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SOCIAL WORK STUDENT'S PERCEPTION, KNOWLEDGE, AND PREPAREDNESS IN SERVING UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN

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SOCIAL WORK STUDENT'S PERCEPTION, KNOWLEDGE, AND
PREPAREDNESS IN SERVING UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN

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
Estela Flores Portillo
Miriam Flores Portillo

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

The following is a quantitative study, conducted at Southern California University with a convenience sample of 56 Bachelor Social Work (BSW) and Master Social Work (MSW) participants. A Qualtrics questionnaire was administered during the fall 2022 semester and utilized to assess the social work students' general perception, knowledge, and preparedness in serving unaccompanied migrant children. This population was chosen to assess because social work students are most likely to work with unaccompanied migrant children at a micro/macro level through their field placements or future employment. This study seeks to shed light on the different levels of knowledge, experiences, and competency of BSW and MSW students. The goal of the study was to highlight the strengths or weaknesses in the curriculum, training, and field experience of social work students.

Keywords: unaccompanied migrant children, immigration, students, perception, knowledge, preparedness, social work

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family, son, and friends. I am deeply grateful to my loving parents Jesus and Miriam for always providing their unconditional love and support. Also, my sisters Estela, Emely, and Ana for always being there by my side to provide support and encouragement. A very special dedication to my son Alejandro for being my drive and source of motivation to never give up on my education. Lastly, I would like to thank all my friends and family who have motivated me throughout my journey in the graduate program. We did it! ¡ Sí Se Pudo! -Miriam Flores Portillo

I would like to thank my parents Miriam and Jesus for their endless love, support, and encouragement throughout my education. Their efforts and struggles have allowed me to have this opportunity of reaching higher education. A special thank you to my sister Miriam for motivating me, I am forever grateful for having the opportunity to have gone through our MSW program together. To my sisters, Emely and Ana, thank you for your love and motivation I could not have done this without you.

-Estela Flores-Portillo

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CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM FORMULATION

Description of the Problem

The United States has seen an increase in the apprehensions of unaccompanied migrant children from Mexico and Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras). Under United States law, an “unaccompanied child” is defined as a person under the age of 18 who arrives at the border without a parent or a formal legal guardian. Therefore, the child who arrives at the border with another family member such as an aunt, uncle, or grandparent is still “unaccompanied” by law. In Fiscal Year 2021 through February, 29,792 unaccompanied migrant children were encountered along the Southwest Border. Two thousand nine hundred and forty-two of these children are under the age of 12 years old and 26,850 are aged 13-17 years old (U.S Customs and Border Protection, 2021). They arrived with family members and are later separated at the border. While others are abandoned by smugglers, other migrants, and at times by their parents near the United States border. Due to the increase in violence, poverty, the pandemic, and hurricanes that affect the Central American Countries many immigrants have opted to find asylum in the United States. The unaccompanied migrant children leave their countries because they are fleeing gangs, abuse, corruption, and in search of better opportunities.

After unaccompanied migrant children are detained at the United States southern border, they enter the immigration system and into multiple government agencies. Furthermore, under the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the departments that share responsibilities of unaccompanied migrant children are the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Health and Human Services (HHS) (Cheatham, 2021). These two agencies must abide by the 1997 Flores Settlement, which states that both accompanied and unaccompanied children must have access to food, water, emergency medical services, facilities with accommodations, and a ventilated environment. The first agency to take responsibility is the DHS which apprehends, processes, and possibly returns migrant children to their countries of origin.

At the border Customs and Border Protection (CBP), a DHS agency oversees detaining, identifying children who are unaccompanied migrant children, and separating accompanied children from adults that are unrelated to the child. On the other hand, HHS takes responsibility for the unaccompanied migrant children under federal custody as they wait for relocation. The unaccompanied migrant children are placed in group homes, foster care, or facilities used for long-term care. The HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is then in charge of placing unaccompanied migrant children across the United States in about two hundred state-licensed and federally-funded facilities. These facilities provide unaccompanied migrant children the opportunity to obtain an education and medical and legal services. Lastly, the main goal of the ORR is

to release the children to a sponsor. If there is no appropriate sponsor found the ORR cares for the child until they are eighteen years old. The children aging out while under the care of the ORR, have limited options to either find a sponsor or be admitted into a detention center to await court proceedings.

