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SOCIAL WORKERS' COMPETENCY WHEN WORKING WITH LATINO IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

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SOCIAL WORKERS' COMPETENCY WHEN WORKING
WITH LATINO IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

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
Suleima Corea
Cynthia Gutierrez
May 2022

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ABSTRACT

This study will focus on exploring the competency of social workers who provide services to Latino immigrant clients, who are court-ordered to complete services, meaning that a juvenile court has had to remove the child from their parents due to abuse or neglect. When social services practitioners provide service to Latino immigrant clients, it is important for them to be familiarized with the culture, beliefs, and behaviors to better understand and serve the population.

This qualitative study used a snowball sampling method to interview six Southern California social workers in two different child welfare agencies via Zoom. The participants were employed with either the International Liaison Unit, Jurisdiction Disposition Unit or Children Policy Unit. The interviews were conducted using an interview guide designed by the researchers.

A key finding of this research was that social workers assess their own competency using three themes that are experience, connecting/relating to the client, and relying on other coworkers/own research.

The researchers also identified that additional training, bringing awareness to the centralized unit that assists in working with his population and having supportive supervisors would all benefit social workers competency.

A suggestion for future research is to increase sample size by connecting with different agencies initially.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation

Thirty-eight percent of California's immigrant population is made up of Latino immigrants (AIC, 2020). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Hispanic population reached a record 60.6 million in 2019, up 20% since 2010 (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). Foreign-born Latino immigrants account for about half (52%) of all U.S. population growth over this period (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). This population is the country's second-largest racial or ethnic group, behind white non-Hispanics (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). Latino children tend to be underrepresented in the nation's child welfare system (Children's Bureau, 2021). According to the Riverside Department of Social Services (2019), in 2019 there were 28,407 children who entered the child welfare system (CWS); of these children, 52.6 percent were categorized as Latinx. Furthermore, the number of Latino children in the child welfare system has risen from 14.2% in 2000 to 17.4% in 2005 (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2002, 2007). This study will focus particularly on social workers who provide services to immigrant Latino clients, children, and parents, both documented or undocumented, who are court-ordered to complete services, meaning that a juvenile court has had to remove the child from their parents due to abuse or neglect. It is important for social workers to be culturally competent and knowledgeable as to the resources that are available to this population to help

them navigate the system and for the social workers to provide the best service available.

Purpose of the Study

This research project contributes to social work practice at both the micro and macro levels. At the micro-level of social work, the findings of this research may improve social workers' competency to serve immigrant families in the child welfare system. On the other hand, at the macro level, these findings may encourage practitioners to advocate and create policy change to better serve this community. For example, this may lead to creating policy intended to serve specifically immigrant families to ensure that they are receiving the same services as any other family who is involved in the system. The findings of this research may also improve social workers' practice in becoming more culturally aware and culturally sensitive to the type of service that they provide their clients. Furthermore, the findings of this research may serve to educate social workers on this community's needs to improve practice in reunification outcomes. Lastly, our research examines the competency of social workers in their work with immigrant families, in an attempt to better understand the tools, skills, and expertise required to serve immigrant families.

It is important to conduct research in this area as it is only fair enough to provide the same quality services to immigrant families as to U.S.-born families who are involved with the child welfare system. As a former Social Service Assistant, I was able to witness the service provided to these families,

thus we believe that it is extremely important to continue researching this area in the child welfare system to ensure that all clients are receiving the best possible service. We believe that it is important to research this problem further because there is very little research in this area, not to mention that the Latino population continues growing and making their presence more apparent in the child welfare system.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter discusses the relevant research to the topic of Latino immigrants' experiences with the child welfare system. It will speak about the Latino culture and how this population is impacted when they become part of the child welfare system. This chapter also describes the study's use of General Systems Theory as a framework for examining this topic.

Latino Population in the United States

In 2018 there were a total of 44.8 billion immigrants living in the U.S (Budiman, 2020). The majority of the immigrants are Latinos. Latinos are a diverse community. Many people use the term Latino which, "refers to geography, specifically, to Latin America, to people from the Caribbean, South America, and Central America " (Fortuna, 2021). The largest population of Latino immigrants in the United States comes from Mexico (Budiman, 2020). In 2018, 25% of the immigrants present in the United States were from Mexico (Budiman, 2020). Many of the individuals who immigrate to the United States come in hopes of better opportunities. Countless individuals flee their country because they fear for their safety. Before, during, and after migration to the U.S, many of these Latinos experience traumatic life events (Perreira & Ornelas, 2013). These events can have a severe impact on their mental health and their adjustment to

life in the U.S (Perreira & Ornelas, 2013). Not getting the proper help to cope with their trauma can lead to unhealthy outcomes. Their trauma can develop into depression, anxiety, and/or substance abuse (Kataoaka, et al., 2002). Parents dealing with substance abuse is a common reason why children end up in children's welfare services. Being involved in CWS ends up affecting the family as a whole.

