court reports etc. (Poulin, 1994). For many social workers the ability to case manage cases and meet the needs of the families they service, while also meeting the logistical demands of the position can become overwhelming and stressful. Regrettably, according to Niven (2014) protecting social workers' emotional and mental needs is not a high priority for most child welfare agencies. Niven notes that, for decades the social work profession has failed its workers by not providing them with effective supervision and support to keep them healthy and less stressed as possible (2014). Nevertheless, it is known that individuals that choose to be social workers do so because they have a need to help others. Willingly social workers choose the profession regardless if it this means having to get over involved with clients thus causing them to stress (Acker, 1999; Borland, 1981; Egan, 1993). To this present time, without hesitation, social workers intertwine professional responsibility and personal commitment to better serve their clients and undermine the consequences to their health such as emotional distress resulting from the over involvement in the profession and burnout (Jayaratne, Himle, & Chess, 1991).

In a study by Lizano and Barak (2015) specify that looked at burnout among child welfare social workers, there was a slight difference in perspective about how relationships between workplace stressors, burnout, and engagement related to each other over time. A finding from this study identified that burnout

plays a central role in disengagement among front line social workers or social work supervisors in the child welfare workforce and that burnout is believed to be a result of prolonged exposure to work stressors, which leads to feelings of cynicism through emotional exhaustion (Lizano & Barak, 2015). In a related study, Lizano (2015) suggests that the child welfare workforce management can help prevent burnout by incorporating strategies that enhance social worker well-being to protect them against emotional exhaustion (Lizano, 2015).

The literature presented provided a background of the United States child welfare system and California's child welfare workforce. It also discussed influential factors for longevity practice in the field of child welfare as well as causes for social workers resignations and burnouts. The information gathered from the literature review suggests that workers who lack the proper training and support and who are unable to differentiate their professional role from their personal life are at higher risk of burnout and resignation. In contrast, those that learn about strategies to make their job easier such as, self-care remains in their positions for a long period of time. Similar are this researcher's hypothesis of what influences child welfare social workers longevity. It is the researcher's hypothesis that DCFS social workers longevity is influenced by their supervisor or supervisor's they had throughout their years at DCFS. Another of the researcher's hypothesis is that DCFS social workers have remained with DCFS for over 5 years due to job security and the benefits they receive.

Theoretical Orientation

Since this study identified factors that influenced longevity practice in the field of child welfare, the researcher used two theories that support this study; Organization Support Theory and Social Exchange Theory. Both theories helped the researcher understand how favorable and unfavorable treatment of child welfare social workers by their agencies and supervisors can affect their longevity.

Per the Organizational Support Theory (OST) employees have an overall thought concerning the importance given by the organization to the contributions and well-being of their staff. OST suggest that the perception that employees have on organizational support drives them to favorable or unfavorable organizational commitment, self-fulfillment, and other negative feelings. (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2015). Similarly, Vardaman described that organizational support creates a mutual response through commitment and dedication to the organization (2016). More specifically, Glisson believes that child welfare outcomes can be improved by learning to understand the organization social context wherein the services provided. Glisson's theory derives from studies that have reveal that the organizational social contexts of child protective agencies are linked to quality of services and results (Glisson, Green, & Williams, n.d.).

Social exchange theory suggests that in social environments, relationships result from the positive development of mutual gain of social exchanges that

preserve continuation of communication and create shared responsibility and

benefit (Radey, & Stanley, 2018). Radey & Staley explained that, in the field of

child welfare supervisory relationships and support have a great influence in

workers commitment to the job and well-being (2018). In addition, describes that

positive supervisory relationships influence burnout and turnover by

strengthening workers' job satisfaction and mitigating negative effects to burnout.

Similarly, the lack of supportive relationships may cause problems. Such as,

child welfare workers enduring feelings of isolation, feelings of accusatory

surveillance and too much independence with their caseloads (Radey, & Stanley,

2018).

