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## INTEGRATING FAITH IN SOCIAL WORK

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# INTEGRATING FAITH IN SOCIAL WORK

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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  
Omar Elhanafy  
May 2021

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Omar Elhanafy  
May 2021

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## ABSTRACT

Religion and Spirituality are concepts rarely spoken about in social work programs. Many social work students have expressed that they have not received a proper education on integration of faith into social work practice in their programs. Evidence is given to support this claim and this Proposal will discuss this concept, its importance, and highlight the need for this education. This exploratory study will use a qualitative design which will explore the experiences of participants on how comfortable they feel in using faith in social work practice. The proposal will continue to further explore the validity to this claim through an ethical means of research practices.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### God

All praise is due to god, the most gracious, the most merciful for allowing me to complete this project.

### Research Advisor

Dr. Davis

Thank you for your time and effort on this project. Thank you for being there for me in times of stress and being an amazing advisor and professor.

### Participants

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A special thanks to my family for believing in me and pushing me to be the best student I can be.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Problem Formulation

A client's religion or spirituality (RS) must be taken into consideration when performing a global assessment of clients. Canda and Furman (2010) believe that the social worker be unbiased, knowledgeable, and informed in practice with religion. Social workers must consider RS in their practice. A client's (RS) can be an incredible positive resource for the client.

Social workers are expected to integrate faith and spirituality into their practice. However, many social workers feel unprepared to do so. A substantial amount of social workers have not received an education on religion and spirituality integration in social work practice (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014).

This is unfortunate and unsettling considering that all social workers are supposed to receive some training on how to incorporate a client's (RS) into practice. Social workers must do so to be culturally competent workers.

There are consequences with there being a lack of education in the integration of faith in social work practice. On a micro level, the social worker will not be able to relate to the client well and will falter in their engagement. On a macro-level, social work programs will not be up to the proper standard and will not address all competencies that they claim they address in their curriculum.

This shows a lack of integrity and with errors in the education system, there will more than likely be errors in practice.

The findings from this study will contribute to social work practice by emphasizing the need to incorporate more education for social workers on how to integrate faith into social work practice. Rarely are the topics of faith and spirituality brought up in academics or how to deal with faith in social work. Religion is something that must be taken into consideration due to the requirement that social workers be culturally competent.

Harris et al.2017 mentions that competencies which focus on integrating faith and practice have been added to programs in some schools of social work with an emphasis on faith. Social workers will be better able to fulfill this cultural competency with more education in this concept.

Social workers may feel unprepared because they have not been taught how to deal with faiths other than their own when learning social work. Harris et al. (2017) believes that providing education on integration of faith to students is the answer to solving this issue. Social workers need to learn how to integrate this knowledge of faith into practice not only because they are supposed to based on the competency, but so that the social worker will have a better chance of relating to the client and strengthening the connection between the client and social worker. This exchange or discussion of faith will help the social worker engage positively with their client. Another reason is if the social worker is aware

of the client's faith, they could offer some faith-based resources that the client may consider enhancing their quality of life.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore what experiences child welfare social workers have when integrating faith into their practice. This research is done so the findings may indicate whether social workers have been adequately educated and trained in cultural competence in their education. There is currently limited research on the topic of faith integration in child welfare and this study will be an addition to any current research. There is a lack in utilizing the client's belief system or religion in current general social work practice and social work practice in child welfare, which is heavily influenced by theories learned over the profession's lifetime. The integration of faith and religion in social work has significantly diminished. This study is being done to help stress the importance of integration of faith in child welfare. Further exploring this topic through interviews gives the profession of social work a better understanding of current social work practice of faith in child welfare. Further exploring this topic through interviews also gives the profession of social work a better understanding of the education given to students in child welfare regarding faith and the integration of faith in social work practice. With a better understanding of the education social work

students in child welfare receive on faith the profession as a whole may be able to recognize what areas of education need improvement.

### Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

This proposal is needed because there is limited research on the topic and there is a need for exploration. This contribution to the social work profession may highlight any mistakes the profession has made as a whole and may indicate if there need to be any future decisions regarding the education of social work students. This study falls under the exploring stage and evaluating stage of the generalist intervention process. By evaluating and exploring what faith the client practices the social worker will be able to integrate the client's faith into practice which will help the client become successful. Integrating faith into practice will help enhance the wellbeing of both the client and worker. This is why students in social work must be educated in faith and integration of faith in social work practice.

