

5-2022

## THE IMPACT OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY ON COUNTY CHILD WELFARE WORKERS

Celeste Ramos

Sonia Magdaleno Ayamel

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ramos, Celeste and Magdaleno Ayamel, Sonia, "THE IMPACT OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY ON COUNTY CHILD WELFARE WORKERS" (2022). *Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations*. 1473. <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd/1473>

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Graduate Studies at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@csusb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@csusb.edu).

THE IMPACT OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY ON COUNTY  
CHILD WELFARE WORKERS

---

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  
Sonia Magdaleno Ayamel  
Celeste Ramos  
May 2022

THE IMPACT OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY ON COUNTY  
CHILD WELFARE WORKERS

---

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

---

by  
Sonia Magdaleno Ayamel  
Celeste Ramos  
May 2022

Approved by:

Dr. Thomas Davis, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Laurie Smith, Research Coordinator

© 2022 Sonia Magdaleno Ayamel and Celeste Ramos

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify and analyze how county child welfare workers can utilize their own religious and spiritual beliefs to alleviate some of the work-related stress. In addition, the study will examine how participating in religious or spiritual support groups will benefit county child welfare workers. The findings may encourage social workers to rely on their respective religious and spiritual beliefs while dealing with difficult situations.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
PROBLEM FORMULATION.....	1
PURPOSE OF STUDY.....	3
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE .....	4
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
INTRODUCTION .....	5
SECONDARY TRAUMA.....	5
RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL SUPPORT GROUPS .....	8
THEORIES GUIDING CONCEPTUALIZATION .....	9
FOWLER’S THEORY OF FAITH DEVELOPMENT .....	9
EXISTENTIAL THEORY.....	11
SUMMARY .....	12
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	13
INTRODUCTION .....	13
STUDY DESIGN.....	13
SAMPLING .....	14
DATA COLLECTION AND INSTRUMENTS.....	15
PROCEDURES.....	16
PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS .....	17
DATA ANALYSIS.....	18
SUMMARY .....	18

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS .....	20
INTRODUCTION .....	20
SUMMARY .....	26
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	27
INTRODUCTION .....	27
DISCUSSION .....	27
DEMOGRAPHICS .....	27
THEME 1: PURPOSE .....	29
THEME 2: RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL SUPPORT .....	30
THEME 3: RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL TECHNIQUES .....	32
THEME 4: AWARENESS OF RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL SERVICES..	34
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE, POLICY, AND RESEARCH.....	36
CONCLUSION.....	37
APPENDIX A MASS EMAIL INFORMATION .....	38
APPENDIX B INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE.....	40
APPENDIX C INFORMED CONSENT .....	43
REFERENCES .....	46

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHICS ..... 20

TABLE 2. *PEOPLE/MEMBERS WITH RELIGIOUS AND/OR SPIRITUAL  
AFFILIATIONS*.....22

TABLE 3. *RELIGIOUS AND/OR SPIRITUAL PLACES* ..... 22

TABLE 4. *RELIGIOUS AND/OR SPIRITUAL ABSTRACT ARTIFACTS/  
TECHNIQUES*.....23

TABLE 5. *RELIGIOUS AND/OR SPIRITUAL IDEAS* ..... 24

TABLE 6. *RELIGIOUS AND/OR SPIRITUAL SERVICES*.....26



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Problem Formulation

Social work, as a profession, was built on a religious foundation. The concept of service and providing for the poor has been incorporated in all major religions for centuries. Social workers' principal of competency is consistent with Judeo-Christian values (Gray, 2008). The values and principles which are enforced in most religious and spiritual practices relate with those listed on the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. The NASW Code of Ethics consists of six principles: 1) Service, 2) Social justice, 3) Dignity and worth of the person, 4) importance of human relationships, 5) Integrity, and 6) Competence. The code of ethics requires social workers to be educated on diverse religion traditions to effectively assist their clients.

Religion is a particular system that consists of a set of organized beliefs, values and practices which are shared among a specific community and/or group (Nelson-Becker & Canda, 2008). There are many religions around the world, five of which are considered to be the major ones with millions of followers. These five are Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism. Each one of these religions in turn consists of multiple denominations. Typically, being religious means some type of affiliation with a religious denomination and following specific ritualistic behaviors prescribed by one's chosen faith (Chan-Serafin et al.,2013). Some examples of ritualistic practices include attending places of worship, praying, meditating, chanting, singing, and reading religious texts.

Whereas religion refers to follow a set of organized beliefs and practices, spirituality is one's personal journey of searching for the ultimate reality, meaning and purpose of human life (Nelson-Becker & Canda, 2008). It offers one a sense of being and connection with the world and beyond. Spirituality is considered to be multidimensional beliefs, communal, connection, culture, faith, relationship with higher power/God, hope, love, and nature (Barker & Floersch, 2010). Both can give people a sense of peace and wholeness on an emotional, physical, and social level.

Religion and spirituality are similar in that both are integral to an individual's nature, which prompts one to comprehend the purpose and meaning of life (Schlehofer et al., 2008). Whereas religion typically clarifies the concepts through a form of higher power, spirituality answers the questions through new age concepts such as nature, astrology or supernatural (Schlehofer et al., 2008). Religion and spirituality are both rooted in having a positive impact on a person's life. Both religion and spirituality are built on rituals and practices that produce a sense of purpose and offers mental health benefits. Spirituality is a general concept developed through a relationship with self, others and reality relating to life events, as opposed to religion, a narrow concept shared by a community that addresses the sacred (Nelson-Becker & Canda, 2008). Overall, religion represents organized practices conducted in a place of worship; spirituality focuses on one's personal journey to one's nature and inner being (Schlehofer et al., 2008).

In the United States, approximately 49 percent of Americans consider religion and spirituality to be an essential aspect of their personal lives (Pew Research Center, 2021). Since social workers make up approximately sixty percent of all clinically trained professionals in a helping profession, they must become aware of the impact religion and spirituality have not only on their own lives but on their clients' lives as well (The College of St. Scholastica, 2017). A 2004 study found that 57 percent of LCSW survey respondents were Christians, 18 percent are Buddhists and 14 percent are Jewish (Oxhandler et al., 2018). A survey conducted of NASW members found that 59 percent of respondents perceived themselves as religious and 94 percent perceived themselves as spiritual (Oxhandler et al., 2018). Lastly, Oxhandler et al., (2018) found that social workers are more likely to self-identify as being part of a liberal denomination, compared to the general U.S. adult population. There are minor differences between the frequency of U.S. adults and social workers participating in religious services.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of religious and spiritual beliefs among county child welfare workers. In this study, we will explore child welfare workers' respective religious or spiritual beliefs. We will allow respondents to discuss in detail the distinctive ways their religious or spiritual beliefs contribute to their personal well-being. Most importantly, it may encourage social workers to rely on their own religious and spiritual beliefs when dealing with difficult situations. In this study, we will examine two main areas. First, the healing effects of religious and spiritual beliefs on the secondary trauma that social workers' experience in the field. Second, the beneficial

effects of religious and spiritual support groups on the child welfare workers. In short, our research question is how do religion and spirituality mitigate some of the work-related stress for county child welfare workers?

### Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

The findings from this study will bring awareness to the importance of utilizing one's religion and spirituality to alleviate the adversities within the social work practice. The integration of religion and spirituality in social work has limited research. The data can benefit former, current, and future social workers. The outcome of this study will give social workers the opportunity to contribute to the literature on religion and spirituality within the child welfare system. The identifying factors from this study that promote the well-being of child welfare workers, can serve as a reference for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

We organized our literature review around two main areas. First, the healing effects of religious and spiritual beliefs on the secondary trauma social workers experience in the field. Second, the benefits of child welfare workers participating in religious and spiritual support groups.

### Secondary Trauma

Social work is a gratifying profession. However, it is known to be challenging emotionally and psychologically, at times. Child welfare workers tend to have an overwhelming number of cases, yet insufficient access to essential resources. They are responsible and obligated to conduct risk assessments, to ensure the child's safety, to implement preventive measures, and most importantly, to connect the given client with the necessary resources. In addition, child welfare workers deal with difficult cases which involve neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. As a result of repeated exposure to clients' horrific and traumatic experiences, the social workers are at risk of experiencing what is known as secondary trauma, vicarious trauma, or compassion fatigue (Gil & Weinberg, 2015). In short, secondary trauma not only has a negative impact on social workers in their professional life but can affect their personal lives as well (Armes et al., 2020).

Social workers with secondary trauma tend to experience negative feelings about their work environment. They often develop complexes about their own competence in the field. These perceptions lead them to doubt not only the impact they have as social

workers but also to question the amount of knowledge and training they have obtained (Ben-Porat, 2017). Child welfare workers also feel lower rates of satisfaction in reference to their work (Griffiths et al., 2018). Secondary trauma creates feelings of helplessness and despair among child welfare workers (Ben-Porat, 2017). These feelings contribute to a decrease in their self-confidence and ability to effectively serve their clients (Ben-Porat, 2017). It is difficult to not only set but also to maintain professional and personal boundaries when one is experiencing vicarious trauma, such as self-disclosing too much information to clients (Holmes et al., 2021).

Some of the personal factors which contribute to secondary trauma include numerous unhealthy habits, poor physical health, and impaired mental health. Due to high levels of stress, child welfare workers have a higher probability of developing negligence in self-care. These habits and behaviors include self-neglect, sleep disturbances, irritability, lack of exercise, and wrong food habits (Griffiths et al., 2018). Most often they use alcohol as a coping mechanism to deal with the stress they experience at work (Griffiths et al., 2018). Vicarious trauma affects the physical health of child welfare workers by bringing in various medical concerns. These medical concerns are often of cardiac nature such as coronary heart disease, acute myocardial infarctions (Griffiths et al., 2018). As a result of these cardiac issues, which decreases one's longevity, vicarious trauma impairs one's immune and nervous system (Griffiths et al., 2018). According to the study conducted by Holmes et al. (2021), compassion fatigue is highly correlated with symptoms of grief, loss, and/or posttraumatic stress which leads to another set of issues. These other issues include anxiety, sleep disturbance, isolation, and

burnout (Griffiths et al., 2018). In order for a social worker to effectively adjust and handle emotional distress, he/she must develop strong coping strategies and utilize resources beneficial to their needs (Gil & Weinberg, 2015). One of the most valuable resources is participating in religious or spiritual support groups. This will assist the child welfare worker in reducing the consequences of the stress they encounter on a daily basis.

Religious and spiritual beliefs act as a coping mechanism that can assist in combating secondary trauma. Forming connections with religious or spiritual communities can provide people with a sense of comfort and guidance. In a study conducted by Ausbrooks (2011), 68 percent of child welfare supervisors remained working in their particular agency because they believed that they were fulfilling their religious or spiritual purposes. By integrating their religious and spiritual beliefs into their mission of saving children and helping families, the child welfare workers developed a strong sense of resiliency. The resiliency child welfare workers develop may lead to positive outcomes in their healing process. In addition, resiliency can help child welfare workers with secondary trauma. Although being human makes it practically impossible for social workers to assist each client with all of their respective needs, having a sense of resiliency may help them in understanding that their efforts in the process are meaningful (Wang et al., 2014). Therefore, developing a strong support network may reduce the effects of secondary trauma stress on child welfare workers and increase the number of years they choose to serve in this field.

## Religious/Spiritual Support Groups

Religion and spirituality can enhance an individual's support system as well. Social support is defined as "various forms of aid and assistance supplied by family members, friends, neighbors, and others" (Hamren et al., 2015). Social workers who have religious or spiritual beliefs tend to maintain a relationship with like-minded individuals with shared beliefs and morals. These interactions not only offer them social, psychological, and personal support, but also provides them with a positive attitude towards the challenging reality of child welfare work. Religion and spirituality are key aspects in life that help social workers deal with daily stressors (Whitehead, 2018).

Social support, a result of having a sense of belonging to a community, is viewed as a protective factor for positive mental health. Child welfare workers are constantly on the go, writing reports, documenting notes, investigating cases and carrying out many other duties. There is a high turnover rate for child welfare workers because of the stress and emotional exhaustion they experience at work. Child welfare workers promote the overall well-being of children and families. In the process of helping others, they often neglect their own well-being which leads to psychological and physical burnout. Faith-based support groups help child welfare workers to maintain their mental health by learning to cope with challenging work duties. This involves being engaged in self-care routines and having healthy interactions with both clients and coworkers alike. In addition, a study conducted by Whitehead (2018), found that symptoms of depression and anxiety are reduced when one is socially engaged with peers from one's religious affiliations. Individuals who are more active in their religious community and place



religion as a priority, are more likely to be happier, healthier, and able to manage difficult life events (Whitehead, 2018). These results are consistent among all religious groups. These studies confirm the significance of child welfare workers' religious and spiritual beliefs on their overall mental health.

Religion and spirituality tend to have a positive impact on one's quality of life. These types of organizations encourage their members to hold each other accountable for their daily habits and decisions. A study conducted by Hamren et al., (2015), found that higher levels of religious engagement enhance one's life satisfaction, happiness, and in general one's overall well-being. Therefore, having religious and spiritual support groups at the core of their beliefs encourages child welfare workers to be mindful of a healthy lifestyle.