The increase of unaccompanied migrant children has become an important humanitarian crisis affecting vulnerable children. This is where social work becomes an essential part of delivering vital services. The role of a social worker is to work with other agencies to ensure that the best interest of each child is met and that their rights are protected at every part of the immigration process. The circumstances these children endure touch upon all areas of the American social work profession which include child welfare, health, and behavioral health, access to safe housing, social justice, and human rights.

It is recognized that Unaccompanied migrant children face many challenges when arriving in the United States and these challenges have been of critical importance for the social work profession. Unaccompanied migrant children face many unique challenges such as immigration policies that constrain and intervene in the capacity to assist this population. According to the National Immigrant Justice Center, the challenges that Unaccompanied migrant children face are no right to appear in their court proceedings with legal representation, the delay in the reunification process and breach of confidential information between the ORR and ICE to be used against them in the court hearings (CRS Report, 2021). The quantitative study surveyed social work students with the goal

of answering the following research questions: What is the perception, knowledge, and preparedness of BSW and MSW students on the unaccompanied migrant children population?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter consists of an examination of the research relevant to the challenges unaccompanied migrant children face, and the social work role in mental health services. The subsections will identify the size of the problem, and the role of social workers and explore mental health issues affecting unaccompanied migrant children. The subsections will examine the Trauma-Informed Approach and Attachment Theory.

Size of The Problem

The migration of unaccompanied migrant children to the United States is a critical issue that has continued to increase in the last decade. According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report released on September 1, 2021, the number of unaccompanied children's apprehensions in Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 numbered 16,067, and in FY 2014 reached a total of 68, 541 (CRS Report, 2021). Later, the numbers fluctuated from the new record of 76,020 in FY 2019 and then declined to 30, 557 in FY 2020. From January to October FY 2021, the apprehension of unaccompanied migrant children reached a record number of 112, 192. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) documents that in FY 2020 the percentage of

children that immigrated to the United States ranged from Age 0-12 with 16%, Age 13-14 with 12%, Age 15-16 with 37% and Age 17 with 35%. The demographic breakdown of unaccompanied children for the FY 2020 was 68% Males and 32% Females.

Many unaccompanied migrant children either arrive alone or with family members from whom they are later separated at the border. Due to the increase in violence, poverty, the pandemic, and hurricanes that affect the Central American Countries many immigrants have opted to seek asylum in the United States. Unaccompanied migrant children leave their countries because they are fleeing gangs, abuse, corruption, and in search of better opportunities (The UN Refugee Agency, 2020). Many of these unaccompanied migrant children mainly immigrate from the Northern Triangle countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras). There has been a decrease in Mexican children immigrating to the United States (Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015). It's important to note that border crossing and apprehensions began rising in the Spring of 2020 under President Trump's administration due to the spread of COVID-19 (American Immigration Council, 2022).

Due to the spread of COVID-19, the United States closed its border to all immigrants attempting to cross into the United States, under the public health authority provided by Title 42 of the U.S. Code. Under Title 42, immigrants crossing the border from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador were immediately sent back to Mexico without a deportation order, even if they were

seeking asylum. The unaccompanied migrant children from other countries were detained for a few days and later deported back to their country of origin. A total of 13,000 unaccompanied migrant children were deported under Title 42 until a federal judge declared the Trump Administration to stop the practice on November 18, 2020, because it was a violation of immigration law (IOM, 2021). The cause of the problem according to researchers stems from years of deterrence-based policies that have not produced any positive outcomes (IOM, 2021).

Mental Health

Unaccompanied migrant children experience traumatic events that affect their mental health, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (El-Awad et al., 2017). Furthermore, unaccompanied migrant children migrate to the United States due to various reasons. Some of the main reasons are due to fleeing gangs, war, persecution, and violence. Additionally, they are looking to reunited with family members, better opportunities, and safety (El-Awad et al., 2017). There are many barriers unaccompanied migrant children endure throughout their journey to the United States. At a young age, unaccompanied migrant children have witnessed crime and violence. These traumatic events affect the development of young children and can have a detrimental effect on their mental health. One of the most common mental health issues unaccompanied migrant children face once they arrive in the United

States is PTSD, and depression (Van Os et al. 2016). Another area that affects children's development is leaving or separating from their attachment figure (mother, father, grandparents, or guardians). Due to these unique experiences, and stressors, unaccompanied migrant children have difficulty adjusting to new environments which contributes to mental health and development issues.