This research study aimed to bridge the gap between faith and social work practice. This study is significant because the results from this study offer a chance to make changes in social work practice. With additional information from this study the social work profession will be given an opportunity to address any disparities in social work education pertaining to the integration of faith in social work practice. It is important to understand what is missing from social work

education to enhance the profession as a whole. This study will allow the profession to correct any areas where education needs to be adjusted. Findings from this study further highlight the gap between faith integration and social work education. These findings will also help develop ideas of administering education on integration of faith in social work practice. Findings from this study will also provide a space to discuss the integration of faith in social work practice in and out of child welfare.

The research question for this study is, based on their education what experiences do social work students in child welfare have on integrating faith into social work practice?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter will be analyzing the definition of faith and the competency that all social workers must follow by in regards to faith or religion. Social work education and practice will be looked at specifically education and practice within child welfare. Arguments and limitations will also be explored in this chapter.

#### Faith

What is faith? According to Meriam webster Faith is the belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion. Many people have different faiths and many live by the rules and standards that their faith has. A person's faith has guiding principles that dictate a certain lifestyle. In the social work profession, social workers are expected to utilize a client's faith in their practice to help the client. A client's faith is a concept that social work professionals are expected to understand and converse about when working with clients. According to Harris et.al (2017), many students feel that a client's faith is strong support during hard times. Social workers should recognize a client's faith as a strength and should

know how to help the client use this strength to further enhance their quality of life and wellbeing.

## Competency

Most if not all schools of social work have a standard set of competencies that have been created by the CSWE (Council of Social Work Education). Many schools of social work require students to practice with cultural competency and cultural humility. Practice with cultural humility is understanding and respecting the client's faith and culture. Social workers are expected to have a broad knowledge of cultures and faiths when interacting with their clients.

Competencies are the principles that constitute how programs are created to make sure that social work students are able to integrate these competencies into their practice to adhere to the CSWE standards. The standard that many social workers are held accountable to is that all social workers should be able and are expected to effectively practice with cultural competency and humility. Understanding and including spirituality in practice is an important concept that is a part of the social worker's cultural competence and ethical responsibility (Darrell,2017). It is the social worker's responsibility to demonstrate cultural competence in practice. It is also an ethical responsibility to include spirituality in their practice in order to best serve clients.

Many in the U.S. practice their faith. A mass of Americans considers religion and spirituality to be an essential part of their lives which is a significant subject for social workers (Graff, 2007). Because many have a faith they belong to, social work students must recognize that faith is a part of one's life. Religious practices and involvement in religious communities has an effect on a person's spirit and health in all aspects (Canda et al., 2010). A person's faith, religion, or spirituality has an impact on their health. This is something that social workers should always take into consideration with their clients. While external forces heavily influence the health of clients, their spirituality also effects the state of their wellbeing which must not be overlooked.

### Education

Social workers are expected to have an understating of a client's faith and learn how to integrate faith into practice. Although this is the expectation placed on social workers, many feel as if they are not able to integrate faith into practice. Social work students should be taught how to integrate faith into practice. Social work students studying at a graduate level have gotten insufficient training in faith integration into practice (Sheridan and Hemert,1999).

Social work students feel that they are not being educated or trained in their curriculum on this topic. Many social workers have said that they have not gained knowledge on integration of religion into social work practice (Oxhandler

&Pargament, 2014). Gilligan & Furness (2005) state that social workers and social work students in Britain have said that it was seldom in their training that religion and spirituality was examined. Many of the literature have expressed the same message that there seems to be a lack of education among social work students on integrating faith into social work practice.

### Practice

Social work practitioners do not feel fully equipped to handle religion and spirituality despite recognizing its significance (Canda and Furman, 2010). A high number of participants indicate that it was seldom to have been given instructions on the use of religion in their social work programs (Sheridan, 2009). This lack of preparation and training indicates that there is a lack of education. If practitioners feel uneasy about their practice then this means that they have not had the appropriate training for that specific practice. Also, according to Canda and Furman (2010), many social work practitioners understand the importance of integrating faith into practice. A large number of students have expressed an high interest to include material on diversity in religion and how to tackle issues in religion (Graff,2007). The integration of religion, faith, and/ or spirituality all should be taught within social work programs. Many students have expressed the need for education of the integration of faith in social work practice and to not

allow this type of education to be available hinders the performance of social work students. If not addressed social work students will feel ill-prepared to work with clients using their faith as a strength. More often than not social work students are taught the strength-based perspective to help clients reach their goals and acquire a better state of living. If so many view faith as a strength then how come students are not being taught how to integrate faith as a strength in their practice.