#### Theories Guiding Conceptualization Fowler's Theory of Faith Development

In 1981, James Fowler developed this theory which through seven stages examines the progress of people's faith journey throughout their life (Zastrow et al., 2019). Within each stage one evolves as he/she becomes closer to the divine and more involved in the welfare of other people. The first stage is known as primal or undifferentiated faith which is formed between birth and two years old. In this stage, individuals begin to establish their own perspectives on faith and the world around them. They learn to build relationships and associate the importance of these interactions. The second stage is named the intuitive-projective faith which is developed between the ages two and six. During this stage children are able to gather a better understanding of their

surroundings. Children apply their own spiritual experiences and spiritual languages used by their surroundings to conceptualize their faith. The third stage is referred to as mythic-literal faith and occurs between the ages of six and twelve. During this period, children continue to strengthen their conceptual thoughts of their faith. They start to link specific symbols and representations to their faith. The fourth stage is known as synthetic-conventional faith and is developed between ages 12 to early adulthood. Individuals discover how to apply the information they gained from their personal experiences in various distinctive ways. This allows them to think abstractly and form new perspectives about their religious and spiritual beliefs. The fifth stage is specified as individualize-reflective faith and is acquired between early adulthood and midlife. Within this stage, one typically questions the traditional values and ideas developed as a child in order to establish a more personalized belief system. The sixth stage is referred to as conjunctive faith. This stage occurs during midlife and persists over time. Generally, at this point individuals have challenged not only the conventional perspectives of religion and spirituality but also their own perspectives. As a result, individuals learn to stand-by their religious and spiritual beliefs while respecting those of others. The seventh stage is named universalizing faith and it also occurs during midlife and continues through one's life. In the sixth stage, one acquires their own perspectives of religion and spirituality. However, in this stage, one integrates these perceptions into the world while using their beliefs as a reference point throughout this process. This theory can be applied when analyzing the influence of religion and spirituality on child welfare workers. It addresses

the development stages that child welfare workers face in search for their religious and spiritual beliefs.

#### Existential Theory

An existential approach involves assisting people in finding meaning and purpose in their life or in a specific situation. This theory is unique in comparison with other theories because of its philosophical framework. In an existential approach, human beings are viewed as open-minded, flexible, and capable of having diverse experiences. This particular type of theory highlights that one's own life experiences and one's view of his/her purpose in this world are mutually influenced.

According to Vos et al. (2015), existential theory is based on the following five philosophical assumptions. First, humans have a strong desire to find meaning or purpose in life. Second, human beings have free will, therefore, they are most effective when they fulfill their potential and take responsibility for their decisions as well as their actions. Third, humans will inevitably confront difficulties in their lives. Therefore, in an effort to live a full life, it is essential that one embraces and not denies or avoids his/her life challenges. Fourth, the central focus for psychotherapeutic work is to consider both positive as well as negative experiences of being human. Fifth, all human experiences could be understood in relation to the experiences of other human beings and the world that surrounds them.

Existentialism, religion, and spirituality are similar as all three are rooted in one's attempt to understand the meaning of life. In everyday matters, people express their

beliefs in diverse ways. Like the rest of the society, child welfare workers are influenced by their own religious beliefs and spiritual perspectives.

#### Summary

Child welfare workers are exposed to secondhand traumatic experiences which have negative consequences such as burnout, and compassion fatigue. In order for them to overcome these types of experiences, child welfare workers can utilize both their religious and/or spiritual beliefs and services to mitigate the effects of their profession on their personal well-being. There are many benefits to being a part of a religious or spiritual support group with people who share similar beliefs and morals. Participation in these supportive groups motivate child welfare workers towards a healthy lifestyle and improves their mental health. In general, these religious and spiritual affiliations improve the overall quality of life for child welfare workers. By connecting them with religious and spiritual groups, child welfare workers may be more willing to utilize the resources offered to them. This confirms that the impact of religious and spiritual beliefs on the professional practice of child welfare workers can never be underestimated.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Introduction

This study aims to identify the impact of religious and spiritual beliefs on county child welfare social workers' competency and practice. This chapter provides a clear description of the various aspects of the methodology including the study design, sampling, the data collection and instruments, study procedures, protection of human subjects and data analysis.

### Study Design

Research on the influence of religion and spirituality on county child welfare workers is relatively limited. In our study, we will use a qualitative research design by inviting child welfare workers to share their perspectives on their own religious and spiritual beliefs in one-to-one interview. In doing so, we will be able to explore the connections between the child welfare workers' personal beliefs towards religion and spirituality and how both affect their overall competency and practice. Concepts such as religion and spirituality are subjective, as such these concepts focus on one's purpose of life. Therefore, the usage of qualitative, in this case, will be more effective in elaborating on a participant's perspective on their religious or spiritual beliefs.

Our qualitative methodology involves collecting information through interviews to analyze the underlying factors of religious and spiritual beliefs among child welfare workers. In our interview, we will use open-ended questions to allow participants to freely describe their personal experiences with regard to their occupation. The

information gathered from the interviews will identify the participants' personal views on their own religious and spiritual associations.

Although there are many advantages of using qualitative research, like all study designs it has its own limitations. One of the limitations is that a qualitative design could be more time consuming. This can become problematic when working with our participants. County child welfare workers have a highly demanding job which requires them to dedicate a great amount of their time both in the office as well as in the field. Therefore, it may be challenging for them to make the necessary time to thoroughly respond to each interview question. Another possible limitation is that our participants could be our colleagues or supervisors. Religion and spirituality can be controversial topics. As a result, this may make participants feel uncomfortable in disclosing information about their beliefs. Another limitation that may arise is that our participants are screened to meet a certain criterion as described in the next section. In meeting this criterion, our sample population may not be representative of the child welfare workers in general. Although, our research focuses on child welfare workers, the data can be beneficial to other types of social workers.

### Sampling

In our study, participants must meet a specific eligibility criterion. Respondents must be a former or a current child welfare worker in any county in the state of California. Participants must also self-identify as holding some form of spiritual beliefs or have some religious affiliations. In order for us to ensure that we obtain various perspectives on the subject, it is essential that we examine child welfare workers from

more than one county. Our goal is to interview at least 25 participants; however, we will stop conducting interviews once we reach data saturation.

### Data Collection and Instruments

For our research, we will use a qualitative study design. Our qualitative methodology involves collecting information through interviews to analyze the underlying factors of religious and spiritual beliefs among child welfare workers. We recognize that conducting interviews will be the most effective and practical method for our research study. Interviews will allow us to collect in-depth information about the participants' perspectives and experiences as well as increase the participants' response rate.

We will generate a guide of a specific set of questions to use during our interviews based on topics that analyze the significance of religious and spiritual beliefs among child welfare workers. The guide was created by the researchers to extract in depth responses in connection with the topic. The participants will be asked a total of nine questions in regard to the influence of their religious or spiritual beliefs. These questions will focus on identifying the importance of their religious and spiritual beliefs as well as the effect their beliefs have on alleviating secondary trauma stress, utilizing social support, and connecting with faith-based organizations. We will ask a series of questions that allow our participants to identify their beliefs and elaborate on the role that their beliefs share in the three categories previously mentioned. The participants will also be asked questions that gather information on the following demographics: employment

position, the number of years worked in a child welfare agency, date of birth, ethnicity, gender, and the particular department. These demographics may play a role in how social workers express or utilize their religious and spiritual beliefs to combat challenges originating through the workplace. Please refer to Appendix A for the full list of interview guided questions.