A number of Latino immigrants arrive in the United States as undocumented individuals/families. Undocumented immigrant families are vulnerable because they face language barriers, legal status issues, financial burdens, and more when they arrive in the U.S. (Lin et al., 2018). Non-citizen immigrants are two times as likely to be poor compared to foreign-born citizens (Jones, 2012). This can be due to immigrants struggling to find a job because job sites require legal proof of residency. It has been proven that children in immigrant families are at increased risk of maltreatment due to the stress and pressure experienced from immigration and acculturation (Earner, 2007; Roer-Strier, 2001; Segal & Mayadas, 2005). In fact, many of the families who become involved with the public child welfare system need social services due to high levels of stressors related to poverty, substance abuse, and mental health (Ayon et al., 2010). As mentioned, both the parents and children suffer from mental health for various reasons. In the Latino community, mental health is often not talked about. They often stigmatize mental health-related issues as a person who is unpredictable. Due to this stigma Latinos are reluctant to engage in therapy or

some form of mental health treatment (Crea et al., 2018). It is difficult for those who seek help because undocumented families do not qualify to receive all government services (Jones, 2012). This makes it difficult for social workers to work with them (Jones, 2012). As described in the research paper by Jones (2012), it becomes emotionally frustrating for social workers to help these families because due to their status they do not always qualify for services.

In the Latino community, culture is important. When families arrive in the United States, they are not familiar with American culture. Many immigrant families are unaware of the child-raising norms that this country has. They may have different norms in their country of origin that can be considered maltreatment in the United States (Lin et al., 2018). This can also lead to child welfare services (CWS) getting involved with the family (Lin et al., 2020). Being involved with the CWS can be viewed as shameful (Ayon et al., 2010). However, the family unit is fundamental in the Latino community, therefore the parents will work with social workers to reunify their family (Ayon et al., 2010). Seeking help from extended family members is not an option many can count on because they do not have family in the states. Becoming involved with the CWS for an immigrant family is something that they do not expect, and the majority do not understand its purpose.

Child Welfare Practice with Immigrant Families

A study conducted by Thomas et al. (2010) focused on the challenges that social workers face in providing services to Latino families. The study identified

items such as lack of internal accessibility of culturally appropriate services within agencies and external availability of culturally competent services. The research also found that there is a small amount of bilingual culturally competent staff, trained translators, and resources within the CWS workforce. As to external barriers, they found that there is a lack of culturally sensitive services such as medical doctors, foster families, and after hour services for Latino working families.

Obstacles Latino Immigrants Face

When social services practitioners are working with Latino immigrant clients, it is important for them to be familiarized with the culture, beliefs, and behaviors to better understand and serve the population. Some factors that Latino immigrants can experience from immigration are stress, terror, loss, isolation and doubt about the future (Dettlaff et. al., 2009, pp.775). It is important for social workers to understand the Latino population to provide them with the best services and appropriate interventions. Not understanding how this population operates may have a negative impact on the type of services that the social worker can provide and as a result Latino immigrants can face more barriers in navigating the child welfare system. For example, Lanesskog et al. (2019, pp.435) named the following as obstacles that immigrant families face when working with social workers in the system: “communicative challenges, cultural differences, limited Spanish language referral services, ineligibility for public programs, and fear of government authorities.” Thus, it is imperative for

social workers to be culturally aware of the services and interventions that would best serve their clients. Due to the challenges that this community faces, it is imperative that child welfare agencies provide culturally appropriate services to these families, particularly to those who are recent immigrants (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2009, pp.777). Social workers must understand the impact that immigration and acculturation have on each family and how these experiences may have contributed to their involvement in child welfare (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2009, pp.775).

