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Social Workers' Perceptions of Resource Family Approval

Hannah Chavez
005338004@coyote.csusb.edu

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SOCIAL WORKERS PERCEPTIONS OF RESOURCE FAMILY APPROVAL

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

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

by
Hannah Rebekah Chavez

June 2019

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Approved by:

Dr. Janet Chang, Committee Chair, School of Social Work

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ABSTRACT

Resource Family Approval (RFA) is a policy that was recently enacted in California. The process seeks to merge existing policies on the regulations of families who wish to care for children involved in the foster care system. The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of resource family approval social workers and the implementation of RFA. Ten participants were chosen from the resource family approval unit from a county child welfare agency. The study was a qualitative design with in person interviews.

Common themes emerged in responses to social worker's thoughts about RFA, social worker's ideas for preparing other workers, families and the agency, and advice to new workers in RFA. The study found that participants had mixed responses regarding their own thoughts about RFA. The majority of the participants in the study felt that RFA was good in theory but not in execution. The study also revealed that RFA workers needed to be open-minded and focus on communicating with all parties involved in RFA. One of the recommendations is for policy makers to assess the effectiveness of the policy before enacting changes and give the policy time to work itself out before trying to change things so often. Another recommendation is that it is critical to offer ongoing trainings to both the workers and the families for RFA to be implemented and run smoothly and effectively within the community.

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To my parents, thank you for always encouraging me to be my own person and follow my own dreams. I have never questioned your support for me because of your willingness to listen, understand and learn more about my passions.

To my husband, Mark, thank you for always having my back and believing in my passion. You dream with me, celebrate with me and sit in hard moments with me. Your support means everything to me.

DEDICATION

To the children who have found their permanency and to those who have not...I will keep going because of you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Children are removed from their home for a variety of reasons. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect are some of the main reasons for removal stated in The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (2015). When a child is removed the options for where they are placed can span from relative care to non-relative care. Relative care is when the child is placed with a relative of their family and non-relative care is when the child is placed with a family that does not have a relation to that particular child (United States Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2015). The primary goal of the child welfare system is safety for a child, but according to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, there are actually three goals in the child welfare system within the United States; safety, permanency and well-being (2015).

Permanency is defined as “a legally permanent, nurturing family for every child involved in the system” (Child and Family Services Reviews, 2018). Child welfare workers seek to achieve permanency for a child in care by reuniting them with their biological parents. A variety of services are offered to the biological parents while in the process of reunifying with their child. These services include parenting education classes, substance abuse counseling, child abuse classes, family counseling, resources, and other services (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). The goal of family reunification is not always met and The

AFCARS Report stated some children do spend many years involved in the foster care system (2015). If reunification is not possible, the next option for a child in foster care would be for him/her to be placed with a relative family member (Child and Family Services Reviews, 2018). Again, this is not always a viable option. If social workers have exhausted all options with reunification and relative family members then social workers seek to achieve permanency through other options such as non-relative foster families. In hopes to decrease the number of children in foster care and make the process for caring for a child simpler, RFA was born.

The researcher considered this a current issue because the process of resource family approval has not been in effect very long. It began statewide in California in January of 2017. Because this process is so new, there are many questions as to what resource families are, why resource families exist, what the goal of resource families is, what the requirements are, what the pros and cons are and what the role of social workers is in this process. Although there are pros and cons to any new policy, the researcher wanted to assess social worker's perception about resource family approval, as social workers are the individuals on the frontlines of implementing this new policy. Specifically, the researcher wanted to gain perception of social workers who specifically work in the resource family approval unit, as they are the ones currently dealing with the new policy.

According to the Judicial Council of California, the agencies involved with Resource Family Approval are County children's services, foster family agencies,

adoption agencies and family members involved in child welfare (2017). There are many roles that social workers play in the implementation of Resource Family Approval. Social workers recruit resource families, facilitate the orientation for families, assist with the application process, facilitate the live scan for families, conduct home studies on potential families, initiate exemptions of criminal records, hold trainings for families and complete psychosocial assessments on prospective families (Judicial Council, 2017).

There are two types of families that undergo the resource family approval process, relatives of the children in care and non-relatives of the children in care. The interactions that social workers have with these families' are important to understand in relation to resource family approval. There are concerns that because the process of RFA is so extensive, relatives of children may forego the process, thus a child could be placed with a non-relative (The Chronicle of Social Change, 2016). Another concern is that although the process has a timeline, paperwork and assessments can get backed up, leaving families lost as to where they are in the process and whether they will have funds provided to assist the child in their care (The Chronicle of Social Change, 2016).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate social worker's awareness, knowledge, and barriers in implementing Resource Family Approval. This policy has been in effect since January 1, 2017 (County of Riverside, n.d.). Specifically, this study examined thoughts such as: What was the role of RFA workers? What

the process was like prior to RFA? What could be done to improve RFA practice? And what are social worker's thoughts about RFA?