Potential Contribution to Micro and Macro Social Work Practice

Both micro and macro social work practice can benefit from the

information gathered in this study. It can benefit social workers employed by child

protection agencies by giving them strategies that can help them cope with stress

and encourage their longevity. It also encourages them to self-reflect on

professional behaviors and solidify cohesion in the workplace. In addition,

educate seasoned social workers on the importance of self-care and to empower

newer child welfare social workers to develop coping skills to handle job

stressors and prevent burnout.

As to the macro perspective, this study helped child welfare agencies

identify factors that contribute to longevity and decrease turnovers. Also, it can

potentially contribute to changes in policy and new development guidelines in

practice that promote retention.

Summary

This chapter asserted that the study's emphasis is factors that influence

longevity practice in child welfare, within the United States. It provided the reason

for directing this study through a post positivist approach. The literature review

looked at the child welfare system and its relations to social work practice.

Furthermore, this chapter highlighted and explained the theories of this study and

possible benefits to micro and macro social work practice.

CHAPTER TWO

ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Chapter two provides and describes this project's study sites. It explains the engagement strategies of the research project. Additionally, it addresses how the researcher uses self-preparation to carry out the study. Furthermore, it discusses issues concerning ethics, diversity and politics as well as the role of technology. Lastly, it includes a summary that delineates the topics addressed in this chapter.

Study Site

The study site utilized for this project is a child welfare agency in Los Angeles County located in Southern California. This agency has several offices throughout its county. The researcher randomly selected two offices to conduct the study. Los Angeles County child welfare agency has a mission to provide services to children and families who enter the child welfare system to ensure child safety and a safe environment for these children. The agency is supervised by a Board of Supervisors and the California Department of Social Services. The agency, if needed, provides children that are at risk of abused and removed from their parent or caretaker with nurturing foster homes that support growth and development. Moreover, if a child does not reunify with his/her parent or

caretaker, the agency is tasked with securing a permanent home in a timely manner.

Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site

The researcher gained access to the agency's social workers by contacting the child welfare agency by phone and verifying who the appropriate and possibly consenting gatekeepers/administrators were for the offices selected. Once the administrators were identified, the researcher sent an e-mail to two administrators introducing herself as well as giving them a brief explanation of the study. The researcher, on a later date, engaged the administrators through a phone interview by apprising them of the purpose and benefits of the study. At this time, the researcher informed the administrators that she planned to recruit and interview their agency's social workers.

Once gaining approval, and since the researcher is an employee of the agency, the researcher selected random social workers from the agency's directory and sent them an email in which she provided an overview of the study and ask to be contacted if wanting to participate in the study. Those social workers that called and expressed interest were given an interview date.

Self-Preparation

The researcher self-prepared to gather data by developing a thorough understanding of the child welfare system in the United States, and child welfare

practice and turnovers in California. This knowledge was gained by comparing literature review. Most importantly, the researcher became familiar with the National Association of Social Work (NASW) guidelines (National Association of Social Work, 2013).

Additionally, the researcher self-prepared by identifying any personal biases since she is a DCFS social worker, writing down questions relevant to the study, keeping in mind any concerns and strength of DCFS administration, having a list of questions as well as a consent form and asking co-workers to read her interview questions to make sure that there was no misinterpretation. Plus, by being open to the idea that the focus may shift as data was gathered and the study evolved. With the data identified during this process, the researcher decided that a post-positivist approach would best to guide this study.

Diversity Issues

In this study several types of diversity issues were recognized such as education achievement, gender, ethnicity, age, years with the agency and titles. The researcher was able to obtain samples of each diverse group to make sure each group was represented in the study. Although the social work field is predominantly female, the researcher made a great effort and was able to recruit male participants.