### Procedures

We are planning to interview approximately 25 participants for our study. In the process of recruiting potential participants, it is essential that we network with county child welfare workers. Once we have obtained a list of potential participants, we will contact them via email or telephone. In addition, we will create a flier which will be distributed within both county offices. The flier will include the nature of the study, the required criteria to participate in the study, instructions on how to become a participant and our contact information. Respondents who wish to participate in our study must email us their name, contact information, and availability to be interviewed. To conduct the interview we will use Zoom, an effective video communication program that will allow us to record and transcribe our interviews. We will provide a Zoom link that is secure and private, meaning that only the invited guest will be provided with a unique link and password to access the meeting. Recordings will be downloaded and stored onto a password protected USB hard drive. Respondents may use their personal phone, tablet, laptop, or computer to sign the informed consent and complete the interview. Once



accepted in our study, we will meet with participants individually to address any questions or concerns they may have.

We want to make our study easily accessible to our participants. Our study design will include a section to educate participants on informed consent, the interview session, and a debriefing statement. We will provide a copy of the informed consent form. We believe given the pandemic situation, most of our participants will prefer an online format. Therefore, participants will complete their interview via Zoom. Our goal is to collect the necessary data while ensuring that our participants feel safe and comfortable to answer the questions as truthfully as possible.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

Participants are required to read and sign the informed consent at the start of the study. Participants will be informed that their participation in this study is completely voluntary. They are not obligated to respond to any questions that make them feel uncomfortable. It is also acceptable for them to leave questions blank or to revoke their survey at any time throughout the study. To maintain confidentiality, we will code each participant's data with a pseudonym through the course of our research. Identifiable information will not be discussed outside of those conducting the research for anything other than the purpose of the study. Through the course of our research, we will keep all documents and USB drives in a locked filing cabinet. This cabinet is stored in a safe location and can only be accessed by the researchers conducting this study. Federal regulation requires that IRB research records must be preserved for a minimum of three years after the research is concluded. Once we have reached three years, all documents,

emails, recordings, and any other identifiable information will be destroyed. Data inputted into a computer database or software will also be deleted at the three-year mark.

#### Data Analysis

Data collected from the interview will be transcribed. A combination of inductive and deductive coding approaches was applied. These methods include top-down theory and ground up theory. Top-down theory requires researchers to start with a set of codes based on the responses they expect to receive in the data. These codes resemble the data found in existing research on the topic. On the other hand, ground up theory involves the process of creating codes derived from the data itself. In this approach, there are no preconceived notions of what the codes should involve. In evaluating our data, we used the following coding methods: open coding, descriptive coding and values coding. In open coding, the data is categorized in particular groups. In descriptive coding, the content of the data is summarized into specific topics. In values coding, the values, beliefs, and attitudes expressed in the responses of each participant are labeled. In addition, we will use a qualitative coding software program to analyze the data of our study.

#### Summary

In this chapter, we outlined the methodology to obtain data for understanding the influence of religious and spiritual beliefs on county child welfare social workers. In doing so, we outlined the techniques we used to obtain data in order for future studies to gain a better understanding of the topic. A step-by-step list of the entire research process that may assist researchers when examining the relationship between the variables at hand. This section also establishes the reliability and the validity of the study as a whole.

In short, it ensures researchers not only of the study's duplicating process but also of the accuracy of the results.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### Introduction

This chapter presents data collected through virtual qualitative interviews. The questionnaire was designed to explore participants' demographics and their understanding of how their religious or spiritual beliefs can alleviate some of the stress from the challenges that emerge from the workplace. Below are six tables that represent the following: 1) Demographics, 2) People/Members with Religious and/or Spiritual Affiliations, 3) Religious and/or Spiritual Places, 4) Religious and/or Spiritual Abstract Artifacts/Techniques, 5) Religious and/or Spiritual Ideas, and 6) Religious and/or Spiritual Services.

Table 1. *Demographics*

#### **Gender**

Female	10
Male	1

#### **Age Range**

26-35	5
36-45	3
46-55	1
56+	2

#### **Ethnicity**

Asian	3
Caucasian	7
Hispanic/Latino	2
Jewish	1

#### **Employment Position**

Social Services Practitioner	8
Supervisor for Social Services Practitioner	3

**Number of Years Worked**

1-2 years	1
3-4 years	3
5-6 years	1
7-9 years	2
10+ years	4

**Raised-In Religious/Spiritual Affiliation**

Asian Spirituality	1
Baptist	1
Buddhist	1
Catholic	4
Christian	2
Judaism	2
Mormon	1
Protestant Christian	1
Spiritual	0

**Current Religious/Spiritual Affiliation**

Asian Spirituality	1
Baptist	0
Buddhist	0
Catholic	1
Christian	4
Judaism	3
Mormon	0
Protestant Christian	4
Spiritual	2

---

Table 2. *People/Members with Religious and/or Spiritual Affiliations*

**God**

- Participant 7: “God will get me through things.”

**Higher Power**

- Participant 3: “I was able to communicate with something higher than myself and get support and encouragement to keep me going when things get tough.”
- Participant 11: “I believe in a higher power in the universe, spiritually all things are connected as far as mind, body and spirit and the earth animals.”

**Jesus Christ**

- Participant 7: “I believe in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice of him dying on the cross for peoples’ sins.”

**Religious/Spiritual Colleagues**

- Participant 7: “I have many people in my life, fellow believers that I live in the community with that really help, who are also social workers.”

**Religious/Spiritual Family Members and Friends**

- Participant 2: “My Asian culture and Judaism, we pride ourselves on our family, and community.”
  - Participant 8: “I have friends that go to the same church...and my fiancé goes to the same church I do.”
  - Participant 9: “I rely on my friends, and my family, and my congregation, and my Jewish community to kind of help me get through hard times.... The majority of the congregation knows me. They have watched me grow. So there always there for me, there supportive. That’s my second family. I would say the outcome is definitely building support and making me feel confident.”
  - Participant 10: “I do have an aunt who is a pastor. I feel like she is a strong leader, a strong woman of faith. When If I feel like I’m not able to process things myself, I go to her... for spiritual guidance and wisdom.”
- 

Table 3. *Religious and/or Spiritual Places*

**Church**

- Participant 4: “[Church] is a critical piece to incorporate as far as safety support.”
- Participant 6: “[A way building resilience is to] go to church.”
- Participant 8: “Sometimes I just need to connect and have worship. I’ll log on to [Virtual Church Service] ... When I’m having a really hard week I go to church and listen to my pastor as he’s giving the service of the week... [People say] that’s God talking to you...I can really relate to his message and make a connection and it helps give me clarity and peace.”

**County Child Welfare Agency**

- Participant 10: “In children and family services there was a small circle of Christian women, and we felt the importance of staying connected.”

**Sweat Lodge**

- Participant 1: “Sweat lodges are an emotional and powerful thing.”

**Synagogue**

- Participant 2: “The Synagogue always takes time to say blessings for people who passed and people who are grieving.”
- Participant 9: “I was able go to [the synagogue] and take my mind off of things and pray about stuff.”

---

Table 4. *Religious and/or Spiritual Abstract Artifacts/Techniques*

**Bible**

- Participant 6: “Getting my Bible to refill myself.”

**Meditation**

- Participant 8: “When I’m super exhausted and stress out, I’ll do guided meditation....to relax, get my mind clear, and recharge.”