Role of Social Work

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) asserts that social workers play an important role in helping unaccompanied migrant children (NASW, 2021). Social workers help to develop and advocate for policies that meet the needs of accompanied migrant children. Many of the children who migrate have been traumatized by the conditions in their country of origin, fleeing their homes and being separated from primary attachment figures. Through the various experiences, they endure from a young age, they develop mental health issues, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety (Kasper, 2021). Unaccompanied migrant children are one of the most vulnerable immigrant populations because they are susceptible to experiencing negative physical, and emotional treatment. They also experience harsh conditions in overcrowded Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) facilities where they are at times denied beds, sufficient nutrition, and medical and mental health care (Children's Equity Project, 2021). This type of treatment is equal to abuse and neglect of vulnerable children in the

United States. The harsh treatment of unaccompanied migrant children goes against what the social work profession values. The role of the social work profession is to address the humanitarian crisis at the United States border and advocate for the rights of unaccompanied migrant children. The increase of unaccompanied migrant children has become an important humanitarian challenge affecting vulnerable children. This is where social work becomes an essential part of delivering vital services. The role of a social worker is to collaborate with agencies to ensure that the best interest of each child is met and that their rights are protected at every part of the immigration process. The circumstances which these children endure touch upon all areas of the American social work profession which include child welfare, health, behavioral health, access to safe housing, social justice, and human rights.

Theory Guiding Conceptualization

In the social work field, social workers serving unaccompanied migrant children must understand the impact of trauma has had on them. Although each experience is different for every child, there are commonalities in their experiences that can help social workers provide trauma informed and culturally responsive care for children who have faced unique dangers, challenges, and losses. Having adequate knowledge on who unaccompanied migrant children are and what traumatic stressors they have experienced in their journey to and within the United States is important for social workers to better serve this population.

The theory used to guide this study is the trauma-informed theory. A trauma-informed approach acknowledges that both health care organizations and social workers need to have a complete overview of the clients past and present life (Harris & Falot, 2001; SAMHSA, 2014a). By organizations and social workers understanding the way that trauma effect their clients they can provide better service and interventions. Through a trauma informed framework, social workers can help clients to feel safe, build trust, gain control, and feel empowered (Knight, 2015; Morrison et al., 2015). Trauma-focused services begin with having social workers suited for trauma-informed work who can better help children recover from trauma. Furthermore, social workers must have knowledge about the types of traumas and barriers unaccompanied migrant children experienced. Lastly, social workers working with unaccompanied migrant children must be familiar with trauma informed approach and the barriers that this population faces to receive treatment.

Summary

The study explored the challenges unaccompanied migrant children face, social work role, and mental health and explain attachment, migration-related stress, and the theory guiding conceptualization. Unaccompanied migrant children have many interconnected reasons for embarking on the arduous journey of traveling to the United States. Many are escaping violent communities, crime, abusive relationships, poverty, and others hoping to rejoin their family in the United States. Unaccompanied migrant children continue to arrive at the

border without their parents or legal guardians seeking protection. The United States is legally obligated to ensure that these unaccompanied migrant children are safe and humanely processed. The harsh treatment of unaccompanied migrant children goes against what the social work profession values. The role of the social work profession is to address the humanitarian crisis at the United States border and advocate for the rights of unaccompanied migrant children.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

The intent of this research study was to build on CSUSB Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master Social Work (MSW) students' knowledge on the topic of unaccompanied migrant children. Additionally, analyze the general knowledge, preparedness, and perception of BSW and MSW students on the topic of the unaccompanied migrant children population. This chapter will provide detailed information on how this study will be conducted. This section will discuss the purpose of the study design, the sampling method, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

This study seeks to identify the perception, knowledge, and preparedness that social work students have of unaccompanied migrant children and in working with this population. The best study design for this project is a quantitative research design due to the manner of the data collection. This study seeks to analyze the data provided by BSW and MSW students through a questionnaire on their perception, knowledge, and preparedness for serving unaccompanied migrant children. To accurately determine where social work students currently stand on this topic, this study will be conducted as a quantitative study. For this

study, a questionnaire was utilized with a series of closed-ended questions and one open-ended question to gain a comprehensive insight into the topic of this research. The data will be collected from current BSW and MSW students attending a Southern California University.