Ethical Issues

The researcher is a supervisor at one of the sites selected for this study; therefore, the researcher then ensured that the participants did not feel coerced to participate since she has a higher level of position in comparison to the participants. The researcher obtained informed consents from each participant prior to their participation. Thereafter, participants were guaranteed that their responses will be utilized solely for research data and free of the researcher's biases. The participants were informed that any information provided to the researcher would require their consent to present the information in the study. Participants were given a list of the interview questions for their review and an approximate length of time of the interview. Moreover, they were informed that the outcome of the study would be provided to administration along with recommendations of individual needs resulting from the study. The researcher assured that privacy and confidentiality would be protected by only using initials of the participants. However, participants were informed that a separate document with the identity of the participant would be kept in a private and in a secure drawer of which only the researcher would have access to. This study underwent a Human Subjects Review, which was approved by CSUSB Institutional Review Board (IRB) in the School of Social Work (IRB #SW1867).

Political Issues

Since the study was likely to revealed insight about social worker's current job satisfaction and areas of concern about their workplace, the researcher remained sensitive about the issues that may ascend. For instant, a demand for a change in policies and practice standards and the unwillingness of the agency to make the changes. Consequently, driving the social workers to be involved in a political issue by contacting their local union to obtain what they felt is in their best interest such as, caseload reduction, supervision support, and involvement in policy making.

The Role of Technology in Engagement

The role that technology played in engagement for this study was to gather data. The researched used the iPad provided by the university, her personal computer and cell phone to record and transcribe interviews, surf the internet to gather literature and send e-mail to the participants. Steps were taken to protect participant confidentiality such as it is described in detail below.

Summary

In this chapter the researcher presented the engagement phase for the study. The research first explained how the administrators and the participants were engaged. The researcher then discussed the strategy to self-preparation. Thereafter, the researcher identified diversity and ethical issues that might arise.

The researcher concluded the chapter by explaining the role of that technology

had in engagement in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

Chapter three discusses the primary components of the implementation phase of the study. It discusses the participants of the study and the logic for their selection. The chapter also describes the data gathering method and the stages of data collection. It describes how data was recorded and analyzed. The chapter also explains how the study was terminated and the follow-up process. In addition, it describes the method of communicating findings and the diffusion plan.

Study Participants

The participants selected for this study were social workers who are employed by a child welfare agency in Southern California and have been employed 5 years or more within a government child welfare agency. The purpose to selecting this specific group was to develop an in-depth study of relevant factors that have influenced their longevity with the agency. Although the agency has many offices and 3,200 social workers employed, the study recruited participants from only two offices that have a total of 336 social workers. The participants were interviewed regarding their demographic information in the form of eight questions (see Appendix B). The researcher was

unable to obtain the agency's demographics of their social worker therefore, no demographic information was obtained of the agency's population.

Selection of Participants

The selection of participants was based on purposive sampling. The study uses a snowball sample to identify participants in the study. The study recruited a sample of 10 child welfare social workers (homogeneous group) from the larger group of social workers. The selected participants were social workers both female and male of different ethnicities with no specific age group and that have worked for the agency for 5 or more years. The researcher contacted the participants via e-mail. The researcher requested that the participant contact the researcher through e-mail. The researcher selected no more than 10 participants with an equal of number of females and males. The researcher selected a female and male Hispanic, Caucasian, African American, and Asian that have 5 or more years of employment with the agency.

Data Gathering

Data was gathered through individual interviews with child welfare social workers. These interviews were conducted at the study site to preserve the naturalistic setting and background of the research.

The interview questions (Appendix B) were prearranged. The researcher began by asking demographic questions. The researcher then asked an open-

ended question to engage with the participant, such as "What are your core values."

The questions became more specific as the interview progressed to preserve focus on the study. The questions continued to be open-ended questions, such as "How would you describe your years as a child welfare social worker?" "Tell me about the responsibilities that you have as a child welfare social worker?" "Tell me about the responsibilities that you have as a child welfare social worker?" "What is one thing that supports your longevity with DCFS, right now?" "What motivates you to keep working as a child welfare social worker?" "Tell me why you chose to work at DCFS?" "Have your relationships with your supervisor and administrator influenced your longevity?" and "Tell me about the techniques that you use for self-care?" The researcher also asked the following question: "How have these factors; values, and professional ethics influenced your longevity with the agency?"

Phases of Data Collection

This study's method of data collections was to interview the participants. The interviews consisted of phases such as engagement, development of focus, maintaining focus and termination. Different types of questions were asked during the phases.