If resource families or those in the process of becoming resource families are dissatisfied with the process, a barrier can be created between them and the social workers. Social workers strive to make processes in child welfare as seamless as possible, they want what is best for the children involved as well as the families. The purpose in gaining an understanding of social worker's perceptions of resource family approval was to enhance what has already been created. Since resource family approval has only been in effect for eighteen months, changes can be made to improve the process.

Whenever change occurs, issues are inevitable. And with a change as big as resource family approval, spanning the state of California, finding a way to reduce these problems can be a goal of child welfare agencies. By the interviews conducted with RFA social workers, child welfare departments could gain insight as to what happens in the day to day process of resource family approval.

This study used a qualitative design with in person interviews conducted by the researcher. The participants were chosen from the RFA unit of a local child welfare county agency. The researcher interviewed ten RFA social workers with interviews lasting fifteen to thirty minutes.

In person interviews with open-ended questions gave participants opportunities to expand on their responses. In addition, in person interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to observe body language and social cues given

by the interviewee. Along with the ability to expand on answers, in person interviews dug deeper than quantitative methods normally can do and this study was able to record attitudes, feelings and behaviors of the participants.

Significance of Project for Social Work Practice

This study is significant to Social Work Practice by evaluating a policy that social workers use daily. By evaluating resource family approval, policy makers can see the outcome of the process they created. Other states that currently do not have the resource family approval process can look to California to see how implementation went. By comparing data collected from multiple counties that implement resource family approval, other counties can better implement their processes to foster and adopt. By getting the perspective of social workers while this process is new, there is still time to conduct change without causing too much disturbance to what has already been done.

Social workers have a generalist model of practice that is significant to their everyday practice. The generalist intervention model of social work has seven stages; engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, termination and follow up. All stages of this study were able to be applied to a micro or macro setting. The researcher considered this study both micro and macro in focus. Micro in the fact that social workers work directly with the resource families and children and macro in the fact that resource family approval is a statewide policy. This study looked at social worker's perception directly, but the interview responses social workers gave were due to the policy

as a whole. The specific stages this study addressed were evaluation and follow up. Evaluation was addressed by looking at whether RFA social workers believe that the goals of resource family were achieved. Follow up was addressed by assessing the program maintenance or whether change needed to be initiated.

This study was relevant to child welfare in that the outcomes of the study can change how this policy is implemented. If social workers are the people that conduct resource family approval day to day, their perception highly matters. If a part of the process is working well, keep it. If a part of the process needs some adjusting, then social workers would be the first to know. Since this policy deals directly with children in foster care, the outcomes impacted them as well.

Ultimately the goal is to achieve permanency for children in care, so if part of Resource Family Approval is not upholding permanency then something needs to change. What is social worker's perception of Resource Family Approval?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This section presents a review on different types of care for children in foster care. There will also be a discussion of the Resource Family Approval Policy. Research on Resource Family Approval is limited because the policy is only eighteen months old, therefore the discussion will look at parts of the policy that impacted social workers. Theories guiding the conceptualization will be presented. Resource Family Approval directly impacts permanency the most, one of three goals in child welfare. Therefore, an in depth look at permanency will also be reviewed.

Children in Kinship Care versus Non-Kinship Care

Many studies have been done on the impact of foster care on children. A focus of one study was kinship care versus non-kinship care and the impact of permanency. Bell and Romano (2015) collected information from previous studies to find an overall consensus of foster family permanency outcomes versus kinship care permanency outcomes. Their findings were that children in kinship care experienced permanency in a greater way as opposed to children in foster care in terms of “lower risk for reentry into care, fewer placement breakdowns, and longer lengths of stay” (Bell & Romano, 2015, p. 275). In opposition, “children in kinship homes have a lower likelihood of adoption

compared to children in foster family homes” (Bell & Romano, 2015, p. 279). But children in kinship care do have a high chance of achieving legal guardianship (Bell & Romano, 2015).

The limitations of this study were that there are so many options for out of home placements. The study did not take into account if a child has been placed in more than one home. Perhaps the child moved from group home to foster family to kinship care. What category would the child fall into? The strengths of this study were that the researchers found a way to incorporate multiple studies into one study and get a consensus of information that matched previous research.