Child Welfare Cases

Despite their underrepresentation, the number of Latino families in the child welfare system has increased progressively in the past decade (Ayón, 2011; Dettlaff & Johnson, 2011, pp.436). A 2011 study found that 7.8% of Latino children who come to the attention of the child welfare system are foreign-born and 92.2% are U.S born (Dettlaff et. al., pp. 938). In addition, an exploratory study that used qualitative interviews with Spanish speaking former clients and Spanish speaking child welfare workers, Lanesskog et al. (2019) examined “child welfare workers’ and clients’ perception of their work together, the factors that hinder their success, and the institutional structures needed to support child welfare practice with Spanish speaking families.” This study used in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Spanish-speaking clients and workers to answer questions related to the clients' and workers' working relationships and the institutional factors that may facilitate or hinder successful working relationships. The sampling consisted of a multi-step procedure to recruit their clients. A total of

10 Spanish-speaking workers from across the county and three former child welfare clients participated in the study. To collect the data, interviews with the workers were conducted in English and the interviews with the client participants were conducted in Spanish. Per the study, the increase of Latino families in the child welfare system is likely related to the presence of poverty and the lack of supportive human services rather than a propensity to commit abuse and neglect (Lanesskog et al., 2019, pp.435). Immigrant families have a higher likelihood of experiencing financial struggles, food insecurity, and limited access to medical and child care thus making them more vulnerable and increasing their chances of entering the system (Johnson-Motoyama, 2014, pp.1067). Furthermore, bilingual social workers who serve immigrant families in the system state that their caseloads are often more complex and time-consuming and as a result, they are dissatisfied with their agencies, supervisors, and colleagues. Lastly, the analysis revealed five broad themes which impacted the client-worker relationship. The themes were as follows: the role of language, the importance of culture, client fear of child welfare agencies, the overwhelming workload for workers in the field, and the need for supportive supervisors. Although Lanesskog et al., (2019) made the findings above, there are a few limitations to consider. For example, the study's findings should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size that the researchers were able to recruit. Another limitation to consider is that this research was only conducted on a single agency and not multiple across the

country. Overall, the findings of this study can guide future research to gain more insight related to the worker-client relationship.

Evidence- Based Practice

Dettlaff and Rycraft (2010) describe an evaluation of a funded initiative to train child welfare social workers in utilizing an evidence-based approach known as systems of care with Latino immigrant children and families. They used this framework to address the need for culturally competent, community-based services for the Latino population. The authors suggest that culturally competent practice requires that social workers assess the cultural values and traditions of Latino families and how such values/traditions may impact their service delivery. The implementation of systems of care in child welfare social work practice allowed families to benefit from improved access to services, reduced fragmentation and improved the level of family involvement in service planning and delivery. Lastly, those who participated stated that the use of this model helped to empower families to become more involved in the decision-making process, which as a result facilitated family and worker engagement and led to positive outcomes in their cases. Overall trained participants responded positively to the systems of care framework, increased their knowledge of the framework, and thus resulted in positive benefits for their clients.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

As previously stated, our research will focus on social workers competency and the impact that undocumented immigrant status has on the

services provided to Latino immigrant families who are involved with the Child Welfare System. In this regard, the best theoretical framework to utilize is General Systems Theory (GST). The GST is an organizational theory that looks at interactions between systems (Fierro, 2020). GST tends to view any system as the result of a dynamic interrelationship between its component parts and its whole (Fierro, 2020). GST allows social workers, for instance, to develop the person-in-situation approach to a broader person-in-environment approach. Thus, utilizing GST as a framework, not only allows us the researchers to assess the clients' problems but also assess the various systems that may affect the client. This theory will allow us as the researchers to identify the systems (micro, exo, macro) that these families are part of to better understand their circumstances and needs within CWS. When applying GST to our research, it is important to take into consideration the importance of acculturation, culture, and the traditional values of the immigrant families who are involved with CWS (Lin & Wiley, 2017).

Within the GST, acculturation plays a key role and specifically relates to Latino immigrants within the United States. According to Zastrow et al. (2019), acculturation is "an ethnic person's adoption of the dominant culture in which he or she is immersed." According to Johnson, "Several factors may influence the acculturative orientations of children of immigrants and their parents at the micro, exo, and macro levels" (2007, pp.1429). For example, modes of acculturation to be conditioned by micro-level factors are factors such as parental socioeconomic

achievement and family composition. As an example, families who did not obtain higher education and have scarce resources are more likely to experience irregular acculturation, thus leading to higher conflict levels. The differences in acculturation levels between parents and children are that parents stand by their traditional culture values while children are more rapidly exposed to the social norms of the majority culture (Dettlaff et. al., 2009). Again, the acculturation choices and strategies available to immigrants are likely determined by contextual factors, such as social/cultural/environmental conditions and constraints (Lin & Wiley, 2017). As a result of all of this, immigrant families involved with CWS experience many barriers, such as language barriers, to accessing services.