During the engagement phase, the researcher established a rapport by asking demographic questions and an open-ended question that engaged the

participant and ease any anxiety the participant had. In the development and maintaining focus phase, the researcher asked relevant questions about the topic. In the termination phase the researcher decrease the intensity of the interview, by asking the participant about self-care, and what would they change about DCFS. Lastly, the researcher concluded the interview by thanking the participants for his/her participation.

Data Recording

The researcher audio recorded the interviews with a website application that she downloaded to her iPad that recorded the interviews and later transcribed the interviews to a Word document. The researcher obtained prior consent from the participants to audio record their interview (Appendix A). To protect confidentiality, the participants did not provide their first or last name in the interview. The researcher saved and identified each interview by the participant initials. The researcher ensured that the recorded data would only be accessible to the researcher, would not be shared with anyone else, and were destroyed after the study was completed.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, a bottom-up approach was used by the researcher. Three phases of coding transpired; first open coding, then axial coding, followed by content analysis. During the open coding stage, the interviews were

transcribed to narrative form and analyzed. This method organized the information and created an approach that helped the researcher label the data that pertained to the focused question and child welfare retention. In the axial coding stage, the researcher identified a linkage between the ideas developed from the interview analysis. This led the research to understand and explain child welfare social workers' feeling, perceptions, and reasons towards the motives for their longevity in the child welfare field as well as the problems surrounding child welfare turnover. In the content analysis stage, the researcher developed her theory based on the data she collected from interviews as well as from the literature review.

Summary

This chapter identified the participants and the reason why they were selected. In addition, information was given about the process of data gathering, data analysis, and data collection. To conclude the chapter, this researcher provided a brief explanation of termination, communication of findings, and dissemination plan.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION

Introduction

This chapter describes the evaluation of data gathered during the research process of this project. Upon completion of the ten (10) interviews that included all child welfare social workers, the audio recordings were transcribed and coded through a content analysis. Credibility of the research process, participants, confidentiality, and any oversights were confirmed by a CSUSB faculty advisor.

Data Analysis

The focal point of this study was to explore the factors that influence child welfare social workers longevity at DCFS. The study was conducted only from the perspective of child welfare social workers that had five years or more of experience. The participants were asked to provide demographic information and answer 15 open-ended questions. Their responses were then analyzed using a bottom-up approach using open coding, through which categories of related phrases were created to find a comparative view of each interview. After completing the open coding process for all ten interviews, the researcher conducted an additional analysis using the axial coding process, which concluded in the identification of subjects between the categories. The

researcher then sorted the major subjects into related themes by doing a content analysis; "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1969). Content analysis is a method used by researcher to analyze, determine and describe the emphasis of what it is intended to be exposed (Weber, 1990).

Data Interpretation

Demographics

This study includes qualitative data of 10 child welfare social workers from interviews conducted in-person by the researcher. Their experience as child welfare social workers ranged from seven years to twenty-one years. An equal number of males (5) and females (5) participated in the study. Six participants identified as Hispanic, one identified as Mexican, one identified as Asian, one identified as African American, and one identified as Caucasian. The participants ranged in age from thirty-two years old to sixty-five years old (M=45.7, SD=10). Six participants had a bachelor's degree and four had a master's degree. Five participants reported to be married, four reported to be single, and one reported to be separated. Seven participants stated that they had children and three participants stated that they did not have children. All ten participants reported to have the same job title of Children Social Worker Three. See Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Sample

	N (%)	M	S.D.
Age		45.7	10
Sex			
Male	5 (50%)		
Female	5 (50%)		
Race/Ethnicity			
African-American/Black	1 (10%)		
Caucasian/White	1 (10%)		
Hispanic/Latino	6 (60%)		
Asian/Pacific Islander	1 (10%)		
Other	1 (10%)		
Education			
Bachelor's 1	6 (60%)		
Master's 2	4 (40%)		
Marital Status			
Married	5 (50%)		
Single	4 (40%)		
Separated	1 (10%)		
Do you have Children			
Yes	7 (70%)		
No	3 (30%)		
Years of Experience			
5-10	3 (30%)		
11-15	3 (30%)		
16-20	3 (30%)		
21-25	1 (30%)		

The researcher conducted a content analysis of the data collected and identified three themes that influenced longevity, which are described in detail in Table 2. The factors identified were; supervisor support, self-gratification as child welfare social worker, and self-care.