The benefit of conducting a quantitative approach is that by utilizing a questionnaire that is self-administered we can reach a larger sample size through a wide range of mediums in which we can distribute the questionnaire. Also, this approach allows participants the flexibility to complete the questionnaire at their own pace and time. Utilizing a questionnaire allows participants to maintain anonymity, which will allow participants to feel comfortable and at ease and encourages them to record their honest answers. However, this approach also has its limitations. A limitation of this study was that when utilizing a questionnaire there is a possibility of participants not completing the questionnaire and or leaving questions unanswered which can affect the validity of the results of this study.

Sampling

This study utilized non-probability and convenience sampling. The participants include BSW and MSW students at Southern California University. The convenience sampling method was utilized based on the accessibility of students through email participation. Any student who was currently in a BSW and MSW program was eligible to participate in this study. This population was

chosen to focus on the perception, knowledge, and preparedness of social work students likely to work with unaccompanied migrant children in their field placements or after they graduate. This study seeks to shed light on the different levels of knowledge, experiences, and competency of BSW and MSW students.

Data Collection and Instruments

Quantitative data collection for this study was obtained using a self-administered questionnaire using the online survey software, Qualtrics. The questionnaire was developed by the researchers. The Qualtrics questionnaire was administered to participants via email where they had the chance to voluntarily complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of twenty close-ended questions and one open-ended question, collecting general demographics information, perception, knowledge, and preparedness. The general demographic information collected includes gender, age, ethnicity, student status, and college/university currently attending. The questionnaire utilized an array of close-ended and 4-point Likert scale assessing three areas of research. Some of the questions that were asked are as follows: *“Would you say that unaccompanied migrant children coming to the U.S is a problem?”*, *“How much knowledge do you have regarding community services that assist unaccompanied migrant children?”*, *“In your degree program(s), did you take any classes that included the topic of undocumented migrant children?”*.

The measure of these variables was collected by self-reported responses in the Qualtrics questionnaire. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected the questionnaire items were thoroughly reviewed on the terminology and wording used to ensure the participant's comprehension and professional language. The questionnaire was developed to reflect the perception, knowledge, and preparedness in working with unaccompanied migrant children. The questionnaire included twenty questions that assessed the 3 areas of research utilizing an array of close-ended, 4-point Likert scale and demographic questions.

Current social work students in BSW and MSW cohorts were sought to take part in this study. Students in the BSW and MSW cohort were requested via email to participate in the study. The Qualtrics questionnaire link was shared by researchers along with general information and informed consent. Participants anonymously complete questionnaires at their convenience through the Qualtrics platform. Qualtrics stored the participants' questionnaire responses.

Protection of Human Subjects

Before conducting the study and recruiting participants, the researchers first obtained approval to conduct the study from the California State University of San Bernardino, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB). Upon accessing the Qualtrics questionnaire link, participants were prompted to read and agree to the informed consent. The

informed consent portion of the questionnaire notified the participants that their participation is anonymous and that they can opt to stop the questionnaire at any time. Additionally, the informed consent provided general information about the study such as the purpose, description, duration, risks, benefits, results, and contact information. If the participant no longer wished to participate, they were able to decline the questionnaire or exit the link. To maintain anonymity, participant-identifying information was not collected throughout the study questionnaire. Once all data was collected, it was downloaded from the Qualtrics platform onto a user and password-protected computer. The study researchers were the only users who had access to the data collected and the data for this study will be destroyed after 3 years.

Data Analysis

This study is a quantitative study of the perception, knowledge, and preparedness of BSW and MSW student in serving unaccompanied migrant children. This study is a descriptive analysis of composite scores collected through a questionnaire. The generalizations of the findings will provide descriptive statistics of the perception, knowledge, and preparedness of BSW and MSW students in serving unaccompanied migrant children.