**Mindfulness**

- Participant 3: “I think without the prayer and the mindfulness and the hope that spirituality gives me. I’m not sure I would have been able to recover [from the emotional and physical illness caused by the secondary trauma and burnout].”
- Participant 11: “I journal a lot and use...conversations that I have with God and the universe... I reflect upon and allow the messages to come through to me as far as what I need to know to feel peace.”

**Prayer**

- Participant 6: “I would go to prayer and go back to rely on God to get filled back up again spiritually to be able to pour out.”
- Participant 7: “It was stressful, complex situations where I had to utilize my core beliefs of prayer, trust and faith in God for keeping safe and working with families.”
- Participant 8: “I connect with the church and pray because it makes me feel grounded, kind of gives me that refreshed feeling I need to keep going.”
- Participant 10: “[Some of my colleagues and I] started to incorporate [prayer] into our daily routine at work. [We prayed] to keep children safe [and for any personal/professional challenges we were dealing with].”

**Rituals**

- Participant 1: “I used to do Aztec dance ceremonies...on special days, like to bless the home and offer flowers to the Virgin [Mary] and sing with guitars for the whole night.... the next day everyone eats together.
- Participant 2: “I will be lighting Shabbat candles with my in-laws, were going to be doing our prayers, and that’s our weekly thing.”
- Participant 2: “[In Judaism, we do a Mikveh]. You get to be bathed in this water to kind of purify yourself of whatever is weighing you down.”

**Worship**

- Participant 7: “Worship is really effective for me. Whether I am in my car listening to worship music, I just have an outlet to only separate my mind and focus on my time with God but then to really praise him in those moments.”
-

Table 5. *Religious and/or Spiritual Ideas*

**Acceptance**

- Participant 1: “Spiritual beliefs tell me it will be okay. People have to go through their trauma and overcome it, this is how people become.”
- Participant 2: “My spirituality helped me to process some negative emotions that I felt or when things happened. For [my spirituality] when things happen, we see it as that is the way the river takes you and it will all resolve in the end.”
- Participant 2: “A strengthen of [my beliefs] is to have empathy and cultural competency.”
- Participant 4: “The higher power is not going to give me more than I could handle.”

**Purpose**

- Participant 1: “The divine is acting through me. When I’m out there doing things for other people, I’m doing things for a purpose.... purpose makes me want to keep going.”
- Participant 5: “[I am] doing God’s work [as a social worker]. Sometimes when things were frustrating or very dark, I was tempted to get bitter... [My purpose/God’s work] provides me some clarity and some relief... The work that I was doing was on behalf of a larger mission.”
- Participant 6: “I would not have gone into social work if I didn’t believe God guided me in that way.”
- Participant 8: “My church just gives me that grounding [to help people] ... I can’t keep doing this job if I didn’t have some kind of faith and spiritual connection.”
- Participant 9: “I rely on my friends, and my family, and my congregation, and my Jewish community to kind of help me get through hard times.”
- Participant 11: “I do believe that we come to this earth for a reason, and we have an agreement that we make work, that were supposed to do here and things that we are supposed to see through.”
- Participant 11: “I’ll be praying for you; they have very different religious beliefs from me but to me that was positive. If I say oh, I’m having good thoughts for you and just allowing everybody to have their spirituality and religion and realizing that we all are for the greater good.”

**Support**

- Participant 5: “A spiritual or religious connection that can guide you in also provide some comfort or framework or explanation for what maybe going horribly wrong at the time.”
- Participant 6: “My relationship with Christ is what keeps me going every day, what kept me going in [child welfare] when it got tough. It was what I relied upon.... Faith is what gave me strength to do what I do every day [as child welfare worker].”



- Participant 8: “Sometimes work is so hard and so stressful that I forget that I need to just bring it to God.”
  - Participant 9: “I feel strong in my faith...it leads to my morals and ethics in life and that’s the basis of who I am. So, I feel like I pull on those strengths, especially a lot in social work.”
- 

Table 6. *Religious and/or Spiritual Services*

**Classes**

- Participant 6: “[My church] also has anger management.”

**Community Gatherings**

- Participant 8: “[My church] has groups, dinners, and activities... [The church coordinated an event] for people with badges [such as] law enforcement, nurses, and social workers to acknowledge the stress that’s put on us...during the pandemic.”

**Counseling**

- Participant 4: “[Churches and Temples offer] individual counseling.
- Participant 6: “I utilized...a Christian therapist to talk too and work through [work-related] stress.”

**Financial**

- Participant 4: “[Churches and Temples offer] single mom assistance, and hotel rooms for transitional homeless.”
- Participant 11: “Local churches will deliver cribs to people’s homes.”

**Food**

- Participant 4: “[Churches and Temples hold] food banks [for the community].”
- Participant 9: “My Rabi will reach out a lot to the community...feed the homeless.”

**Religious/Spiritual Growth**

- Participant 6: “[My church] also has women bible studies.”
- Participant 8: “The church I go to is really big on bible groups. I haven’t [participated in] them. It’s probably because I don’t have a lot of time.”

**Substance Abuse**

- Participant 4: “[Churches and Temples conducted] AA (Alcoholic Anonymous) and NA (Narcotics Anonymous).”

**Support Groups**

- Participant 4: “[Churches and Temples offer] bereavement, new parents, and divorce.”
  - Participant 6: “The church I belong to has a lot of support groups. The have marriage enrichment classes that I attended and helped with my own marriage.”
-

### Summary

This chapter presented an analysis of demographic and thematic findings through visual figures. A qualitative approach was used to allow participants to openly communicate their experience utilizing their religious or spiritual beliefs to combat child welfare agency challenges. The data findings demonstrate the correlation between personal religious or spiritual beliefs and the contribution to reducing difficulties acquired through child welfare agencies.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the results of our study. First, we will briefly explain the demographics and its impact on our findings. Second, we will discuss in detail the implications of the four themes that were consistent throughout our study. These themes include purpose, support, religious/spiritual techniques, and awareness of religious/spiritual services. In addition, this chapter will elaborate on the recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research in regard to the participant's experiences.

### Discussion

#### Demographics

Table 1 displays the demographic findings of the study participants. The sample size consisted of eleven current and former child welfare workers. Participants were asked a total of eight demographic questions which provided information on the following: age, gender, ethnicity, employment position, agency department, and the years of service as a child welfare worker. In addition, the demographic questions included both the religious/spiritual affiliations in which they were raised as well as their present ones.

The first criterion is age. Of those eleven participants, five participants ranged from ages 26-35, three ranged from ages 36-45, one ranged from ages 46-55, and two were ages 56 and older. The second criterion is gender. A total of ten participants identified as female and one participant identified as male.

The third criterion is ethnicity. Out of the eleven participants three identified as Asian, seven were Caucasian, two were Hispanic or Latino, and one was Jewish. There are more numbers than total participants since some participants reported that they are multi-racial.