There is little research and literature on integrating faith into social work practice within child welfare however, there is literature on integrating faith into social work. Further exploration and further research must be done to see if the education in child welfare programs is lacking the concept of integration of faith into practice like the education that social work students in non-child welfare programs receive. This study aims to explore this and hopefully fill in this gap.

### Importance of Faith

All the existing research emphasize the importance and need for social work programs to educate its students on the integration of faith into practice. As previously mentioned, Many students have barely had training in religion in their social work graduate program (Sheridan and Hemert, 1999). There is a clear lack of integration of faith in social work practice amongst social work students. Students recognize the importance of the education of integration of faith and

wish they received it. The argument that can be made is that there must be a change to the education that social work students receive in terms of faith and spirituality in social work practice. There is a gap in the literature as to whether or not child welfare students receive this type of education and this study aims to fill this gap. With a more faith-based approach to the education that exists students will be able to fully complete a bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessment for their clients. If students received this education of integration of faith in their education they would have been better equipped when facing challenges pertaining to the client's faith.

### Limitations

Some limitations to this study are the research is only exploring the education that social work students in child welfare receive and not all social work students. Child welfare social work students are a preformed group which means other experiences will not be heard. The nature of this particular study is to explore the education child welfare students receive in their social work programs. Another limitation would be the number of institutions that allow permission for their students to participate in the study.

## Theories Guiding Conceptualization

A theory that would guide conceptualization is systems theory. Ecological systems theory is a form of models used in social work (Siporin, 1980). When using systems theory, it is important that social workers observe the school as a system and the education it provides its students. If the education is not up to the standard that the systems says it is then there is a flaw in the system and this flaw will have a negative impact on the smaller systems within it. Those smaller systems are the students and the clients that the students will deal with in the future as social work professionals.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This study aims to identify the experiences social work students have with faith and faith integration in practice particularly in the area of child welfare. Chapter three describes the methods used to locate any experiences. The design of the study, sampling, data collection and instruments and procedures will be discussed on how this data was gathered. Finally the protection of human subjects and data analysis will be discussed.

#### Study Design

This study design would use a qualitative methodology as this is an exploratory study. Since this study is exploratory, the researcher interviewed participants using a list of open-ended questions to explore these experiences. A strength of this design is that the interview is structured using open-ended questions that allow the participant to freely voice their opinion and/or experience. A limitation of this type of study is the bias of the researcher which is why this type of data collection mitigates any bias from the researcher and allows the participant to share their thoughts or views however they wish. There have

been studies in the past which explored the education social work students have received and this study continues to explore this topic further. This type of study will contribute to the education of social work and the practice of social work.

### Sampling

The type of sampling that would be used is a non-random sampling and snowball sampling. The sample consisted of 8 social work students. The type of social work students that will be recruited for this sample will be social work students specifically in child welfare programs from a college or university. The demographic information of participants collected for this research will be age, gender, and level of education.

### Data Collection and Instruments

This study gathered data using qualitative methodology using individual interviews in February of 2021. These interviews were recorded live on a digital voice recorder. The interviewer asked participants demographic questions as well as questions pertaining to the research question, what experiences do social work students in child welfare have on integrating faith into social work practice? (see full interview guide on Appendix B).

The interviews were done using an interview guide (see Appendix B) that has been created for this study. The interview guide was created by the researcher. Participants were asked open-ended questions that allowed them to reveal the education they received in their programs and their attitudes towards talking about faith with their clients. Questions regarding techniques and strategies regarding the implementation of faith were also asked as well as how comfortable or uncomfortable the participants' feel about talking about faith with clients.

A limitation of this instrument would be how comfortable the participants felt on answering questions. Participants may be hesitant to respond or cautious when responding given this topic is an aspect of social work practice that can be difficult to talk about. Some participants may have felt intimidated or uncomfortable when answering interview questions because of such a taboo topic.

## Procedures

The researcher recruited participants through a separate social media account and email. The researcher created a Facebook page specifically for the project using a separate non personal Gmail account. The Gmail account was created solely for the research project. The Facebook page was called Social Work and Faith and the Gmail created and used was called [socialworkandfaith@gmail.com](mailto:socialworkandfaith@gmail.com). Using this Facebook page a recruitment flyer

(see Appendix D) was made to attract potential participants. Using this platform the researcher reached out to potential participants using a recruitment message (see Appendix E) asking for participation in the study.