Data gathered through the Qualtrics questionnaire was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS). The statistical test used to analyze the data gathered will be a nonparametric correlation test. The

adapted survey from Religion and Politics Tracking Survey, conducted by the nonpartisan Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) in 2014 was utilized. The Religion and Politics Tracking Survey helped create a score for the level of competency and perception in working with unaccompanied migrant children. The relationship between the variables was analyzed using SPSS. In the SPSS software, the participants were given a number code for representation in the analysis and to protect their confidentiality. The participant codes were then used in the SPSS when inputting data. The data collected was sorted on the SPSS software into individual categories of participants' age, gender, ethnicity, and level of education.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the perception, knowledge, and preparedness of BSW and MSW students in working with unaccompanied migrant children. The questionnaire aimed to highlight the strengths or weaknesses in the curriculum, training, and field experience for social work students. Applying a quantitative method, non-probability, and convenience sampling will allow researchers to best facilitate the process.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter reports the findings collected from this study, which sought to understand the perception, knowledge, and preparedness of BSW and MSW students in serving unaccompanied migrant children through quantitative data. The researchers collected responses from 56 participants which included BSW and MSW students from a Southern California University through a Qualtrics questionnaire administered during the fall 2022 semester. The following sections of this chapter will address the demographics of the participants of this study as well as analyze and review the responses to the questionnaire questions.

Demographics

The first portion of this study focused on the demographics of the participants. Out of 56 participants in the study, 50 (89.3%) identified themselves as females, 5 (8.9%) identified themselves as males, and 1 (1.8%) identified themselves as other. These results can be viewed in Table 1 listed below. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 73 years old ($M=31$, $SD=11.21$). These results can be viewed in Figure 1 listed below. Participants were also asked to describe their race/ethnicity and results showed that 28 (50.0%) reported being Hispanic/Latinx, 16 (28.6%) reported being White/Caucasian, 7

(12.5%) reported being African American, 2 (3.6%) reported being Asian American, 1 (1.8%) reported prefer not to say, 2 (3.6%). These results can be seen below in Table 2 listed below. Results reported 'other' race/ethnicity not listed as 1 (1.8%) Half Caucasian/Mexican and 1 (1.8%) Multiracial. These results can be seen below in Table 3 listed below. The participants were then asked to check their current student status. The results show 45 (80.4%) MSW students and 11 (19.6%) BASW students. These results can be seen below in Table 4 listed below.

Table 1. Gender Demographic

Participants Gender Demographic

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	5	8.9%
Female	50	89.3%
Rather not say	1	1.8%

Figure 1. Participant Age

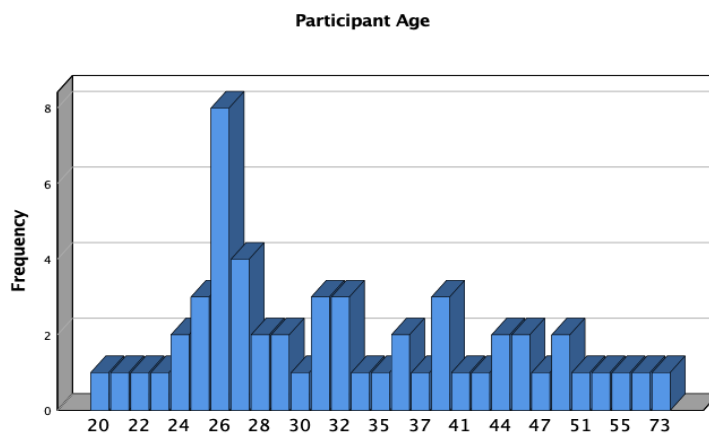


Table 2. Participants' Racial and Ethnic Demographic

Which of the following race/ethnicity do you identify with?

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Hispanic/Latinx	28	50.0%
White/Caucasian	16	28.6%
African American	7	12.5%
Asian American	2	3.6%
Prefer not to answer	1	1.8%
Other	2	3.6%

Table 3. Participants' Racial and Ethnic Demographic

Which of the following race/ethnicity do you identify with?