Furthermore, while using the GST and for the purpose of this study, the systems that would be assessed are the following: the client/individual, the family system, and the interaction between the client and the macrosystem such as the CWS.

Summary

This study will explore social workers' competence when working with Latino immigrant families in the child welfare system. These families face many barriers to receiving resources that can provide the help that they need. Some of these barriers are that these families are solely Spanish-speaking and others may be undocumented. The study will also help determine what can help social workers be more skillful when working with Latino immigrant families.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This research study examined social workers' self-assessed competency in working with Latino immigrant families. We assessed how social workers perceived their competency when working with Latino immigrant families. The goal of this study was to answer the following questions: 1) How do social workers who work with Latino immigrant families perceive their competency? 2) What trainings are provided to prepare the social workers to understand the cultural differences and traumatic events that immigrant families may have experienced? 3) How do years of experience impact a social worker's competency in working with Latino immigrant families? In this chapter, we described the details of how our study was conducted. The sections that are discussed in this chapter are the following: study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to explore social workers' self-assessed competency in working with Latino immigrant families who are currently involved in a child welfare system in Southern California. There is a limited amount of research that speaks about social workers' experiences in working with Latino

families and the challenges they face. Additionally, with this research, we were able to determine what resources and tools could be provided to these social workers so that they can help Latino immigrant families navigate the child welfare system effectively. This study was a qualitative study where in-depth interviews were used to collect data from social workers working in two different Southern California child welfare agencies.

A qualitative approach allowed for each social worker to share their own experiences, and not restrict them to a limited range of answers. Using an interview guide approach allowed us to have more structured interviews and sequence the questions to avoid interviewer bias. Open-ended questions were asked when interviewing the social workers to allow them to express their experience, barriers, and ideas as to how to better serve this population. This interview made it possible for social workers to share their experience of working with Latino immigrant families in the CWS.

A limitation of this study was that social workers that were interviewed were recruited from two separate counties, which is not representative of other counties. Also, there were a number of participants that were from the same unit, limiting the view of how a social worker works with Latino immigrant families. Research results from this study may not be easily applicable to other areas where social workers have limited exposure or experience in working with the Latino population.

Sampling

We used a purposive sampling method to recruit participants with knowledge and experience on this particular research topic. We interviewed a total of six participants to gather enough data. We made sure that the participants met the following criteria: (a) Current or former child welfare social worker in any Southern California agency (b) minimum 1 year of experience (c) over 18 years old (d) willing to give consent to be audio recorded. Potential participants were excluded if they were: (a) unable or unwilling to give informed consent (b) had less than one year of experience.

Recruitment of participants happened via email and via social media. We reached out to the project coordinator of our program and asked her to send our flyer to a group of social workers who met the requirements. My partner and I posted our flyer on social media to recruit participants as well. A sample size of six participants allowed us to explore their perception of competency to work effectively with Latino immigrant families.

Data Collection and Instruments

The qualitative data for this study was collected by conducting online interviews with those who met the criteria for the research. To prepare for the interviews, the researchers created a set of questions that will maintain focus on the study. The researchers used snowball sampling in which research participants recommended other social workers to participate in the study.

Interviews took place via Zoom. The interviews were scheduled based on the days that worked for the participants. The interview began by the researcher thanking the participant for taking the time to do the interview. Then it proceeded by reminding the interviewee that they can stop the interview at any time, if they feel uncomfortable about answering any of the questions. The first couple of questions were utilized to gather demographic information, which asked questions about their ethnicity, years of experience and the unit they work for. There were a few open-ended questions during the interview that gathered information about their experience. The study questions were: a) Have you had experience in working with Latino Immigrant families? If yes, how was your experience? If not, at this point in your career would you feel competent working with this population? b) Have you received any training that prepared you to work with Latino immigrant families? If so, what were they? c) How do you perceive your competency in working with Latino immigrant families? d) Do you have any concerns/limitations as to working with this population? e) How do you acknowledge the strengths or weaknesses in the Latino immigrant population? f) Would you want to receive additional information/training as to working with this population? Before beginning to record the interview, participants were asked for their informed consent to be recorded and to use their responses as data for our research paper.