Through communication, criteria was discussed for participation and agreements were made between the researcher and the participants. This email and social media account were used to communicate with participants about informed consent and the interview process. An email was sent to the participants requesting to review the informed consent (see Appendix A) and if comfortable sign and return back via email.

After receiving signed informed consent forms the researcher communicated with each participant to schedule an appropriate day and time for an interview. Participants were reminded once more that the researcher records their responses during the interview. Recordings were confidential and stored on a digital voice recorder.

All interviews took place virtually either using an attached Facebook app called messenger or through setting up a virtual meeting using the Gmail provided above. Through Facebook messenger or email participants were and recording using the digital voice recorder Interviews took no more than 20 minutes. After the interview was completed participants were thanked.

## Protection of Human Subjects

The identity of the participants was protected and remained confidential. Participants were emailed an informed consent which was read and signed, stating that participation is voluntary and they may leave the study at any point in time. No audio recording were done without the participants' consent. Participants were told that they may choose to not answer any question they do not feel comfortable. On the informed consent, participants were notified that all information gathered in the study will remain confidential and their identity will remain anonymous. Audio recordings were stored on the same digital voice recorder that was used to record responses.

## Data Analysis

After data collection, the data was transcribed by the researcher. Once the interviews were completed the data was analyzed to obtain common themes or statements. Common themes that were anticipated were a lack of comfortability in integration of faith in social work.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

After interviewing 8 students on the topic of religion and spirituality in child welfare, there were themes and interesting findings that emerged. Due to the fact that faith and religion are concepts that are not discussed heavily in child welfare, this study aimed to understand how comfortable students in child welfare were in regards to faith or religion in this field. This study aimed to better illustrate the idea of faith by identifying people, places, things or artifacts, and ideas that have been discussed and mentioned throughout all interviews. These concepts will be referred to as categories of faith. The demographic information will be discussed followed by the categories of faith.

#### Demographics

The sample was comprised of 8 adults who identified as females. Of the 8 respondents, seven were have already received their Bachelors degree and working towards their Masters degree and one currently working towards their bachelors degree. All 8 participants are currently enrolled in a child welfare program. The age range of the sample was 22-26

Table 1. Demographics of Research Participants

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Education</b>
Participant 1	23	Female	Masters
Participant 2	24	Female	Masters
Participant 3	24	Female	Masters
Participant 4	22	Female	Bachelors
Participant 5	25	Female	Masters
Participant 6	26	Female	Masters
Participant 7	25	Female	Masters
Participant 8	24	Female	Masters

### People

Through interviewing all participants, people or persons have been mentioned by participants in regards to faith. Below are the direct quotes regarding people.

Table 2. Direct Quote Regarding People

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding People
Participant 1	<p>“I wouldn’t say like a specific course, I know different professors have kind of touched on integrating faith even if you are uncomfortable with it, but I wouldn’t say we have been given like specific knowledge or information about like incorporating faith or faith in religion in this curriculum” (Survey Interview, February 2021).</p>
Participant 2	<p>“uhm yeah just how the founders of social work were like faith based so it started with like uhm churches or their beleis in helping the less fortunate and how their faith played a role in their service” (Survey Interview, February 2021).</p>
Participant 3	<p>“There is definitely room for improvement , I think Christians and Catholics have a very strong presence in the inland empire so that is</p>

	<p>something more well known compared to other religions such as like Muslim, Hinduism”</p> <p>(Survey Interview, February 2021).</p>
Participant 4	<p>“uhm well in terms of like engaging with my clients I have learned to kind of stay competent in religions that are more predominantly in my area” (Survey Interview, February 2021).</p>
Participant 6	<p>“No yeah other than asking parents like are you do practice any uhm religion or any like spiritual like tradition, uhm and I think most of my experiences have been like yes I believe in god but I don’t go to church and it’d be like kinda parents are kinda laughing it off ya know I should do better but I don’t. and then I basically yea know this is just a question I am not judging you uhm on your beliefs or on how often you go and then I would explain were just trying to see maybe we could tap into specific uhm coping skills or like refer you to certain services that might benefit you more”</p> <p>(Survey Interview, February 2021).</p>

Participant 8	<p>“I mean I’ve been able to uhm shadow social workers that have used faith in a way that motivates a client to want to change or provide a reason for change specifically like when a client was struggling with completing their services and finding a reason to not give up” (Survey Interview, February 2021).</p>
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### Places

Through interviewing all participants, places or locations have been mentioned by participants in regards to faith. Below are the direct quotes regarding places.