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
	54	96.4%
Half Caucasian/Half Mexican	1	1.8%
Multiracial	1	1.8%

Table 4. Current Student Status Demographic

What is your current student status?

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
BASW Student	11	19.6%
MSW Student	45	80.4%

Perception on Unaccompanied Migrant Children

Participants in this study were asked a series of questions regarding their perception of unaccompanied migrant children. Perception of BSW and MSW students on unaccompanied migrant children was asked in questions 5 through 9 of the questionnaires. Table 4 shows the series of questions that were asked to participants regarding their perception and the results obtained. The first question asked whether the participants agree or disagree that the U.S. should not allow unaccompanied migrant children to stay because it will encourage others to ignore the laws and increase illegal immigration. Results showed 34 (60.7%) participants strongly disagreed, 10 (17.9%) disagreed, 6 (10.7%) neither agree nor disagree, 4 (7.1%) agree, and 2 (3.6%) strongly agree. The second question on perception asked participants which following statement came closest to their views on what the U.S. should do about unaccompanied migrant children. 83.9% of participants believed the U.S. should offer shelter and support to unaccompanied migrant children while they begin the process of determining whether they should be deported or allowed to stay in the U.S. On the other hand, 1.8% of participants believed they should be deported immediately back to their home country and 14.3% of participants responded none of the above. The third question on perception asked the participants if they agree or disagree that unaccompanied migrant children coming to the U.S. is a problem. Of all the responses, 15 (26.32%) participants strongly disagreed, 15 (26.32%) disagreed, 9 (15.79%) neither agree nor

disagree, 16 (28.07 %) agree, and 2 (3.51%) strongly agree. The fourth question asked participants their perception on whether we should provide refuge and protection for all unaccompanied migrant children who come to the U.S. when they are facing serious danger in their home country. The majority of participants (71.4%) strongly agreed that we should provide refuge and protection to unaccompanied migrant children facing serious danger, while only (7.1%) neither agree nor disagree. The last question regarding perception asked if participants agree or disagree that while unaccompanied migrant children are waiting for their cases to be heard, they should be released to the care of relatives, host families, or churches rather than be detained by immigration authorities. The majority of participants (80.4%) strongly agreed that children should be released to the care of relatives, host families, or churches rather than be detained by immigration authorities, 6 (16.1%) somewhat agreed, 1 (1.8%) strongly disagreed, and 1 (1.8%) of the responses were counted as missing.

Table 5. Perception on Unaccompanied Migrant Children

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
The U.S. should NOT allow unaccompanied migrant children to stay because it will encourage others to ignore our laws and increase illegal immigration.	Strongly Disagree - 34	60.7
	Disagree - 10	17.9
	Neither agree nor disagree- 6	10.7
	Agree -4	7.1
	Strongly agree -2	3.6
Which statement comes closest to your views about what the U.S. should do about the unaccompanied migrant children? We should...	Offer shelter and support while beginning a process to determine whether they should be deported or allowed to stay in the U.S. – 47	83.9
	Deport them immediately back to their home countries – 1	1.8
	None of the above -8	1.8
Would you say that unaccompanied migrant children coming to the U.S is a problem?	Strongly Disagree - 15	26.32
	Disagree - 15	26.32
	Neither agree nor disagree- 9	15.79
	Agree - 16	28.07
	Strongly agree - 2	3.51
We should provide refuge and protection for all unaccompanied migrant children who come to the U.S. when they are facing serious danger in their home country.	Strongly Disagree - 0	0
	Disagree - 0	0
	Neither agree nor disagree- 4	7.1
	Agree -12	21.4
	Strongly agree – 40	71.4
While unaccompanied migrant children are waiting for their cases to be heard, they should be released to the care of relatives, host families, or churches rather than be detained by immigration authorities.	Strongly disagree - 1	1.8
	Somewhat disagree - 0	0
	Neither agree nor disagree- 0	0
	Somewhat Agree -9	16.1
	Strongly agree - 45	80.4
	Missing - 1	1.8