The fourth criterion is employment position. A total of eight out of the eleven participants were employed as Social Service Practitioners in a county child welfare agency. While the other three participants were employed as Supervisors in the same type of agency. The fifth criterion is the agency department. All eleven of our participants worked in a county child welfare agency. The sixth criterion is the years of service as a child welfare worker. One participant was employed for 1-2 years, three were employed for 3-4 years, one was employed for 5-6 years, two were employed for 7-9 years and four were employed for 10 years or more.

The seventh criterion is the religious/spiritual affiliations in which participants were raised. One participant was raised in each of the following Asian Spirituality, Baptist, Buddhist, Mormon, and Protestant Christian. Two participants were affiliated with Judaism and Christianity and four participants were raised Catholic. The eighth criterion is the participants present religious/spiritual affiliations. One participant stated he/she is currently affiliated with Asian Spirituality and Catholicism. Three participants currently practice Judaism. Four participants reported they are Christian or Protestant Christian. Two participants did not mention any affiliation rather they declared themselves to be just Spiritual. Both criteria seven and eight represent more numbers

than total participants, since some participants have more than one religious and/or spiritual affiliation.

### Theme 1: Purpose

The first theme is purpose, which can be defined as one's motivation to fulfil their personal and professional obligations. Participants stated that their religious and spiritual beliefs provided them with a sense of purpose in the field of social work. As Participant 6 stated, "I would not have gone into social work if I didn't believe God guided me in that way." The findings could confirm that religion and spirituality influence some social workers in their desires to help others.

The findings may also indicate that social workers who hold religious and/or spiritual beliefs rely on their idea of a higher source/God to not only motivate them in a specific direction but also to keep them grounded throughout the process. For example, Participant 5 stated, "[I am] doing God's work [as a social worker]. Sometimes when things were frustrating or very dark, I was tempted to get bitter... [My purpose/God's work] provides me some clarity and some relief.... The work that I was doing was on behalf of a larger mission." This might suggest that social workers' can gain a sense of certainty and support through their religious and spiritual beliefs.

The findings also suggest that religion and spirituality aid in social workers not only in fulfilling their purpose but also accepting it. For instance, Participant 2 stated, "My spirituality helped me to process some negative emotions that I felt or when things happened. For [my spirituality] when things happen, we see it as that is the way the river

takes you and it will all resolve in the end.” This indicates awareness of one’s purpose allows one to accept the outcomes of certain situations.

These findings prompt further research into the sense of purpose one acquires from their own religious and spiritual beliefs. In addition, future research should analyze the effects of being aware of one’s purpose and how it influences one’s decisions in a professional setting. The findings confirm that religion and spirituality can influence one’s motivation as a social worker.

### Theme 2: Religious/Spiritual Support

The second theme is religious and/or spiritual support, which refers to the support and guidance that the participants claim to have received from their religious and/or spiritual beliefs. Participants disclosed that their religious and/or spiritual beliefs helped them in managing the stress of being a child welfare worker. The participants mentioned that they received this support and guidance from a higher power/God, Jesus Christ, as well as from religious/spiritual family members, friends, and colleagues.

For instance, Participant 3 stated, “I was able to communicate with something higher than myself and get support and encouragement to keep me going when things get tough.” This indicates that religious and spiritual support offers county child welfare workers a way to process and work through their job-related stress. The findings imply that research has neglected the impact of religious and spiritual guidance on county child welfare workers. Therefore, the findings may recommend that child welfare workers could benefit from receiving trainings on how to reduce stress using their own religious and spiritual practices.

This study may prompt further research on the benefits of incorporating classes on religion and spirituality in social work programs. These types of classes may act as a method to promote resilience among social workers. These findings underscore the significance of the work-related stress among county child welfare workers and offers a possible solution.

In addition, the findings highlight the importance of understanding how religion and spirituality can lessens the effects of the work-related stress for county child welfare workers. For instances the findings indicate the reasons religion and spirituality are able to reduce stress as well as the settings social workers can apply their beliefs. For example, Participant 8 stated, “Sometimes I just need to connect and have worship. I’ll log on to [Virtual Church Service] ...When I’m having a really hard week I go to church and listen to my pastor as he’s giving the service of the week... [People say] that’s God talking to you...I can really relate to his message and make a connection and it helps give me clarity and peace.” This suggests that religious and spiritual institutions can provide people with a safe place to seek advice, support, and guidance, especially when one is going through a difficult time.

Another example from the findings demonstrates that religion and spirituality can be implemented in professional settings, such as, in child welfare agencies. Participant 10 reported, “In children and family services there was a small circle of Christian women, and we felt the importance of staying connected.” This indicates that having people who share similar religious and spiritual beliefs in the workplace can assist social workers when they face the challenges of their workload and difficult cases. These finding

demonstrates that religion and spirituality help social workers to maintain mental stability while effectively fulfilling their professional obligations.

### Theme 3: Religious/Spiritual Techniques

The third theme is religious and spiritual techniques, which are methods, such as, reading the bible, mindfulness, meditation, prayer, rituals, and worship. Participant 6 utilizes the Bible to “refill” themselves and build personal resilience. Mindfulness guides participant 3 through recovery from the emotional and physical illness caused by the secondary trauma and burnout. While using guided meditation, Participant 8 is able to “relax, get my mind clear, and recharge.” During stressful and complex work-related situations, Participant 7 utilized prayer to keep them safe while working with families. To build personal resilience, participant 1 participated in Aztec dance ceremonies to “bless the home and offer flowers to the Virgin [Mary] and sing with guitars for the whole night.... the next day everyone eats together”, this participant described this experience as, “to not think but to feel” which connects them “more spiritually.” Participant 7 described her connection with worship as, “an outlet to not only separate my mind and focus on my time with God but then to really praise him in those moments.”

Participants reported that these types of techniques assisted them in mitigating the effects of the stress they acquired in the field. This study found that religious and spiritual techniques are important in reducing stress for child welfare workers. These findings suggest that incorporating religious and spiritual techniques would help child welfare workers in addressing the work-related stress they experience.



County child welfare workers can utilize these types of techniques to assist them in their healing process from the secondary trauma, burnout, and compassion fatigue they endure in the field. Therefore, integrating practical religious and spiritual techniques could help clear and recharge the mind of county child welfare workers. As referenced by Participant 11, “I journal a lot and use...conversations that I have with God and the universe... I reflect upon and allow the messages to come through to me as far as what I need to know to feel peace.” This finding could imply that there are numerous religious and spiritual techniques that are practical. These techniques can be applied in many different situations.

This study prompts further research into the following: a) various types of religious and spiritual techniques that can be used in a professional setting, and b) the process of learning these techniques. Research on religious and spiritual techniques may aid by providing information on a) how each technique works, b) why each technique is beneficial, c) where can one apply these techniques and d) when is the appropriate setting one can use techniques. Participants 10 reported, “[Some of my colleagues and I] started to incorporate [prayer] into our daily routine at work. [We prayed] to keep children safe [and for any personal/professional challenges we were dealing with].” The above examples suggest the importance of county agencies providing workers with education on religious and spiritual techniques that they can practice within the office.