Table 3. Direct Quote Regarding Places

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Places
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Participant 2	<p>“well in my masters program there was one class where the professor did uhm kind of talk about faith and how the founders of social work started off like faith based but it was very little information.” (Survey Interview, February 2021).</p>
Participant 3	<p>“uhm within while I was shadowing other families I was able to see how to be respectful in their homes when you are communicating with them. I think in the classroom we learn about different religions in there so we know how to respect one another because for example I have a friend who is actually Muslim and that is something I didn’t know about before or I didn’t know a lot about the community prior to him being my friend” (Survey Interview, February 2021).</p>
Participant 4	<p>“uhm well in terms of like engaging with my clients I have learned to kind of stay competent in religions that are more predominant in my area so kind of be competent in that so that when I engage with</p>

	people who are of that faith to kind of like respect that and that will like enhance the engagement process” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
Participant 5	“uhm in our micro class we discussed faith and discussed different support groups macro support groups that have been established in social work to uhm I guess promote the idea of faith the mix between faith and uhm practicing social work” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
Participant 6	“uhm I would say uhm so my school is uhm really big on critical race theory so uhm we talk about like uhm privilege and power and oppression” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
Participant 8	“I do recall learning a bit about faith based practice in macro or my first quarter in the program specifically just discussing how like organizations or like part of churches are kind of like social work like from the beginning seen in churches like other charity organizations like

	the sifers of charity stuff like that” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
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### Artifacts

Through interviewing all participants, artifacts have been mentioned by participants in regards to faith. Below are the direct quotes regarding artifacts.

Table 4. Direct Quote Regarding Artifacts

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Artifacts
Participant 1	“in our masters program I really don’t feel like they’ve given us any like techniques” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
Participant 1	“ I feel like if I have been taught more on that I could have answered these questions with better material but I really feel like there’s

	definitely a lack of that” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
Participant 2	“I think that would be like uhm when we do the biopsychospiritual assessment we definitely ask questions regarding like their spirituality” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
Participant 3	“I have been taught that when you’re doing the global assessment or the biosychosocial you need to you can ask what their values and goals are related to them on a spiritual level and that might open the conversation for their religion and their spirituality and what they believe in and how that may be a component to how they complete their case requirements or stuff like that” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
Participant 5	“I feel comfortable with it only because I have a strong foundation in my faith so I’m just more willing to I guess integrate other people’s faith when I practice with them if that makes sense ” (Survey Interview, February 2021).

Participant 6	“what experiences, hmmm uhm I wouldn’t say I’ve had many experiences uhm other than uh I know faith was a religion/ spirituality was a question uhm when I used to do assessments and I know I do believe its part of our SDM tool when were doing those things like asking how religion applies or if it helps anyone cope with anything” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
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### Ideas

Through interviewing all participants, ideas have been mentioned by participants in regards to faith. Below are the direct quotes regarding ideas.

Table 5. Direct Quote Regarding Ideas

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Ideas
Participant 1	“ I really honestly don’t feel like we have been taught a lot about that” (Survey Interview, February 2021).

Participant 2	<p>“I feel like the only thing we’ve been taught is to acknowledge other people’s faiths, their spirituality, it could be whatever they believe in just including that into what they are as a person” (Survey Interview, February 2021).</p>
Participant 3	<p>“I think to an extent. There is definitely room for improvement” (Survey Interview, February 2021).</p>
Participant 4	<p>“I feel like I have been taught to do so but I don’t think I have been taught like how to do it but again I think that’s kind of difficult especially when faith is not really something that I feel I’ve had a professor who is comfortable to talk about especially when it comes to like a particular faith I think they kind of stray away from like talking” (Survey Interview, February 2021).</p>
Participant 6	<p>“it hasn’t been out there in many other classes” (Survey Interview, February 2021).</p>

Participant 6	“ I think the most we have gotten into faith would have to be in my field seminar” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
Participant 7	“ to be honest with you I don’t think I’ve ever received any classes on faith in general throughout undergrad and post bachelor” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
Participant 7	“ not a lot of experiences, I can’t pin point one because I haven’t experienced any” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
Participant 8	“if I am being honest I feel like I haven’t received very much information or education on faith and child welfare” (Survey Interview, February 2021).
Participant 8	“I don’t believe that I have been taught how to integrate it in my practice specifically through my courses, I feel like I have seen it more through experience” (Survey Interview, February 2021).