In the next study, Koh (2010) also examined the outcomes of children in kinship and non-kinship foster care. This was done by testing the external validity of kinship effects. Koh found that kinship care did have higher stability than non-kinship care (2010). But in opposition to that, kinship care had a lower level of legal permanence. By this, Koh showed that children in non-kinship care had a higher likelihood of being adopted. The methods Koh used were from Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (Afcars, 2016) “data contributed to the Fostering Court Improvement (FCI) project by five states: Arizona, Connecticut, Missouri, Ohio, and Tennessee” (Koh, 2010, p390). The findings varied based on previous studies. It was noted that kin and non-kin children did not differ in the rates of their adoption, although reunification rates are reported higher for children in non-kinship foster homes (Koh, 2010).

Permanency is a main component of child welfare so to understand its importance in a child's life is essential to understanding child welfare. Without permanency, children would not thrive. Social workers as well as relatives and non-relatives of children in care are impacted by Resource Family Approval.

Resource Family Approval

RFA was created to regulate and make uniform the requirements for all types of caregivers in caring for children in foster care. RFA combined existing processes for approval, licensure, and adoption. Prior to RFA, there were different process for relative caregivers and non-relative caregivers. In hopes to standardize the process and improve gaps in the process, RFA was created. One goal of RFA is to “reduce maltreatment in out of home care (safety), increase placement stability (permanency), and improve timeliness of achieving permanency” (Salzgebe, 2016). The way to achieve these goals is to make the requirements for caregivers' uniform.

To achieve safety for a child, RFA workers complete a home study to confirm a resource family's home is safe for a child. A risk assessment is also a part of the approval to ensure that caregivers are not only giving basic care to children but are also providing an environment that encourages the child to thrive. Prior to RFA relative caregivers did not need a psychosocial assessment, but non-relative caregivers did. RFA now requires a psychosocial assessment of all applicants (County of Riverside, n.d). Prior to RFA, training was only required of licensed foster parents. This included

CPR, first aid and risk assessments. Now, RFA requires this of all resource families (County of Riverside, n.d). The risk assessment includes screening for family violence, substance abuse, mental health and physical health. This is important for providing a safe environment for children.

Approval standards now require all applicants to complete the following: a background check, permanency assessment and home study. Although RFA has many requirements and procedures for families to complete prior to a child staying in their home, there is not always enough time to complete all the paperwork and assessments. If there is a need for emergency placement for a child, the home does not have to have the full approval process complete. Emergency placements must have their full approval complete within 90 days (County of Riverside, n.d). In order for resource families to obtain Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Foster Care (AFDC-FC), approval must be complete. Otherwise, aid will not be given (County of Riverside, n.d).

RFA is the next policy in encouraging safety for children. California has previous policies, such as ASFA and AB340, and RFA is another policy to add to the list that encourages families to move from a facility for a child to a family for a child.

Policies Guiding Resource Family Approval: Quality Parenting Initiative and Continuum of Care

The Quality Parenting Initiative's (QPI) goal is to strengthen foster care by refocusing on excellent parenting for all children in the child welfare system. QPI began in 2008 in Florida and has expanded to 10 states, California included, as of 2018. The basis of the initiative focuses on children's need to thrive and in turn, this requires good parenting. Even though children in the foster care system are not being cared for by their biological parents, the thought is that they still deserve a family that is committed to their well-being (The Center for Child Welfare USF, 2015). By merging caregivers skills in parenting and the policies that are among child welfare systems, QPI focuses on the following five core principles (The Center for Child Welfare USF, 2015); Excellent parenting and the provision of families, not just a place to stay, knowledge in child development and trauma research, community and cultural relevance, changing policy to align with research and participants in system's input (The Center for Child Welfare USF, 2015).

QPI sets a standard for caregivers and provides resources to meet that standard. Caregivers have a voice, children in care have a voice and because of this, policies can adapt to the needs.

The Continuum of Care (CCR) is a compilation of reforms for children in child welfare. The overview states that children in foster care, living away from their biological parents, thrive best when put in a nurturing family (California

Department of Social Services, n.d). The principles for CCR include the following; all children deserve a nurturing family that will help prepare them for the world. Everyone involved has a voice that deserves to be heard. Support for the child in terms of Child and Family Team Meetings should be utilized. Children have the right to access services where they live, with the option of in home services. Agencies such as “child welfare, probation, mental health, education, and other community service providers” should utilize collaboration methods to ensure the best care for the child (California Department of Social Services, n.d). Children should not live in a group home long term, familial relationships are a goal in CCR (California Department of Social Services, n.d).