Procedures

The researchers used personal and student networks, as well as social media, to recruit current or former child welfare social workers that work with Latino immigrant families in a Southern California child welfare agency. The researchers created a flyer that was shared on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. The flyer included the purpose of the study, what the study would consist of and the criteria that must be met to be considered to be part of the study. An email was also sent to the Title IV-E Project Coordinator to help assist in the recruitment process. The Title IV-E Project Coordinator agreed to share the information with former Title IV-E students who are social workers in Southern California. The email that was created included the purpose and goals of the research, as well as the need for participants. In the email, the requirements for this research were stated. The email also included the researchers contact information so that the participants can communicate with them to set forward a schedule for the interview process. The researchers also recruited participants by word of mouth with social workers at their current internship placement. The researchers proposed for the interviews to occur between 8 am and 4 pm on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and some Fridays. Depending on the response that they received, they determined if it is necessary to complete interviews on other days as those initially intended.

As participants checked in to the online interviews, the researchers began by expressing their gratitude for their willingness to participate in the research

study. The researchers then discussed confidentiality and had them verbally consent to have the interview recorded. The researchers reminded all the participants of the purpose of the study, and inquired if there were any questions before initiating the interview. Once the researchers had discussed confidentiality, and the purpose of the study with each participant, the recording began.

Protection of Human Subjects

The identity of the participants will remain in complete confidentiality. The recordings of the interview were not to be shared with anyone but the research supervisor. This will ensure that all participants' identity remains confidential. The transcribed information from the interviews were properly saved on the Zoom cloud services that requires a password in order to access them. The researchers used pseudonyms to reference any of the participants. After a year of finalizing the research, we will discard all the interview recordings.

Data Analysis

In order to code the interview data that we collected, we used thematic coding. Our analysis was guided by Braun et al. (2019) six-phase approach that includes the following: familiarization, generating codes, constructing themes, defining themes, revising themes, and producing the report. For the first step, familiarization, we, the researchers became familiar with the data that we collected. We transcribed the recording using a software program. Secondly, we

worked together in coming up with codes for our data. Next, we worked on grouping together common codes into themes. In the fourth stage, we defined the themes in relation, and in the fifth phase, they were revised. Lastly, the last stage consists of all written manuscripts.

Summary

The research design we used is a qualitative one. A qualitative design allowed us to better understand how comfortable/competent social workers are when working with immigrant children and families. When conducting a qualitative study, the participants were free to share as much detail as they wished. Using purposive (sampling), we conducted zoom interviews with Southern California county social workers. It's an important topic to explore because a social worker's competency in this area can affect the family's outcome when in the system. By interviewing social workers, we hope to receive insight into how the process differs for immigrant families compared to non-immigrant families.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings from this study, which sought to understand how social workers and other social service providers who work with Latino immigrant families assess their own effectiveness. The researchers interviewed a total of six individuals from two different agencies. The participants were interviewed throughout February and March 2022. All individuals were employed at an agency that is responsible for working with Latino immigrant families either directly or through creating policy that directly affects this population.

Our findings suggest that social workers who work with Latino immigrant families are responsible for assessing themselves; no one else assesses them. They have some unique ways of assessing themselves, which include: experience over the years, connecting/ relating to the client, and relying on other coworkers/ own research. In this chapter we will discuss the three methods they use to evaluate their work. Furthermore, our participants offer recommendations on how their effectiveness with Latino immigrant clients can be improved

Demographics

Five out of the six participants were female, one was male. Five of the participants that were interviewed identified as Latino(a). One participant

identified as Latino (a) and white. The study participants are child welfare workers employed by a Southern California child welfare agency. Three of the participants were part of the International Liaison Unit, two were from the Jurisdictional/ Dispositional unit, and one participant was part of the Children's Policy Unit. Five of the six research participants were fluent Spanish speakers.

Findings

The study found the following themes are used by child welfare workers to assess their competence in working with Latino immigrant families: experience, connecting/relating to the client, relying on other coworkers/own research. Also, the study identified recommendations that can be used to help county workers enhance their competency when working with Latino immigrant families.

Participants Assessing Themselves Based on Experience

The research participants assess their competency in working with immigrant children and families who are involved with the child welfare system. The research participants mainly reported that they self-assessed the quality of work that they completed in working with Latino immigrant families. They did not assess themselves based on a formal assessment that the organization provides. Additionally, they are not relying on an assessment from their supervisor. The majority of the research participants agreed that their competency in working with this population comes from both experience in working directly with the population and personal experience. Research participants stated that personal experience such as being immigrants

themselves, knowing the language, learning about the culture, and having family members with an immigrant background has allowed them to empathize and successfully assist this population.