## Summary

Faith or spirituality were broken down into categories of faith which includes people, places, artifacts, and ideas. These categories were obtained through thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and then organized into tables. Themes and perceptions were gathered from the data that give insight into how comfortable social work students in child welfare are on integrating faith into social work practice and their knowledge of doing so. Further explanation and an in depth analysis of the categories of faith will be produced in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

The goal of this project was to view what experiences students in child welfare had on integrating faith in child welfare. This chapter will discuss the categories of faith, people, places, artifacts, and ideas in regards to faith in social work. The categories being discussed derive from each of the tables presented. After review of the data, this study several themes that were common among all participants. It was discovered that the common theme was not having enough knowledge of faith in child welfare or how to integrate it into practice. Several direct quotes will be discussed across all categories and how they pertain to faith and spirituality in child welfare.

#### People

Faith and spirituality were present in the category of people and was present in this participant's responses. When asked about what education was received on faith in child welfare participant 2 stated "Well in my masters program there was one class where the professor did uhm kind of talk about faith and how the founders of social work started off like faith based but it was very

little information” (Survey Interview, February 2021). This sentence implies that there was information being taught in the child welfare curriculum however a small amount. In regards to people this sentence indicates that there are faculty in the child welfare programs that teach about faith to a certain degree. This sentence is important because it suggests that there is little information being taught in regards to faith in child welfare. This is surprising because faith and spirituality are concepts that must be taught to students to become culturally competent. This may suggest that there may need to be additional people and additional courses in child welfare programs who are able to teach students about faith and spirituality. This sentence could also imply that the student never received a specific course on faith in child welfare due to only hearing about the concept of faith briefly in one class. As stated previously, a substantial amount of social workers have not received an education on religion and spirituality integration in social work practice (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014). The quote is consistent with the evidence of a lack of education given to social work students. Students in child welfare must be prepared to address faith in practice as a client’s faith is an important part of the client that shouldn’t be overlooked. Faith and spirituality is an aspect of the client and is often not addressed or spoken about with clients. By analyzing this quote it could indicate that students are still not receiving an education on faith and faith integration in social work practice. As mentioned before, evidence shows a high number of participants indicate that it was seldom to have been given instructions on the use of religion in their social

work programs (Sheridan, 2009). It is surprising because social work originated from religion itself. The values that guide practice stem from religious values.

## Places

Faith and spirituality were present in the category of places and was present in this participant's responses. When asked if the participant was taught how to integrate faith or religion into social work practice participant 8 stated "I don't believe that I have been taught how to integrate it in my practice specifically through my courses, I feel like I have seen it more through experience" (Survey Interview, February 2021). This sentence is important because it may suggest that the student was not adequately prepared on integrating faith into social practice in child welfare. It may suggest that the student did not receive any education on integration of faith in child welfare. It might be significant that the student reports an absence of knowledge of faith in child welfare. This might open up the idea that child welfare is unaware of the importance of faith and its integration in practice. Students have expressed a lack of preparedness when integrating faith into practice. This is evident with the quote participant 8 mentioned. Students must be prepared to integrate faith into social work practice otherwise the social work profession may not be as effective as it used to be.

When asked about the type of education received on faith in child welfare participant 6 stated "I think the most we have gotten into faith would have to be

in my field seminar” (Survey Interview, February 2021). This sentence is significant because it highlights that faith was discussed in a place in the curriculum. This sentence implies there is a possibility to include faith in child welfare because it has already been brought forward in a setting for students. This sentence might serve as a solution to the lack of knowledge taught surrounding faith integration by including faith in more areas in child welfare. It might suggest that there may need to be more places where students are able to learn and discuss faith integration in social work practice.

### Artifacts

Faith and spirituality were present in the category of artifacts and was present in this participant’s responses. When asked if the participant was taught how to integrate faith or religion into social work practice participant 1 stated “I feel like if I have been taught more on that I could have answered these questions with better material but I really feel like there’s definitely a lack of that” (Survey Interview, February 2021). This sentence is significant because the participant mentions that there was a lack of material in her response. This might imply that the student was not properly taught on faith integration in child welfare. It could indicate that the information being taught is limited and possibly insufficient. Not having enough education on faith integration limits the quality of

practice and may leave the student with a low level of confidence when interacting with clients.