Theory Conceptualization

John Bowlby's Attachment Theory

The first theory that guided the research was attachment theory. Attachment theory was founded by John Bowlby in the 1960's with his work being continued by Mary Ainsworth. The concept of attachment theory is that when a child is separated from his/her mother at birth, ramifications will likely occur. A key component of attachment is that the relationship between the infant and caretaker is essential for survival (Rees, 2007, pp920-922). The bond between caretaker and child is a pattern of bonds that reoccur over time. The outcome for this relationship is the basis for future relationships as the child grows up. For example, if the relationship between caretaker and infant is

inconsistent, the child will grow up and have inconsistent relationships. Self-esteem, trust, and one's sense of security are all created based off the bond the child has with the mother (Rees, 2007, pp920-922). The emotional and psychological growth of a child can be traced back to how they were treated as an infant. In child welfare, this theory is widely used. When one of the goals of child welfare is permanency, attachment must be considered. This theory was related to the researcher's study because stable permanency impacts a child. The basis of resource family approval is to establish permanency. Social workers that worked with resource families understand the vitality of how attachments to caregivers impact a child's sense of permanency.

Erickson's Psychosocial Stages of Development

A second theory that was beneficial in explaining Resource Family Approval and permanency was Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of Development. Erickson hypothesized that there are eight stages of man. Each stage is a continuation of the next (Zastrow, 2016). Since the ages of children in foster care range from ages zero to eighteen, only those stages will be covered in this paper. The first stage is trust versus mistrust which consists of age's birth to one year. In this stage, the infant learns to trust the caregiver by their basic needs being attended to. The consistency of the caregiver will result in the infant feeling secure in the world or anxious and insecure in the world. The next stage is autonomy versus shame and doubt which consists of ages one to three years. During this stage, children will learn to exercise their free will and control

themselves. If they do not, they become uncertain and dependent on others.

Confidence and security will grow if the child is supported and encouraged, but if they are not the result is insecurity. If the caretaker is critical, controlling or rarely gives the child opportunities, the child will feel inadequate and feel shame.

The next stage is initiative versus guilt which is age's three to six. During this stage children learn to initiate their own activities, enjoy what they have accomplished and start developing some purpose. If the caretaker does not support their independence the child will start to feel guilty. Children may feel like a nuisance, only follow what others are doing, and lack initiative. The result is a fearful child who clings to others and lacks their own imagination. The next stage is industry versus inferiority which consists of ages six years until puberty. This is school aged children. The child learns to be competent and effective. If they are not valued by adults in their life or their peers, they start to feel inferior to others. The child feels good about their achievements and is proud of who they are. If the caretaker does not recognize their uniqueness and abilities, the child may become hesitant of the future and not reach their potential. The final stage, in correlation to foster care, is identity versus role confusion which is thirteen to twenty years. This stage is known as the 'who am I' stage. The adolescent is establishing their identity. They are transitioning from child to adult, becoming more independent and looking towards the future. If the adolescent does not have a strong foundation from their early years they can become paralyzed by

the feeling of inferiority and feel confused about themselves and their place in the world (Zastrow, 2016).

So it is apparent that the caretaker's role is vital in a child becoming a healthy and resilient adult. When a child is in foster care they may not have consistent caregivers. It is imperative that social workers understand the stages of development when working with children and families in the resource family approval process because their understanding of this theory will help them educate their clients on what children in care may be going through. The more social workers understand their clients the more prepared they will be in working with a variety of families.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

A third theory that was used to guide this research was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner hypothesizes that there are five systems that impact a child's development. Micro-system, meso-system, exo-system, macro-system and chrono-system (as cited in Paquette and Ryan, 2017). Micro-system includes the child's home, school and neighborhood. Meso-system consists of the child's communication between various micro-systems. Examples could be the relationship between the child's teacher and parents or between the child's church or neighborhood (Paquette and Ryan, 2017). Exo-system includes the environments that affect the child, but the child does not actually enter. Examples would be the parent's workplace, community resources and the media. Macro-system is the larger cultural context. Examples could

include traditions, customs and laws (Paquette and Ryan, 2017). The final system is the chrono-system. This portrays the patterns of stability and changes in the child's environment over time. Examples include external events, "such as the timing of a parent's death, or internal, such as the physiological changes that occur with the aging of a child" (Paquette and Ryan, 2017). So many systems are affected when a child is in foster care. Their world seems to be turned upside down. This theory will help resource family approval by helping social workers explain how the different systems impact a child. Similar to attachment theory, if a child grows up in chaotic systems, the child will be negatively affected and carry the chaos and stress into their adult years (Paquette and Ryan, 2017).