In fact, when participant one was asked about her competency, she stated that in the two years that she has been working with this population she has grown more competent especially because “she thought that more social workers knew about the unit” that served immigrant children and families in child welfare. Per participant two, unfortunately not many social workers in the county know that a centralized unit is there to assist social workers and families in this population thus allowing her to feel more competent in comparison to other workers.

Additionally, when participant two was asked about her competency she stated that she is “pretty competent” because she is well rounded on “working with the families, knowing their needs, and knowing their language for the most part.” Other participants also stated that they felt competent working with this population due to their background and having knowledge about the culture and knowledge about the issues that this population faces. This made it easier for them to provide the necessary services to the clients. Additionally, participant three stated that she felt competent working indirectly with this population because the policies that she is assigned to work on and edit, “have an impact as far as the work that is being done with the families.” Participant four also stated “it’s my background, I think that just really helps me with working with them.”

Participant five added that they are not being assessed by the supervisor because “the worker had to figure out how to do the steps themselves because that person [supervisor] didn’t offer any assistance.” The participants consistently mentioned that they are building their experience over time and based on that they determine that they are more competent over time. Lastly, participant six stated that he felt competent because he is able to “understand and connect” with the population because he “has a lot of family members who are immigrants.” Overall, the participants shared that their experience out in the field and their personal experience have assisted in working with this population.

Connecting/ Relating to the Client

One way the participants connect with Latino immigrant families is by speaking the same language. Being able to communicate with the families is necessary. The participants shared that being able to speak the language has allowed them to build rapport with the clients. In most Latino households, Spanish is the primary language. Participant 2 stated, “...most of our immigrant families right now are Spanish speaking and so I’m able to identify that way”. If the worker is Spanish speaking, it gives the family some comfort knowing that they can directly express themselves. Participant 3 shared “...because I Speak Spanish a lot of my assignments were Spanish speaking [Latino] families”. Assigning Spanish-speaking families to a Spanish-speaking worker removes the burden of having to seek a translator. Seeking a translator is not always easy or effective.

In fact, Participant 5, attests to this by sharing how not speaking Spanish has been a burden when working with Latino immigrant families. Participant 5 shared:

Contacting the translation services was difficult because it was during COVID, so the translator could not come into the office, so I had to call them on the phone, put the phone on speaker and I'm sitting in the office with the parents and I'm having the translator translate the form from English to Spanish

Participant 5 added "...sometimes the translator didn't understand how to translate the CPS language". Therefore, understanding the language is a way workers relate to the client and rate their competency at a higher level.

Furthermore, when working with Latino immigrant families there are going to be cases that involve working with the consulate. The majority of the participants described how they work closely with the consulate for various reasons. Participant 1 states "it is our responsibility to contact the consulate of that country and let them know there is a case open with a foreign native of their country". The consulate can assist with providing documentation such as birth certificates or help assist with the parent locator. Participant 6 added, "Spanish is a different language and when speaking with the consulate the emails have to be well written". Competency in working with the consulate increases when you can work with them directly.

Additionally, most of the participants assessed themselves as being competent because they identify themselves as Latino(a). Therefore, they can be used as an advantage in understanding the Latino culture. By understanding the culture, the worker acknowledges the family's morals and values. This is fundamental when working with Latino immigrant families because they hold close ties to their culture. Each participant had a uniquely personal experience that enabled them to empathize with their clients. Participant 2 expressed "...I also came from an immigrant family, I was an immigrant myself". Being able to relate on this level increases competency in the services that are needed to help the families. Participant 4 shared "...I relate so much I was fortunate enough that I am now a naturalized citizen".

None of the participants received any training specific to working with Latino immigrant families. Participant 4 describes "...all of what I know comes from my personal experience and from what my parents have shared with me". When asked how competent do you feel about working with Latino immigrant families, participant 3 responded

I think because of my background I feel pretty competent, because I do have some knowledge of the culture and all the issues and I also speak the language which I think makes it a lot easier to provide services and work with the family.

Participant 6 stated "I could understand and connect because I have a lot of family members who are immigrants." Having that personal experience and

being able to relate to the client has allowed the participants to declare themselves competent in working with the population of Latino immigrant families.