When asked about receiving an education on faith in a child welfare program participant 1 also stated “I wouldn’t say like a specific course, I know different professors have kind of touched on integrating faith even if you are uncomfortable with it, but I wouldn’t say we have been given like specific knowledge or information about like incorporating faith or faith in religion in this curriculum” (Survey Interview, February 2021). This sentence is significant because it seems consistent with the idea stated before that students may not have had the proper education in child welfare pertaining to faith and faith integration. It might suggest that child welfare has not properly prepared students to integrate faith in child welfare.

### Ideas

Faith and spirituality were present in the category of ideas and was present in this participants responses. When asked about what techniques were taught in regards to integrating faith in social work practice participant 2 stated “I feel like the only thing we’ve been taught is to acknowledge other people’s faiths, their spirituality, it could be whatever they believe in just including that into what they are as a person” (Survey Interview, February 2021). The idea of faith was brought up in this response. This sentence is significant because it shows the

techniques that the student knows on how to integrate faith into social work practice. Although it shows what the student knows it may imply the only technique the student knows. Acknowledgement of a client's faith is the only thing that the student was able to present which could suggest that the knowledge of integrating faith into social work practice is limited. It is surprising because students in social work are taught multiple techniques when dealing with clients. This opens up the importance and the need for an education of faith in child welfare. It also provides insight into the little education that is provided in child welfare on faith. It ties into our research question because it implies that students have not been educated on techniques to integrate faith into social work. This opens up the idea that the profession of social work has devalued faith and its importance in practice. It also might suggest that students have not been prepared and may struggle in regards to addressing faith in child welfare.

When asked if the participant had been taught how to integrate faith or religion into social work practice participant 4 stated "I feel like I have been taught to do so but I don't think I have been taught like how to do it but again I think that's kind of difficult especially when faith is not really something that I feel I've had a professor who is comfortable to talk about especially when it comes to like a particular faith I think they kind of stray away from like talking" (Survey Interview, February 2021). This sentence is significant because it the student mentions that the idea of faith has not been taught to them in their child welfare curriculum. This may suggest that the social work profession is ill equipped to

address faith and may require more attention in regards to integration of faith in social work practice. This participant expressed that professors would avoid speaking about faith even though it an idea that must be taught to students. This open the question of why faith and integration of faith isn't discussed or taught in child welfare. It ties into our research question because it suggest that students have not had enough experience or knowledge of faith or integration of faith into social work practice.

When asked what type of education was received on faith in child welfare participant 7 stated "To be honest with you I don't think I've ever received any classes on faith in general throughout undergrad and post bachelor" (Survey Interview, February 2021). This sentence is important because it highlights the lack of education on faith given to students in child welfare. Student in child welfare are required to address all aspects of a client and faith is one of those aspects. It is surprising to notice that a student states that they have not had any education on faith considering faith is a crucial aspect of a person's wellbeing. It seems consistent with the previous responses that there is a lack of education on faith in child welfare. It could suggest that the profession is ignoring education on faith and integration of faith in child welfare. There may be an absence of education on faith in the child welfare curriculum. This sentence also implies that faith has not been an important concept or idea to be taught in social work education.

## Limitations

This study like all qualitative studies have limitations. One of this study's particular limitations was the sample size. The sample size of this study was eight participants. Another limitation was the gender of the participants. All eight participants of this study were female. To gain a better understanding of the experiences of students in child welfare on faith a larger sample size is needed.

## Recommendations for Research, Policy, and Practice

### Research

The categories mentioned and discussed helped to understand the experiences that were shared by participants and how they apply to social work practice. In order for change to occur further research must be done. Expanding this study to include more participants is recommended to learn more about the types of experiences social work students in child welfare have on faith and faith integration. This will help bridge the gap between faith, faith integration, spirituality and education. In turn this will also help interpret this education into practice in child welfare. By obtaining more information from additional social work student in child welfare, the social work field can better understand the severity of the need of faith in social work practice. Continued exploratory studies will help the social work field take proper steps to implementing faith-based practices in education.

## Policy

One recommendation would be for the NASW and the CSWE to include more education on faith, faith integration and faith-based practice in their curriculum in child welfare and in other fields of social work. There is clear evidence that there is a absence of education on faith and faith integration in social work practice as one participant stated “To be honest with you I don’t think I’ve ever received any classes on faith in general throughout undergrad and post bachelor” (Survey Interview, February 2021). Education on faith and faith integration will better prepare students in social work and will help the profession as a whole.