Table 2. Factors That Influence Longevity

Themes	Sub-Themes
Supervisor Support	• Takes the time to individually meet with social workers and provide training. • Not exclusively focusing on departmental goal but instead using supportive behaviors that bring out social worker's skills around the goals to be accomplished. • gives social worker's control of their decisions, has an open-door policy to discuss problem solving and makes a final decision with the input he/she receives.
Self-Gratification as Child Welfare Worker	• Gratification for working with children and families. • Gratification for helping a child or parent be successful with accomplishing their goals.
Self-Care	• variety of activities to reduce stress

Supervisor Support

Participants where asked what factors have influenced their longevity at

DCFS. Seven (70%) of the participants identified supervisor support as a

significant factor to their longevity. The participant identified three common

qualities of what they perceived is a supportive supervisor.

Three (30%) of the participants elaborated that a supportive supervisor is

a supervisor that takes the time to individually meet with social workers and

provide training. Participant explained that this approach helped them to decrease their stress and learn the job effectively.

For example, one participant stated, "I think I've had some really good supervisors and had a very good trainer that train me when I started with DCFS. This really gave me the opportunity to learn the job well." (Personal Interview #5, January 2019).

Two participants (20%) described a supportive supervisor as not exclusively focusing on departmental goal but instead using supportive behaviors that bring out social worker's skills around the goals to be accomplished.

For example, one participant stated that "a good supervisor takes the time to listen and teach the social worker the job and cares more for the social worker's well-being instead of the amount of paperwork that needs to be done" (Personal Interview #3, November 2018).

Another two participants (20%) described a supportive supervisor as a supervisor that gives social workers control of their decisions, has an open-door policy to discuss problem solving, and makes a final decision with the input he/she receives.

For instance, one participant shared that "if you have a good supervisor that trains you and allows you to make decision along with him/her you will learn a lot and not be so stressed out" (Personal Interview #10, March 2019).

<u>Self-Gratification as Child Welfare Social Worker</u>

Several participants reported self-gratification as child welfare workers as an influential factor in their longevity. The participants discussed that they have remained in the field for so long because they simply like being child welfare social workers. Participant described two major reasons for self-gratification. The first reason is gratification for working with children and families. The second reason is gratification for helping a child or parent be successful with accomplishing their goals.

Seven participants (70%) reported gratification from being a child welfare social worker. Four participants (40%) reported getting gratification from working with children and families while, three participants (30%) reported getting gratification from helping a child or parent be successful with accomplishing their goals.

For example, one participant stated, "I like the work that I do. I like to engage with the families. I think it's a very important job that I have, and I really enjoy that interaction with the families" (Personal Interview #5, January 2019).

Another participant stated, "I do love working with the kids. So, advocating for kids has probably kept me here" (Personal Interview #6, January 2019) while two other participants provided shorter statements including, "I like what I do. I like working with families" (Personal Interview #9, January 2019). "I really loved child welfare" (Personal Interview #1, November 2018).

The results from receiving gratification from helping a child or parent be successful with accomplishing their goals, were expressed by three participants in the following manner:

"So, I think working towards improving the well-being, a better direction for kids" (Personal Interview #1, January 2019).

"The rewarding of working and seeing the success of my clients" (Personal Interview #7, January 2019).

"When I see a smile on a child's face that's back home with his parents or that I been successful in placing a child in an adoptive home, knowing that the child is safe and happy" (Personal Interview #, March 2019).

<u>Self-Care</u>

All ten participants shared that they practiced self-care to deal with the daily stressors of the job, and they all reported practicing self-care outside the workplace by doing a variety of activities.