Relying on Other Coworkers/Own Research

Most individuals when starting a job are not competent in their position. That was the case with many of the participants. Participant 1 shared "...the only training was with a former SSA who trained me." The participant goes on by explaining that the SSA who trained her did not receive any training either, she had to learn on her own. Participant 2 shared that "...just working with the people that were previously in the unit helped." Working with former and current colleagues has helped the participants gain knowledge in their agency which helps them become more proficient in working with Latino immigrant families.

Another factor that is taken into consideration when the participant assesses their competency is the amount of research and training, they seek out on their own outside of the county. As previously mentioned, the county does not provide training specific to Latino immigrant families. Generally, what each participant has learned has been from doing their own research or attending webinars outside of the county. Participant 2 mentioned that by "...doing my own research and reading I was able to get more information." Participant 6 recalled "taking Spanish courses in college really helped me learn more about Spanish culture." However, they do hold a meeting that involves all the counties once a year. In this meeting all the counties of Southern California come together to

discuss what is working well with the process of the families. Participant 2 explained "...county does have meetings with other counties that deal, that are in the same international liaison unit, and deal with the immigrant families." Overall, competency increases by learning from former or current colleagues and seeking trainings and research.

Participant Recommendations

Our participants provided recommendations as to how to increase their own competency and those who work directly with this population. Participant one suggested that learning more information about the population should make her more competent. Additionally, she stated that "bringing awareness to the unit" can help her and other social workers working with this unit become more competent. Participant two added that obtaining more training because "that is one thing that the county does not offer." She added that the problem with obtaining more training might be due to it being costly. She suggested that contracting out with an attorney should be an option to make the work more effective and allow them to become more competent. Participant three stated that "having more contact with the families, having more training provided by the department" could really benefit her in becoming more knowledgeable and competent in working with the population. Participant four suggested that she would really benefit from gaining more "knowledge about what is going on and what the clients are going through" to better understand them and the trauma that they are experiencing. She also added that her current employer can

facilitate this by “providing more training for those working with undocumented clients.” Participant five added that training would benefit her towards becoming more competent in working with this population. She added having a “supervisor who is actually doing their part” would also benefit her and her peers. Lastly, participant six stated that “maybe getting training on immigration and finding more resources” could assist them in working with this population. Overall, all participants shared the common belief that additional training is essential to becoming more competent in working with this population. Other factors such as bringing awareness to the centralized unit that assists in working with this population and having a supportive supervisor would benefit their competency.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter we discuss our findings, significance, limitations, and recommendations. The researchers have gained valuable knowledge from the experiences and challenges that social workers who work with Latino immigrant families in child welfare face. Although our study consisted of a limited sample size, the findings demonstrate a significant similarity from the experiences of one worker to another.

Discussion

It was unclear if social workers had the competency to work with Latino immigrant families who are part of the child welfare system. There are obstacles that social workers need to take into account when working with this population. The results of the present analyses indicated that social workers assess their own competency based on three themes: experience, connecting/relating to the client, and relying on other coworkers/own research. Having personal experience of being an immigrant allows for the worker to have an understanding of the resources the families need. After years of experience working with this population, the worker's competency enhances because they become familiar with different organizations that can provide the resources. Understanding the language and culture of the population helps build rapport with the client. Relying

on other coworkers and doing their own research gives them an insight into the information they did not know when they first began working. Overall, the study finds that social workers who meet these three themes have the competency to work with Latino immigrant families.

Findings

The literature review addressed a different set of questions than those presented by this study. However, several challenges and issues that were discussed in the literature were found to be similar to our findings. For example, our research findings suggest that social workers are familiarized with the culture, beliefs, and behaviors of immigrant children and families in the child welfare system. Similarly, Dettlaff and Rycraft (2009) acknowledge that it is imperative for child welfare agencies to be prepared to provide culturally appropriate services to Latino families. Additionally, Lanesskog et al. (2019, pp. 435) obtained similar findings to our research further suggesting that immigrant families face challenges such as limited Spanish language referral services and ineligibility for public programs.

In addition, we identified a key finding that was not acknowledged in the literature review but we found that our participants stated that they assess their own competency level when it comes to working with Latino immigrant families. Additionally, themes identified to assess their competency that were not discussed in the literature review include: using personal experience, connecting/relating to the client, and relying on other coworkers/own research.

These themes are significant when assessing competence in working with this population the reasons why are explained in the sections above.