Summary

This chapter focused on the theories that guide social workers involved in resource family approval. Attachment, systems and stages of growth are all vital when understanding children in foster care. Policies such as QPI and CCR aid social workers in the history of implementing RFA. Quality of care for children in foster care continues to be a policy goal. Knowledge of these theories and policies can assist social workers in the process of resource family approval. The more a worker understands the theories and policies applied with children in foster care, the better the worker can understand how the process of resource family approval impacts a child.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter will give an overview of the methods and the steps that were taken to carry out this study. Chapter three discusses study design, sampling methods, data collection and instruments, procedures, methods of protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to explore social workers perceptions of the policy, Resource Family Approval. Social workers encounter many policies and procedures in their line of work that are constantly changing or being updated. RFA is a new policy in child welfare. It is a process that combines parts of the prior process to become a relative foster family and a non-relative foster family. Approval standards for resource family are unified, whether the family is related to the child in care or not. Requirements to become a resource family include a psychosocial assessment, background check, training, home study, CPR, first aid and a risk assessment. By exploring social worker's perception of RFA, other counties and social workers can have a better understanding of how resource family approval is perceived by the workers and the families.

A qualitative study design with face to face interviews was used. This qualitative design was chosen because the researcher can gain an in-depth

understanding of the participants' experiences with RFA, their prior experience before RFA was implemented, professional thoughts about RFA, input on how to prepare future workers for RFA and the adaption of RFA. The study used face to face interviews to allow the participants to expand on a given question if they desire, as opposed to a survey study where only one choice can be chosen for a response. The researcher wanted to capture social worker's true perception and by doing an in person interview, that was able to happen. The purpose of qualitative research was to raise awareness and an understanding of human behaviors, therefore research on RFA workers is essential when trying to understand RFA implementation.

Practice implications for this study included a better understanding of how RFA has impacted workers as well as the families, a better understanding of how workers have handled this significant change and suggestions for how the agency might aid in the transition to RFA from workers who are currently going through the process with the family.

Limitations in using qualitative design include the following; since the research was done through face to face interviews, participants may have felt uncomfortable talking about such a new policy in their agency. Participants may have felt like they had to answer the questions in a certain way due to the researcher's presence. Some participants may have felt more comfortable with close-ended questions, therefore this study may have caused them to feel overwhelmed by the structure of open ended questioning. Lastly, conducting an

interview about an agency policy with the researcher not being an employee of that agency may have caused suspicion on the part of the participants. The study is not intended to sway data any type of way, since the study's purpose is to gain an understanding of social worker's perceptions of Resource Family Approval.

Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. The sample size included 10 social workers from a local child welfare county agency, specifically the resource family approval unit. The researcher recruited these workers by an agency phone list. The researcher chose participants specifically from the resource family unit rather than other social workers within the county because workers in the RFA unit are the individuals who have the most experience with RFA procedures and policies. These workers can offer insight into RFA that social workers in other units cannot. The questions the researcher asked participants are included (Appendix A).

Data Collection and Instrument

Data for the study was collected through the use of face to face and phone interviews. A semi structure interview guide was used and it consisted of thirteen questions, with four of them being focused on demographic information. The demographic variables included age, ethnicity, level of education and how long the participant has worked for the agency. The remaining questions focused on

the role of the participant at the agency, the participant's knowledge of resource family approval, the participant's perception of what could be done to improve the process of RFA and advice for new workers in navigating RFA.

The first step in conducting this research study was to seek approval to conduct the study from the agency. A research proposal, including the nature of the study and asking for consent was presented to a Regional Manager of the agency. Participants included social workers from the Resource Family Approval Unit. The researcher sought out to potential participants through their managers. The researcher obtained managers emails through their county email address. The email included an introduction letter, informed consent and debriefing statement. The researcher requested for the managers to forward the email to their workers. The letter provided potential participants with background information on the nature of the study, the purpose of the study, and a return email of the researcher for participants to reply to if they wanted to participate in the study. Interviews took place from February 2019 until March 2019.

Consent to participate was obtained through the use of an informed consent form (Appendix C) in which participants were instructed to sign with an "X" mark to grant their willingness to voluntarily participate in this study. Upon signing the informed consent, participants were asked to not place any identifying information such as name, address, or telephone number anywhere on the informed consent form. The researcher did not ask any identifying information of the participants. The research study was kept confidential throughout the entire

process. The questionnaire (Appendix A) included a number of questions that took about fifteen to thirty-five minutes to complete. Once the interview was completed, participants were given the debriefing statement (Appendix D).

Protection of Human Subjects

Protecting the privacy and well-being of participants was the primary concern of this researcher. First, interviews included no questions of identifying information. The letter of introduction was given to potential participants that explained the research project and ensured confidentiality measures were taken. Furthermore, an informed consent form was provided to participants, which stressed voluntary participation, the right to withdraw participation at any time without penalty, the right to skip questions and that consent should be granted by signing with an "X" mark and not their name. Lastly, a debriefing statement was included at the end of the questionnaire outlining a contact number to reach the faculty advisor supervising this project and a statement of where and when the findings of the study will be available. All interviews were recorded on a device that was password protected. After the research has been published the researcher will appropriately discard the recordings. The findings of the study will be presented anonymously and the interviews will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research study around July 15, 2019.

Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data the researcher collected. The researcher used a word processing tool to transcribe each interview and used a journal to track common categories. The researcher was able to export the text that was audio recorded and listen back to the interviews, making changes to punctuation as needed. By doing this, the data showed major categories and patterns in participant's responses. Coding was used to assess the categories and find correlations between participant's responses. The final step was describing the major categories in the research to conclude findings.

Summary

This study explored social worker's perception of resource family approval. The face to face and interview process was used to gather the experiences, thoughts and processes of resource family approval workers. This study has the capacity to contribute to suggestions on how to better meet the needs of social workers working with resource family approval and the families in the process of resource family approval.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

In this chapter, demographics and characteristics representing Resource Family Approval social workers interviewed for this study will be presented. Major findings, regarding social worker's thoughts about resource family approval as well as preparations and advice to new workers regarding resource family approval will be presented as well.

Presentation of Findings

Demographics

The study included ten resource family approval social workers. Of this sample, one man, representing 10%, and nine women, representing 90%, were interviewed. The participants were of a diverse ethnic population which included 60% Hispanic or Mexican (6 participants), 30% African Americans (3 participants) and 10% of Caucasian ethnicity (1 participant).

The median age of participants was 39 years old. The youngest participant was 29 years old and the oldest participant was 62 years old. The study included 5 participants between 29-39 years of age, 3 participants between 40-49 years of age, 1 participant between 50-59 years of age, and 1 participant, 62 years old.

Of the participants interviewed, 6 participants (60%) held a master's degree, 3 participants (30%) held a bachelor's degree and 1 participant (10%) held a PhD.

Interviewees had an array of experience at the agency they are currently employed at. Of the 9 participants who answered, the median number of years worked at the agency was 12 years. 3 participants (30%) have worked at the agency for 6-10 years, 3 participants (30%) have worked for the agency 11-15 years, 2 participants (20%) have worked at the agency for 16-20 years and 1 participant (10%) has worked less than five years at the agency. 1 participant (10%) did not answer the question.

When asked about how long participants had worked in the resource family approval unit at the agency, the median was one year. Only 7 participants (70%) answered this question. Of those who responded, 4 participants (40%) said 1-2 years, 2 participants (20%) said 2.5 -5years and 1 participant (10%) said less than one year. 3 participants (30%) did not answer.

Thoughts about Resource Family Approval

When participants were asked about their own thoughts about resource family approval, the majority of the participants responded that they had mixed thoughts. Seven participants, representing 70%, stated that the concept was good in theory but the execution of resource family approval was complicated. One participant stated "it is a wonderful thought. I think it has a long way to go before it is what the framers envisioned it to be. And to me, you can see where

the growing pains are, you can see kind of where it needs to go. I think it's going to be great one day, just not today" (Interviewee 2). Similarly, another participant stated that "it is a good intention. I do not think we are there yet. I think it is a good start and we're headed somewhere, but I don't think it's at its maximum potential or state" (Interviewee 3).

The minority of participants stated that they thought resource family approval was a good and positive policy. Three participants stated that the policy was something they liked. For example, one participant stated "I think that the one worker model is a good idea for consistency for the family. And maybe just expediting things a little quicker. Also, early assessment, I think it's necessary. So I see it as benefits there...in terms of really looking at whether the family is a permanent family for the child. So I feel like it is a positive thing" (Interviewee 5).

Preparations for Workers, Families and the Agency

A major theme was found when participants were asked what preparations they perceive to be needed in regards to resource family approval. Preparations were asked in regards to the workers, the families and the agency. The majority of participants, (80%) answered that workers need to be open minded, attend a lot of trainings and communicate with supervisors and families. One participant stated, "Preparations for workers would be the constant trainings, communication, and just learning how to do it and how it is expected to be done" (Interviewee 4). Another participant stated, "Communication at all times" (Interviewee 9). Similarly, a participant stated, "for workers who are in RFA, really

be knowledgeable, make sure you go through the training that's offered; be ready and open for change" (Interviewee 10).

When asked about preparations for families, participants all answered that families need to know what is expected of them and what the process entails. One participant stated, "There is a process that families have to go through, and many do not know the process. Many think the process is very easy. They need to know the process beforehand... they need to know that the process can be intimidating" (Interviewee 5). Similarly, another participant stated that "these families do not know what they are doing. This is all new to them. They need guidance" (Interviewee 9). In relation, a participant stated that "for a resource family, just making sure they know upfront what is expected. A lot of times, what I'm finding is it may not be that they are not being informed, I think that sometimes they may be so excited about starting the process that when it comes time to do what's required, they get frustrated. So I think they need to know what they are getting themselves into" (Interviewee 10).