## Practice

Faith and integration of faith should not be avoided or ignored as this has been hurtful to students in their education. Students are left feeling ill equipped, unprepared, and ignorant when addressing faith with clients. Historically social work began on faith and spirituality and has drifted into more secular practices and has ignored faith. A recommendation for practice would be to include education and training on faith-based practices in child welfare so students are able to practice effectively and comfortably. Students in child welfare deserve education on faith and faith integration in order to fully competent.

## Conclusion

Based on these results and discussion of research faith and integration of faith in social work should be addressed and not avoided. It is clear that there needs to be more education on faith in child welfare. Students have expressed a lack of education on faith in child welfare and integration of faith in social work practice. A client's faith is a part of the client that has high importance and should not be overlooked. The profession and child welfare may need to address faith more in the future for social work students to be capable and comfortable enough to integrate faith in practice. In order for the profession to be fully effective and competent the profession must be comfortable to discuss and educate faith in child welfare.

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT

## INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to explore how comfortable social work students in child welfare programs feel about integration of faith in social work. The study is being conducted by Omar Elhanafy, a graduate student, under the supervision of Thomas Davis, Research Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSIJSB.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the study is to examine the comfortability of students in child welfare programs feel about integration of faith in social work.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be interviewed on their education of faith in their child welfare program, what techniques they have taught, experiences integrating faith in practice, and how comfortable they are when dealing with faith in social work practice.

**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:** Your responses will remain confidential and data will be reported in group form only. Recordings will be kept on a separate USB flash drive and stored in a secure location that only the researcher will have access too.

**DURATION:** The Interview may take from 30 minutes to I hour to complete.

**RISKS:** Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

**BENEFITS:** There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. A benefit of this study is that it will contribute to the existing knowledge of integration of faith in social work.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Davis at 909537-3839.

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library Scholar Works database

(<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2021.

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I agree to have this interview be audio recorded:      YES      NO

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

\_\_\_\_\_

Place an X mark here

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

The California State University • Bakersfield • Channel Islands • Chico • Hills • East • Fresno • Fullerton • Humboldt • Long Beach • Los Angeles • Monterey Bay • Northridge • Pomona • Sacramento • SAN BERNARDINO • San Diego • San Francisco • San Jose • San Luis Obispo • Santa Barbara • Santa Clara • Stanislaus • Stockton • Tulare • Tulsa • Ukiah • Visalia • West Sacramento • Yuba

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Demographic questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your highest level of education?

### Interview guide

1. Have you received an education on faith in your child welfare program?
2. What type of education have you received on faith in child welfare?
3. What techniques have you been taught in regards to integrating faith in social work practice?
4. Describe how comfortable you feel on integrating faith in social work practice?
5. What experiences have you had on faith in social work practice ?
6. Do you feel you have been taught how to integrate faith or religion into social work practice ?

APPENDIX C  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IRB#: IRB-FY2021-94

Title: Integration of faith in social work practice Creation

Date: 10-28-2020 End Date:

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Thomas Davis

Review Board: Main IRB Designated Reviewers for School of Social Work Sponsor:

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### Study History

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Submission Type Initial	Review Type Exempt	Decision Exempt
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### Key Study Contacts

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Member Omar Elhanafy	Role Co-Principal Investigator	Contact elhanafo@coyote.csusb.edu
Member Thomas Davis	Role Principal Investigator	Contact tomdavis@csusb.edu
Member Thomas Davis	Role Primary Contact	Contact tomdavis@csusb.edu

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APPENDIX D  
RECRUITMENT FLYER

# PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

A study on Faith Integration in Child  
Welfare.

Who do I need?

**Participants who are social work  
students in child welfare.**

Participation is voluntary and appreciated.

To schedule an interview please message the  
email below.

Approved by the California State University of  
San Bernardino Institutional Review Board,

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT  
SOCIALWORKANDFAITH@GMAIL.COM



APPENDIX E  
RECRUITMENT MESSAGE

## Recruitment message

Good Morning,

My name is Omar Elhanafy. I am currently a Masters student at California State University of San Bernardino. I am conducting a research project on faith integration in child welfare programs. I am looking for participants in my study to interview and was wondering if you would be interested in an interview? If so please let me know, I would gladly explain further details.

Thank you for your time

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