Limitations

The findings of this study could not be generalized to all social work agencies as the sample size was small thus limiting the experiences that social workers spoke about. The primary limitation of this research study is that the researchers encountered difficulty recruiting participants due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in place. Participants were also unable to recruit more participants as most social workers were telecommuting, thus limiting interactions and activity at internship sites. Due to these limitations, the researchers were only able to recruit six participants from two different agencies. Furthermore, the interviews were only completed via Zoom thus limiting our interactions with the participants and the findings. Although the participants were from two different agencies, the findings could not be generalized to all other counties. In hopes to recruit more participants, IRB modification was made so that any Southern California social worker who had at least one year of experience in working with the Latino immigrant population could participate in the study.

Recommendations for Social Work Agencies

With the information gathered through the interviews, the researchers identified gaps in how social workers are being supported to enhance their competency to provide the best services to immigrant children and families in the

child welfare system. As social workers, it is our ethical obligation to be culturally competent and provide the best quality service to our clients. Current and future social workers should be well rounded on the current services, policy, and best practices to serve this population. The main recommendation from our findings is that there is a need to enhance social work education and training around working and providing services to immigrant children and families in the child welfare system. With this, we suggest that agencies provide updated training to current and future social workers at least twice a year. Additionally, we recommend that child welfare agencies build a system to assist social workers in assessing their competency in working with this population. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to have more services tailored to the needs of immigrant children and families in the child welfare system. Making these services readily available to this population will assist social workers in providing the best quality services.

Conclusion

This research study provided insight to social workers competency and training needs in working with Latino immigrant children and families in the child welfare system. Our research suggests that additional education and training would enhance a social worker's ability to provide the best quality service to this population. The study identified the gaps in social work education and training readily available for social workers. Although the findings could not be generalized due to a small sample size, it highlighted what could be implemented to increase social workers competency. Furthermore, this study can contribute to

future research and training. Future studies are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of additional support.

APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL EMAIL



December 20, 2021

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Administrative/Exempt Review Determination

Status: Determined Exempt

IRB-FY2022-97

Deirdre Lanesskog Suleima Corea, Cynthia Gutierrez
CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Deirdre Lanesskog Suleima Corea, Cynthia Gutierrez:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Social Worker Competency in Working with Latino Immigrant Families in the Child Welfare System" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has weighed the risks and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's [COVID-19 Prevention Plan](#) for more information regarding campus requirements.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. The Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

School of Social Work

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407909.537.5501 | fax: 909.537.7029
<http://socialwork.csusb.edu>

The study in which you are asked to participate is exploring self-determined competency as a Children's Services Division social workers who work with Latino immigrant families that are involved with the Child Welfare System (CWS) in Southern California. The study is being conducted by Cynthia Gutierrez and Suleima Corea, graduate students, under the supervision of Dr. Deirdre Lanesskog, Assistant Professor in School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to explore competency in social workers working when working with Latino immigrant families who are part of the Child Welfare System.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked a few questions on how they perceive their competency when working with Latino Immigrant families, their experiences and the tools that are beneficial to them when working with this population.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is completely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time without penalty.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will be kept confidential and data will be reported

DURATION: It will take approximately 30mins to an hour to complete the interview.

RISKS: Although not anticipated, participants may be uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You are free to skip any questions you feel uncomfortable answering.

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

CONTACT: If you have any questions/concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Lanesskog at (909) 537-7222.

RESULTS: Results of the research can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu>) at California State University, San Bernardino after June 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 form and agree to participate in study.

x _____

Sign here

Date

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Questions

Demographics

1. How long have you worked for a child welfare agency?
2. What unit are you part of? (ex: Investigation services, continuing services)
3. What do you like most about working within child welfare?
4. What ethnic group do you identify with?

Study Questions

1. Can you please describe how your current position allows you to work with Latino immigrant families?
2. Tell me about your experience in working with Latino immigrant families?
3. Have you received any training that prepared you to work with Latino immigrant families? If so, what kind of training did you receive?
4. How do you perceive your competency in working with Latino immigrant families?
5. Do you have any concerns/limitations as to working with this population?
6. How do you acknowledge the strengths or weaknesses in the Latino immigrant population?
7. What do you think would benefit you towards becoming more knowledgeable in working with this population?

Closing Questions

1. Do you have any questions or concerns regarding the issues that we discussed?
2. Do you know of someone else who may be interested in talking to us about this topic?

APPENDIX D
STATEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY

All Chapters were completed together by researchers Suleima Corea and Cynthia Gutierrez. Chapter two literature review was split evenly between both researchers. Coding of the interview transcripts was also split evenly between both researchers.

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