When asked about preparations in regards to the agency, participants had a variety of thoughts. These thoughts included more communication needed, more trainings and for the agency to look at what is falling through the cracks. For example, one participant stated, "Continued ongoing training, guidance and support for staff. Because there are a lot of constant changes with the program. I think that communication is needed, because of all the changes" (Interviewee 6). Two participants stated that the agency needed to look ahead and think long

term. For example, one participant stated “the agency needs to look ahead. We are really just reacting instead of being proactive. I know it’s hard when there’s so much going on. But we need to think about things two or three years down the line” (Interviewee 1). Two more participants stated that the agency needed to provide more trainings. Another 2 more participants said that the agency needed to hire more workers. One participant stated that they think the agency is too lenient on who they approve.

Advice to New Workers Regarding Resource Family Approval

One of the closing questions asked to participants was advice that they would give to new workers regarding resource family approval. The answers varied, but 4 participants emphasized the importance of having a routine. One participant stated, “For a new RFA worker, establish some really good routines and stick to them” (Interviewee 1). Similarly, another worker stated “new social workers have to be really good at multitasking...you have a lot of things to do and you have to stay on track or you will forget something and it will fall through the cracks” (Interviewee 5).

Other workers emphasized communication. Two participants spoke about the importance of communicating with others involved in the case. One participant stated “Well, it is new...so just communicate. Ask, you know? There are no dumb questions” (Interviewee 4).

One participant stated the importance of not being attached to the policies, as they change so often. The participant stated, “Change happens by the end of

a meeting. You can't get attached to things. There's no way of knowing what is going to change. Our regulations change every year" (Interviewee 4).

Summary

In summary, this chapter presented the demographics, characteristics, and major findings, regarding resource family approval social worker's perceptions of resource family approval and what can be done to better prepare for it. The opinions, experiences and beliefs derived from 10 face to face and phone interviews were used to illustrate the findings that were presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the major findings presented in chapter four. In addition to the discussion of major findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research will be discussed as well. This chapter will conclude with a summary of findings and implications for Social Work practice.

Discussion

This study was conducted to understand the perceptions of resource family approval social workers on the policy implementation of Resource Family Approval. Although the literature used to guide this research study compared outcomes for children in foster care placed with relatives versus non-relatives, the literature was not relevant to social worker's responses to this particular study. The literature was used to guide the policy of resource family approval, but the lack of studies conducted on Resource Family Approval make it difficult to compare the current study findings to existing literature in RFA. Resource Family Approval is a new policy and with the emerging policies comes emerging research.

The study found that most of the participants had mixed feelings towards RFA. In regards to their thoughts about RFA, the majority of participants stated

that RFA was good in theory but not in execution. In regards to preparations for workers, families and the agency, the majority of participants stated that workers need to be open minded and focus on communicating with all parties involved in RFA. When asked about preparations for families, all participants answered that families need to know the expectations regarding the RFA process. When asked about preparations for the agency, participants had mixed responses. The responses included a variety of answers, from communication with supervisors to hiring more workers. This study found that communication with all parties involved in resource family approval is vital to complete the approval process and be in compliance with policies within the agency.

When asked about advice for new workers regarding RFA, participants had a variety of responses. Answers varied from encouraging new workers to have a routine to making sure new workers are good at multitasking. All advice given from the participants is useful when working in a child welfare agency. Their advice was specifically geared towards new RFA workers, which is beneficial to those who are not familiar to the RFA unit. From multitasking to routines, it seems as though organization is a common theme among participant's responses.

Although the literature is not correlated with the responses of participants, due to the lack of research surrounding RFA, the responses of participants can be used to help understand the implementation of RFA at an agency level.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the small sample size of 10 individuals. These individuals represented social workers that work in the Resource Family Approval Unit. This limited the generalizability of the study because the perceptions of these individuals do not necessarily represent the perceptions of all social workers within child welfare. Social workers in the resource family approval unit had unique perceptions based on their everyday use of the RFA policy, whereas other social workers may not come into contact with the RFA policy daily. Another limitation in this study was ethnic diversity. Although the study was ethnically diverse, not all ethnic groups were represented, due to the small sample size. Furthermore, the study only had one male participant. Therefore, the diversity in gender was also lacking.

In addition to these limitations, a further limitation was that the researcher planned to conduct face-to-face interviews with participants. Due to the hectic schedule of some participants, the researcher opted to interview some participants over the phone. Due to the lack of in person contact, participants may have not expanded on their answers to the interview questions.

The next limitation in this study is that the researcher developed the interview guide with a faculty advisor specifically for this research study. The limitation with this is that the interview guide was not tested.