The findings acknowledge the importance of all county workers being educated on how to access, incorporate, and apply techniques into their personal lives to further combat work-related stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue. In addition, research on

religious and spiritual techniques may educate child welfare agencies on how to incorporate these approaches within their agency. The data underscores the importance of child welfare workers establishing a concrete strategy using practical religious and spiritual techniques to assist in mitigating the work-related stress. This study confirms the importance of utilizing religious and spiritual techniques within the field of social work. These findings demonstrate that religious and spiritual techniques have a place in the social work profession.

#### Theme 4: Awareness of Religious/Spiritual Services

The fourth theme is awareness of religious and spiritual services, which can be defined as seeking and acknowledging religious/spiritual resources that are offered to participants within their community. The following services were discussed throughout the interviews. These services are related to a) education, b) community gatherings, c) counseling, d) financial compensation, e) food, f) religious/spiritual growth, g) substance abuse and h) support groups.

Participants acknowledged a variety of religious or spiritual services offered within their community that are available for different age and population groups. Participant 1 participated in a Native Aztec group and felt a “spiritual connection” because the person running the group “say things that are powerful, and it connects with me, and I believe something higher is talking to me through them.” Participant 6 utilized a Christian therapist to, “talk to and work through [work-related] stress” along with attend marriage enrichment classes that were offered through their church and “helped with” their own marriage. In order to acknowledge stress originating from the pandemic,

participant 8's church organized a community gathering for law enforcement, nurses, and social workers. Different prayer groups, dinners and activities were held; participant 8 attended the community gathering and felt "impacted" by the benefit of the script.

These findings suggest that awareness of religious and spiritual services provide child welfare social workers with support to cope with the challenges related to the profession. This suggest providing time for child welfare workers to connect with religious and spiritual services is important. This could imply that religion and spiritual services are undervalued by the county, as child welfare social workers are heavily consumed by work obligations to participate in religious and spiritual services. Some limitations were identified that put a hinder on child welfare social workers from participating in religious or spiritual services. Participant 8 stated, "The church I go to is really big on bible groups. I haven't [participated in] them. It's probably because I don't have a lot of time." Furthermore, participant 4 emphasized she does not participate in any religious or spiritual groups because she lives in the same community she is employed through and added, "I never wanted a family to feel like they couldn't use [religious or spiritual] resources." Though many child welfare workers may be aware of the abundance of religious or spiritual services offered through the community, they may lack the time and resources to participate in those services.

This prompt further research into the benefit of administering religious and spiritual services in the county for workers to utilize. The results from this study underscore the importance of awareness of religious and spiritual services to build support. The results from this study be a call to understand 1) how child welfare social

workers can utilize religious or spiritual services to reduce work-related stress, 2) why religious or spiritual service can build support for child welfare workers 3) where child welfare social workers can locate services to participate in and 4) when religious and spiritual services can act as a buffer to combat work-related stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue. The findings indicate, awareness of religious and spiritual services can mitigate the needs of child welfare workers. This confirms the importance of religious and spiritual services providing guidance to fulfill the role of a child welfare social worker. Lastly, the findings demonstrate a collection of services offered through the community that are available for county child welfare workers.

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

This study contributes to the field of social work by providing a new perspective on the benefits of religion and spirituality for county child welfare workers. Our findings suggest that social workers who hold religious and/or spiritual beliefs do utilize their beliefs to process the stress they experience on the job. This is essential, especially for county child welfare workers who handle critical cases involving abuse (e.g., emotional, physical, and sexual) as well as neglect. Religion and spirituality help them process difficult situations and reduce the stress they feel on the job. In order for the workers to express, utilize, and benefit from their respective religious and spiritual beliefs, the county must implement the following. They need to establish safe places in professional settings, offer extra time, special incentives, and encourage continuous dialogues on the subject among the county child welfare workers.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to identify how child welfare workers benefit from engaging in religious or spiritual support groups and how they can use their respected beliefs to alleviate some of the difficulties acquired on the field. We used literature to summarize and apply information from our research to support the findings from our study. Data collected from research participants were used to finalize the hypothesis. The result of this study suggests that child welfare social worker's respective religious or spiritual beliefs have an influence on how they can combat secondary trauma, burnout, and compassion fatigue. Additionally, our findings may indicate that child welfare social workers benefit from engaging in religious or spiritual support groups. The data analysis describes in detail how child welfare social workers find support and purpose in their relationship with religion and spirituality and how to utilize religious or spiritual techniques and services to combat stress acquired on the job.

APPENDIX A  
MASS EMAIL INFORMATION

The following is a general template followed for each participant reached out to:

Good afternoon [Potential Interviewee Name],

Hope all is well with you. My research partner, Sonia Magdaleno Ayemel and I are seeking participants for our research project.

Our study focuses on exploring the impact of religious and spiritual beliefs among current or former county child welfare workers. This study aims to identify how county child welfare workers can use their religious and spiritual beliefs to assist them in alleviating some of the secondary trauma stress they have acquired on the job. In addition, the study will examine the benefits of county child welfare workers participating in religious or spiritual support groups.

I have attached our flier with further information on the qualifications to participate in the study and what the study entails.

*If you meet the requirements and would like to participate in the study, please respond to this email and we can proceed with setting up your zoom interview.*

Thank you,  
Celeste Ramos & Sonia Magdaleno Ayamel

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE



## **Interview Questions**

### **Demographics:**

1. Name
2. Date of Birth
3. Gender
4. Ethnicity
5. Department worked in
6. Employment Position
7. Number of years worked in Child Welfare Services

### **Religion and Spiritual Questions:**

1. What religious affiliations and/or spiritual beliefs do you currently hold?
2. What religious affiliations and/or spiritual beliefs were you raised in/with?
3. Describe the role you believe religion and spirituality have in social work.

### **Secondary Trauma Questions:**

1. Do you believe that your identified religious or spiritual beliefs alleviate the stress of work obligations? If so, how?
2. Social workers tend to experience secondary trauma, burnout, or compassion fatigue. Have you ever experienced secondary trauma, burnout, or compassion fatigue as a child welfare worker? If so, how did you use your religious or spiritual beliefs to manage this situation?
3. What religious or spiritual strategies do you use to build personal resilience?

### **Religious or Spiritual Support Group Questions:**

1. Did you ever participate in a religious or spiritual support group? If so, what were the outcomes of your participation?
2. How do you acknowledge the strengths or weaknesses which arise from your religious and spiritual beliefs?
3. What type of religious or spiritual services are offered within your community?

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT

## Informed Consent

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the impact of religion and spirituality on child welfare social workers. This study examines how county social workers rely on their own religious and spiritual beliefs when dealing with the challenges of their profession. This study is being conducted by *Sonia Magdaleno Ayamel* and *Celeste Ramos* under the supervision of *Dr. Thomas Davis, Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino*. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of religion and spirituality among county child welfare social workers.

**Description:** Participants will be asked a series of questions to examine how their religious or spiritual beliefs alleviate secondary trauma stress and the benefits of participating in religious and/or spiritual support groups. Respondents will be provided with a Zoom link that is secure and private. Meaning that only the invited guest will receive a unique link and password to access the meeting. Recordings will be downloaded and stored onto a password protected USB hard drive. Respondents may use their personal phone, tablet, laptop, or computer to sign the informed consent and complete the interview.