Six participants (60%) described their method of self-care that works best for them as spending time with family. Four of the 10 participants (40%) also described including an activity as self-care with their family such as, jogging, running, getting involved in charitable events, and traveling.

Four participants (40%) did not identify spending time with family as their self-care method and described that what works best for them is doing activity alone such as traveling, exercising, meditating, gardening, bike riding, hiking and reading.

For example, one participant stated, "I travel, I work out a lot, I like riding bicycles and hiking" (Personal Interview #8, March 2019). Another participant stated, "I do a lot of gardening and I do a lot of hiking so, that keeps me in good spirit and good health" (Personal Interview #5, January 2019).

<p style="text-align:center">Perceptions of Turnovers of DCFS Social Workers</p>

Although this study primarily focused on longevity, participants were also asked what their perceptions on what contributes to turnovers among child welfare social workers. All participants were familiar with the term turnover and recognized that it is a critical issue in the child welfare sectors do to what the workload entails. The majority of the participants reported two mains reasons for the cause; lack of support from supervisors and high caseload. While the minor responses attributed the cause to stress and the hiring of inexperience social workers.

Six participants (60%) stated that turnovers are caused by lack of support from supervisors and high caseloads while, 20% (two participants) reported that turnovers are caused by stress. Another 20% (two participants) mentioned that the hiring of inexperience social workers is what causes the turnover of child welfare social workers. The following are examples from the participant's statements:

When referring to the cause being high caseloads, one participant stated, "High caseloads, burnout, not taking the job really seriously it's just too much work. Lots of work" (Personal Interview #8, March 2019).

A participant that perceived the cause to be the lack of support from supervisors shared, "Everything about DCFS is about who you know, it's all politics. It's just about numbers stats, and meeting map goals. Everything else comes last. Supervisors and administration need to start looking at caring for their employees and reducing the workload" (Personal Interview #10, March 2019).

When referring to the cause as the hiring of inexperience social workers, one participant clearly stated, "I think it's mostly staff being hired. They are inexperience young college graduates with little or no life experience. Relying totally on being book smart and they get easily frustrated and discouraged" (Personal Interview #7, January 2019).

An example of a participant who stated that stress was the cause for turnovers stated, "The stress. Too much stress with DCFS and workload of course. Stress, workload and the amount of work that we get. So overwhelming" (Personal Interview #2, November 2019).

Discussion

Several important points originate from the study findings. First, it is of interest that several factors consistently emerged as significantly contributing to

the longevity of DCFS workers. As participants described their experiences, these ratings of what influenced longevity at DCFS became more consistent in nature. There was no significant variance in any demographic groups concerning longevity. The impact of longevity at DCFS and the field was related to positive experiences between social workers and supervisors, which was in alignment with my aforementioned hypothesis.

Those who had five years or more as DCFS employees, were predicted to remain in the job due to job security and benefits. Longevity at DCFS, however, was strongly influenced by supervisor support and self-gratification. These findings suggest there is a strong desire of child welfare social workers to willingly want to do the job and that supervisor support is one contributing factor to longevity. This finding is in alignment with other researchers such as Chenot, Benton, & Kim (2009), which concluded that supervisor support was significantly and positively related to retention specifically for early-career child welfare workers.

Both supervisor support and self-gratification were identified as factors that helped them remain at DCFS.   However, supervisor support had a stronger influence than self-gratification since, supervisor support had a higher rating through the entire study and was identified as an influential factor for self-gratification itself. This is in alignment with studies from Lee, Weaver, & Hrostowski, (2011) and Landsman (2001) who found that social workers that achieve psychological empowerment are better able to identify their own needs

and the difficulties of their role in serving the most vulnerable children and their families. Plus, this develop a sense of knowledge and expertise that promotes empowerment and effective practice that helps them reduce stress and results in a minimal risk of resignation (2011). Landsman indicates that professional commitment tends to promote longevity because it is strongly influenced by the intention to stay and driven by professional values and needs of the workplace as well as culture professional values (2001).