□

Knowledge In Serving Unaccompanied Migrant Children

Participants in this study were asked a series of questions regarding their knowledge of unaccompanied migrant children. Knowledge of BSW and MSW students on unaccompanied migrant children was asked in questions 10 through 14 of the questionnaire. Table 5 shows the series of questions that were asked to participants regarding their knowledge and the results obtained. The first question asked whether the participants have taken dedicated coursework in culturally responsive practices for unaccompanied migrant children from diverse cultural backgrounds. The majority of the participant, 46 (82.1%) responded that they have not taken coursework on culturally responsive practices for unaccompanied migrant children from diverse cultural backgrounds and 9 (16.1%) responded that they have. The second question on knowledge asked participants how much they know about community services that assist unaccompanied migrant children. Of all the responses, 35.7% responded to none at all, 37.5% knew a little, 23.2% knew a moderate amount, 1.8% knew a lot, and 1.8% of the responses were counted as missing. The third question asked the participants if they felt competent or incompetent in providing trauma-informed care/interventions to unaccompanied migrant children who have experienced trauma. Results showed that 5 (8.9%) participants felt extremely incompetent, 12 (21.4%) felt somewhat incompetent, 20 (35.7 %) responded with neither competent nor incompetent, 17 (30.4 %) felt somewhat competent, 1 (1.8%) felt extremely competent, and 1 (1.8%) of the

responses were counted as missing. The fourth question asked participants if they believe they need additional training to increase their knowledge in serving unaccompanied migrant children. The majority of participants 80.4% (45) strongly agreed that they need additional training to increase their knowledge in serving unaccompanied migrant children, while only 10.7% (6) somewhat agreed, 1.8% (1) neither agree nor disagree, 1.8% (1) somewhat disagreed, 1.8% (1) strongly disagree, and 3.6% (2) of the responses were counted as missing. The last question regarding knowledge asked participants if they know the roles that social workers play in working with unaccompanied migrant children. For this question, 51.8% of participants responded Yes, 44.6 % responded No, and 3.6% were recorded as missing.

Table 6. Knowledge In Serving Unaccompanied Migrant Children

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
I have taken dedicated coursework in culturally responsive practices for unaccompanied migrant children from diverse cultural backgrounds	Yes - 9	16.1
	No – 46	82.1
	Missing- 1	1.8
How much knowledge do you have regarding community services that assist unaccompanied migrant children?	None at all -20	35.7
	A little - 21	37.5
	A moderate amount - 13	23.2
	A lot - 1	1.8
	A great deal -0	0
	Missing- 1	1.8
I am competent in providing trauma informed care/interventions to unaccompanied migrant children who have experienced trauma.	Extremely competent - 5	8.9
	Somewhat incompetent -12	21.4
	Neither competent nor incompetent- 20	35.7
	Somewhat competent - 17	30.4
	Extremely incompetent- 1	1.8
	Missing- 1	1.8
I need additional training to increase my knowledge in serving unaccompanied migrant children.	Somewhat disagree - 1	1.8
	Strongly disagree - 1	1.8
	Neither agree nor disagree - 1	1.8
	Somewhat agree - 6	10.7
	Strongly agree - 45	80.4
	Missing -2	3.6
Do you know the roles that social workers play in working with unaccompanied migrant children?	Yes – 29	51.8
	No - 25	44.6
	Missing - 2	3.6

Preparedness In Serving Unaccompanied Migrant Children

In this study, participants were asked questions regarding their experience and competence to gain a better understanding of their preparedness in serving unaccompanied migrant children. The preparedness of BSW and MSW students in serving unaccompanied migrant children was asked in questions 15 through 19 of the questionnaire. Table 6 shows the series of questions that were asked to participants regarding their preparedness and the results obtained. The first question presented to participants regarding their preparedness asked if they have worked with unaccompanied migrant children. The majority of participants 87.9% responded yes, while only 8.9% of participants responded no, and 3.6% were recorded as missing. The second preparedness question asked participants how long they have worked with unaccompanied migrant children. For this question 48 (85.7%) responded that they have not worked with unaccompanied migrant children, 4 (7.1%) responded less than a year, 1 (1.8) responded 1-2 years, 1 (1.8) responded 3-5 years, and 3.6% were recorded as missing. The third question asked on preparedness asked if participants have taken any classes that included the topic of unaccompanied migrant children in their degree program. 67.9% of participants responded no while 28.6 % of participants responded yes. The remaining 3.6 % were recoded as missing for this question. The participants were also asked if they have served unaccompanied migrant children during their field placement. Results were as follows, 51 (91.1%) responded no, 3 (5.4%) responded yes, and 2 (3.6%)