**Participants:** Participants must meet a specific eligibility criterion which has been pre-approved by the researchers. The respondent's participation is completely voluntary, they may decline to answer any questions or freely withdraw from the study at any time.

**Confidentiality:** To maintain confidentiality, under no circumstances will identifiable information be discussed with anyone other than those conducting the research. Through the course of our research, we will keep all documents and password protected USB drives in a locked filing cabinet. Federal regulation requires that IRB research records be preserved for a minimum of three years. After the minimum of three years is finalized, all documents, emails, recordings, and any other identifiable information will be destroyed.

**Duration:** The expected duration of the subject's participation may take anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes, depending on how much information the participants wish to provide.

**Risks & Benefits:** Although unlikely, due to the sensitivity of the topic, participants may feel discomfort while responding to the interview questions. To mitigate this discomfort, we will ensure that our participants are aware they may decline to respond to questions, and/or withdraw from the study at any time. By contributing to the research on religion and spirituality in the field of social work, participants will have a better understanding of their own belief systems.

**Contact:** If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact *Sonia Magdaleno Ayamel* at [sonia.magdalenoayamel8404@coyote.csusb.edu](mailto:sonia.magdalenoayamel8404@coyote.csusb.edu), *Celeste Ramos* at [ramosc5@coyote.csusb.edu](mailto:ramosc5@coyote.csusb.edu) or our research advisor, *Dr. Thomas Davis* at [tomdavis@csusb.edu](mailto:tomdavis@csusb.edu).

**Results:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2022.

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

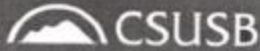
I agree to have this interview be audio recorded: \_\_\_\_\_Yes    \_\_\_\_\_No

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

APPENDIX D  
COUNTY APPROVAL LETTER



School of Social Work

WE DEFINE THE *Future*

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO  
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407  
909.537.5501 | fax: 909.537.7029  
<http://socialwork.csusb.edu>

December 2, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

I am a current MSW student at Cal State University, San Bernardino completing my second year research requirement. This research project will be utilized to fulfill the requirements set forth by California State University San Bernardino's MSW Program under the supervision of Dr. Thomas Davis, Professor of Social Work, California State University of San Bernardino. Celeste Ramos and Sonia Magdaleno-Ayamel will be using child welfare social workers from both Riverside County and San Bernardino County as participants. This study aims to identify how county child welfare workers can use their religious and spiritual beliefs to assist them in alleviating secondary trauma stress they have acquired on the job. In addition, the study will examine the benefits of county child welfare workers participating in religious or spiritual support groups. We intend to interview approximately 25 participants for our study. Under no circumstances will identifiable information be discussed with anyone other than those conducting the research. After the research is concluded, all documents, recordings, and any other identifiable information will be destroyed.

Thank you,

Celeste Ramos, MSW Intern at San Bernardino Children & Family Services

Approved by:   
Deputy Director, Eastern Region

Date: 12/02/2021

Approved by:   
Manager, Eastern Region

Date: 12/02/2021

## References

- Armes, S. E., Lee, J. J., Bride, B. E., & Seponski, D. M. (2020). Secondary trauma and impairment in clinical social workers. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 110*(3), 104540–104540. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104540>
- Barker, S. L., & Floersch, J. E. (2010). Practitioners' understandings of spirituality: Implications for social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education, 46*(3), 357–370. <https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2010.200900033>
- Ben-Porat, A. (2017). Competence of trauma social workers. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 32*(8), 1291- 1309. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515588536>
- Bride, B. E. (2007). Prevalence of secondary traumatic stress among social workers. *Social Work, 52*, 63–70.
- Chan-Serafin, S., Brief, A. P., & George, J. M. (2013). How does religion matter and why? Religion and the organizational sciences. *Organization Science (Providence, R.I.), 24*(5), 1585–1600. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1120.0797>
- Chi, F., Kaskutas, L., Sterling, S., Campbell, C., & Weisner, C. (2009). Twelve-Step affiliation and 3-year substance use outcomes among adolescents: social support and religious service attendance as potential mediators. *Addiction (Abingdon, England), 104*(6), 927– 939. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2009.02524.x>



- Gil, S., & Weinberg, M. (2015). Secondary trauma among social workers treating trauma clients: The role of coping strategies and internal resources. *International Social Work, 58*(4), 551–561. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872814564705>
- Gray, M. (2008). Viewing Spirituality in Social Work through the lens of Contemporary Social Theory. *British Journal of Social Work, 38*, 175-196.
- Griffiths, A., Royse, D., & Walker, R. (2018). Stress among child protective service workers: Self-reported health consequences. *Children and Youth Services Review, 90*, 46–53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.05.011>
- Hamren, K., Chungkham, H., & Hyde, M. (2015). Religion, spirituality, social support, and quality of life: measurement and predictors CASP-12(v2) amongst older Ethiopians living in Addis Ababa. *Aging & Mental Health, 19*(7), 610-621. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2014.952709>
- Hodge, D. (2018). Spiritual competence: What it is, why it is necessary, and how to develop it. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 27*(2), 124-139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2016.1228093>
- Laslett, A., Room, R., Dietze, P., & Ferris, J. (2012). Alcohol's involvement in recurrent child abuse and neglect cases. *Addiction (Abingdon, England), 107*(10), 1786-1793. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2012.03917.x>

Nelson-Becker, H., & Canda, E. R. (2008). Spirituality, religion, and aging research in social work: State of the art and future possibilities. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*, 20(3), 177–193.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15528030801988849>

Oxhandler, H. K. (2017). Social work field instructors' integration of religion and spirituality in clinical practice. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 53(3), 449–465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2016.1269706>

Oxhandler, H. K., Polson, E. C., & Achenbaum, W. A. (2018). The religiosity and spiritual beliefs and practices of clinical social workers: A national survey. *Social Work (New York)*, 63(1), 47–56. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swx055>

Pew Research Center (2021). Religion and public life: How covid-19 has strengthened religious faith. <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/01/27/more-americans-than-people-in-other-advanced-economies-say-covid-19-has-strengthened-religious-faith/>.

Schlehofer, M. M., Omoto, A. M., & Adelman, J. R. (2008). How Do “religion” and “spirituality” differ? lay definitions among older adults. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 47(3), 411–425. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2008.00418.x>

The College of St. Scholastica (2017). Want to work in mental health? psychiatry isn't your only option. <http://www.css.edu/the-sentinel-blog/want-to-work-in-mental-health-psychiatry-isn%E2%80%99t-your-only-option.html>.

The role of coping strategies and internal resources. *International Social Work*, 58(4), 551–561. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872814564705>

Whitehead, B. (2018). Religiousness on mental health in older adults: The mediating role of social support and healthy behaviours. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 21(4), 429– 441. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2018.1504906>

Zastrow, C., Kirst-Ashman, K. K., & Hessenauer S. L. (2019). Understanding human behavior and the social environment.