This study only took into account the perceptions of social workers within the RFA unit, perceptions of others involved with RFA such as social workers in

other units, foster families and relative caregivers were not included in this study, although their perception would have been valuable.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Social Work Practice

Based on this study, a common theme among improving social work practice is the importance of communication. Communication can stretch between other workers, the families involved in child welfare, and management. Many social workers expressed the confusing nature of RFA and all the policy changes that occur so often. Therefore, communication is a way to mediate these feelings of confusion. If the social workers are confused about how RFA functions, then this can have a trickledown effect to affect the families RFA workers work with.

The study also found that a few social workers spoke about the importance of training regarding RFA. Not only training for the workers but also training for the resource families. On a macro level, the agency can take it upon themselves to offer ongoing training to both the workers and the families. Better quality of training can affect how RFA is implemented within the community.

Social Work Policy

During this study many social workers stated that they thought the RFA policy was good in theory. The issue RFA social workers had with the policy was the execution of it. A recommendation would be to possibly amend the amount of

changes RFA experiences. This can be done by measuring the effectiveness of the policy before enacting changes. Workers stated that once they start to understand the process, something changes. This can create burnout in workers and the desire to keep up with policy changes may seem impossible. Although this is a new policy and changes have to be made, the recommendation is that policy makers give the policy time to work itself out, before trying to change things so often. Perhaps look at why there have been so many changes to the policy.

Social Work Research

Further research regarding Resource Family Approval and the perceptions of workers and families involved is needed to better understand its implementation. Interviewing a broader array of workers, among different child welfare agencies and counties, may give a better understanding of how RFA is being implemented. In addition, measuring outcomes in relation to children's well-being, safety, and permanency may also give child welfare workers a better understanding of RFA.

Conclusion

Common themes emerged when social workers stated their thoughts on RFA and their advice to new workers in RFA. In addition, many social workers felt preparations could be done to improve RFA for families, social workers and the agency as a whole.

In conclusion, although the study did not capture exactly what the researcher had planned, the study did produce valuable information regarding social worker's perceptions of Resource Family Approval. This study identified resource family approval social worker's perceptions on the policy implementation of Resource Family Approval through questions regarding preparations for families, workers and the agency, advice to new workers regarding RFA and personal thoughts about RFA. It is the hope of this researcher that this research will help other professions involved with RFA understand the perceptions of social workers and the impact RFA has had on their practice. It is also the hope that the perceptions of social workers would be valuable in further research regarding RFA.

APPENDIX A
INSTRUMENT DEVELOPED BY THE RESEARCHER



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Interview Guide

1. Demographics
 - Age
 - Ethnicity
 - Level of Education
 - How long have you worked for the agency?
2. Tell me about your role at the agency.
3. What was the process like for families prior to Resource Family Approval?
4. What are your thoughts about Resource Family Approval?
5. What do you know about Resource Family Approval?
6. What preparations can be made in respect to Resource Family Approval? (in terms of workers, agency and families)
7. Tell me a story about a specific case that impacted you in relation to Resource Family Approval.
8. What advice would you give to a new worker about Resource Family Approval?
9. Anything I should have asked but didn't?

909.537.5501 909.537.7029

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APPENDIX B
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

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

Researcher(s) Hannah Chavez

Proposal Title Social Work Research Project of Resilient Family Approval

201902

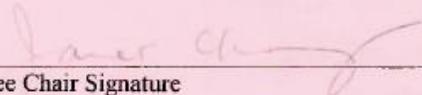
Your proposal has been reviewed by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. The decisions and advice of those faculty are given below.

Proposal is:

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

Revisions that must be made before proposal can be approved:

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

 Committee Chair Signature 1/14/2019 Date

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

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT



California State University, San Bernardino
Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee
APPROVED 1/14/2019 VOID AFTER 1/13/21
IRB# 541962 CHAIR Janet Chang

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 Social Worker's Perception of Resource Family Approval. The study is being conducted by Hannah Chavez, a MSW student under the supervision of Dr. Janet Chang 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 Social Worker's Perception of Resource Family Approval

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked of a few questions on their thoughts about Resource Family Approval, what processes were in place prior to Resource Family Approval, advice to new worker's on Resource Family Approval and what preparations can be made in relation to Resource Family Approval.

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

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

DURATION: It will take 45minutes to 1 hour to complete this study.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

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

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Janet Chang at 909-537-5184 (email: jchang@csusb.edu)

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

909.537.5501

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

Place an X mark here

Date

I agree to be tape recorded: _____ Yes _____ No

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APPENDIX D
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT



College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
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DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

This study you have just completed was designed to examine Social Worker's Perception of Resource Family Approval. I am interested in how this new process has impacted social workers.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Janet Chang at 909-537-5184. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact the ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) after June 2019.

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