Last, one more factor had an important influence in this study. Self-care positively influenced the longevity of DCFS social workers. Interestingly, self-care was the only factor that all participants agreed with as being an influential factor to longevity at DCFS and in the field. Therefore, the perception of self-care was reported as having a positive impact on child welfare social workers. As workers become accustom to using self-care, they reduce levels of stress and develop coping mechanism to handle the high demands of the job that eventually become normative to them and no longer impact their willingness to remain in the field. This aligns with the findings of Smullens (2012) and Niven (2014). Niven's study reveals that while social workers attempt to meet the logistical demands of their position, they can become overwhelmed and stressed. Similarly, Smullens' study indicated that individuals who adhere to self-care techniques, such as strict boundaries between their professional and personal responsibilities and who understand the importance of physical and mental wellbeing in their professional practice, have an increased probability of remaining in the field (2012). This also

supports the notion that those who wish to prevail as child welfare social workers in child welfare should develop a method of self-care from the beginning of their career, which aligns with other findings from Smullens (2012). Smullens implicates that, religious activities provide social workers with a spiritual force that gives them a level of trust, strength, and support in unmanageable variables (2012).

Implication of Findings

Supportive Supervision

The findings in this study produced many implications for practice and further research. First, many of those concerned about child welfare social worker have written about the need for supportive supervision. Clearly, the results of this study also indicate that social workers need more support from their supervisors. Steps toward this goal may include more trainings and individual time between social workers and supervisors. For instant, mentoring seems to be an essential part of effective supervisor support. Therefore, professional enhancement of social workers should be implemented through informal transmission of knowledge, and communication from supervisors to worker. Educating supervisors on demonstrating positive attitude and to act as a positive model may also be vital to developing support and positive relationships. In additions, supervisors should empower social workers to develop their own strengths, leadership traits and beliefs. In brief, supportive supervision through

educational and training efforts will help the social worker find success and
increase gratification in the job.

<u>Perceptions of Self-Gratification</u>

Another finding of this study was the feeling of self-gratification as
characterized by child welfare social workers. This finding simultaneously
influenced longevity and shares the gratification that DCFS social workers
predominantly like about the field. Therefore, the fact that child welfare social
workers appear to obtain gratification from simply doing the job may be beneficial
to DCFS in that social workers will remain in their positions for long periods of
time regardless of the organization's imperative management. DCFS should
take advantage of this finding and implement leadership trainings with focal
topics on methods to improve the morale of employees. For instant, taking the
time to celebrate accomplishments or grant time off to social workers to pursue
activities and/or projects social workers are passionate about to include,
educational advancements. This can lead to high productivity and decrease
turnover and ultimately facilitate DCFS to reach organizational goals. Similarly, to
what Glisson & Green (2011) define as a child welfare system organizational
climate. The climate of a child welfare system is defined as the caseworkers'
perceptions of the psychological impact of their work environment on their own
functioning (2011).

Self-care as an Influential Factors to Longevity

The last important finding of this study was the use of self-care as a coping mechanism to influence longevity. All participants found that implementing self-care is essential to one's well-being within the field and at DCFS. Participants mentioned time spent with family and doing recreational activities as beneficial self-care methods. This suggests that DCFS should encourage self-care and dedicate resources to enhance self-care. For example, providing ergonomic equipment and space as well as time to engage in self-care. Every social worker should have good lighting, chairs that provide good posture, and a quiet space to work. Moreover, DCFS could offer stress and time management training as well as the practice of mindfulness. In addition, supervisors could implement self-care as part of their meetings by having walking meetings instead of having a meeting with a social worker in a conference room. This will make the meeting go faster and both the supervisor and social worker will get a little exercise and self-care.

Summary

This chapter discussed the evaluation process that was used to analyze the data collected. The demographic information of the participants was presented as well as the themes identified to influence child welfare social worker's longevity. The perception of the participants to what contributes to the

turnover of child welfare social worker was discussed. A brief discussion of the

finding was also presented plus, the implications of findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

Introduction

This chapter discusses the termination and follow-up methods that the researcher used to develop this qualitative based research project.

Termination of Study

Before termination, participants were thanked and asked if they had any questions or comments about the study. In addition, they were informed about the continuing process that would occur to conclude the study. Participants received a debriefing statement (Appendix C) via email that included the researchers contact information and link to the study.

Communication of Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

The researcher communicated the study findings to the study sites, and participants by verbally informing the participants that the study could be accessed through the CSUSB ScholarWorks website on June 15, 2019. The researcher further informed both the participants and study sites that the study included existing literature and how it contributed to the topic. Plus, how transferrable the findings were to related areas of the research question. In

addition to, strengths and limitations of the research and how her reflections influenced the data.

Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

A debriefing statement was provided to the participants via email upon completion of this study. Plus, the researcher communicated to the participants that she is available via email for any additional follow-up.

Dissemination Plan

This optimal purpose for this study was to explore the factors that influence longevity for child welfare social workers. The researcher summarized the results in a one-page document that included a brief definition of the factor that influence longevity among child welfare social workers. Since the research is an employee of the agency where the study was conducted, the one-page summary of the findings was provided to the participants in-person to the participants after obtaining consent from the agency's administration. The researcher respectfully requested to the agency's administrators to send a copy of the finding via email to all the social workers employed at the sites in which the study was conducted.

Summary

This chapter concluded the study's presentation. In this chapter, the researcher discussed the termination of the study as well as the communication of findings to study sites and study participants. In addition, the ongoing relationship with participants and dissemination plan. Moreover, the researcher reminded the participants that the study would be assessable through the CSUSB ScholarWorks website after the researcher's graduation date on June 15, 2019.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SAN BERNARDINO

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 factors that influence child welfare social workers to remain in their positions for a long period of time. The study is being conducted by Veronica Betancourt-Perez, an MSW student under the supervision of Dr. James Simon, assistant 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, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to examine factors that influence child welfare social workers to remain in their positions for long period of time.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be individually interviewed at a time and place of their convenience. Participants will be asked questions regarding the factors that have influence their longevity in the child welfare field.

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

CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY: Your agency will not be named; your identity will remain confidential using an alias or number and data will be reported using an alias or number. Audio recorded data will be destroyed after accurately transcribed.

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 Veronica Betancourt-Perez (email: 005748661@coyote.csusb.edu) or Dr. Simon (email: james.simon@csusb.edu)

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

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic and Engagement Questions

1. What is your gender?

2. Would you mind sharing your age?

3. What is your marital status?

4. Do you have any children?

5. What is your ethnicity?

6. What is your level of education?

7. How many years of experience do you have with DCFS?

8. What is your job title at DCFS?

Interview Questions

1. What are your core values?

2. How many years have you worked as a child welfare social worker?

3. How would you describe your years at DCFS?

4. Tell me about the responsibilities that you have as a social worker at DCFS?

5. What is the one thing that supports your longevity with DCFS right now?

6. What motivates you to keep working as a child welfare social worker?

7. Tell me why you chose to work at DCFS?

8. Have your relationships with your supervisor/s and administrator/s influenced your longevity at DCFS?

9. What do you believe contributes to turnover among child welfare social workers?

10. What is it about being a DCFS social worker that you like?

11. Tell me what makes you feel appreciated at work? Has appreciation influenced your longevity?

12. Tell me about the techniques that you use for self-care?

13. Does your culture background influence your longevity with DCFS?

14. How have these factors values, and professional ethics influenced your longevity with the DCFS?

15. If you had a magic wand, what would you change from DCFS to keep staff?

APPENDIX C

DEBRIFING STATEMENT

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work

Debriefing Statement

This study you have just completed was designed to investigate factors that influence employment longevity among child welfare social workers. We are interested in assessing the factors to longevity and perceptions among child welfare social workers. This is to inform you that no deception is involved in this study. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact MSW student Veronica Betancourt-Perez at 005748661@coyote.csusb.edu. Thank you for your participation.

909.537.5501 · 909.537.7029

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