responses were missing. The last question asked regarding preparedness if participants felt they were competent about serving unaccompanied migrant children. Results showed that 8 (14.3%) participants felt extremely incompetent, 23 (41.1%) felt somewhat incompetent, 13 (23.2 %) responded with neither competent nor incompetent, 8 (14.3 %) felt somewhat competent, 2 (3.6%) felt extremely competent, and 2 (3.6%) of the responses were counted as missing.

Table 7. Preparedness In Serving Unaccompanied Migrant Children

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Have you worked with unaccompanied migrant children?	Yes - 5	8.9
	No - 49	87.5
	Missing - 2	3.6
For how long have you worked with unaccompanied migrant children?	Have not worked- 48	85.7
	Less than one year - 4	7.1
	1-2 years - 1	1.8
	3-5 years - 1	1.8
	Missing- 2	3.6
In your degree program(s), did you take any classes that included the topic of unaccompanied migrant children?	Yes - 16	28.6
	No - 38	67.9
	Missing - 2	3.6
During my field placement, I served unaccompanied migrant children.	Yes - 16	5.4
	No - 38	91.1
	Missing - 2	3.6
I feel incompetent about serving unaccompanied migrant children.	Extremely incompetent - 8	14.3
	Somewhat incompetent - 23	41.1
	Neither competent nor incompetent-13	23.2
	Somewhat competent - 8	14.3
	Extremely competent - 2	3.6
	Missing - 2	3.6

Presentation of the Findings

A nonparametric correlations test was performed on the data to look at the relationships between averages as they relate to Likert Scale data. For example, researchers looked at the relationships between variables that they consider to be a kind of interval ratio such as participants' feelings about preparation, competence, and knowledge. The following are significant findings of the data collection.

The results showed that there is a moderate positive relationship between knowledge of community services that assist unaccompanied migrant children and the perceived level of competence in serving unaccompanied migrant children ($r=.383$, $p=.001$). This means that the more knowledge a participant reported having the more competent they reported feeling about working with the unaccompanied migrant children population. The two variables used to run the test were: *'How much knowledge do you have regarding community services that assist unaccompanied migrant children?'* and *'I feel incompetent about serving unaccompanied migrant children.'* Other tests completed were not significant, demonstrating no relationship between other variables tested.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the finding of the researcher's quantitative study that sought to examine the perception, knowledge, and preparedness of BSW and MSW students in serving unaccompanied migrant children. The results presented that there was a link between the knowledge of community services and the perceived level of competence within BSW and MSW participants.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study examined the perception, knowledge, and preparedness of BSW and MSW students in the unaccompanied migrant children population. This chapter will discuss the findings through the questionnaire and its implications for the social work profession. Furthermore, the authors discuss any strengths and limitations in this study and suggestions for any future studies on the topic of unaccompanied migrant children as well as the impact this information could have on social work practice and policy.

Discussion

This study sought to analyze the perception, knowledge, and preparedness of BSW and MSW students in working with the unaccompanied migrant children population. The literature suggests that social workers are playing an important role in understanding and addressing the needs of unaccompanied migrant children. Professional social workers must possess training in dealing with complex situations, understand and deliver trauma-informed interventions to help children cope with the various forms of trauma. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) recommendations illustrate, social workers have an important role to play, both in

helping unaccompanied migrant children directly and indirectly (NASW, 2014, p.9). Social workers can start by helping develop and advocate for policies that better meet the needs of unaccompanied migrant children. Furthermore, the NASW suggests enrolling in an accredited BSW or MSW program to develop the skills needed to better serve the unaccompanied migrant children's populations. According to the data collected in this study, on knowledge 82.1% responded that they have not taken coursework on culturally responsive practices for unaccompanied migrant children from diverse cultural backgrounds and 9 (16.1%) responded that they have. Additionally, 80.4% of participants strongly agreed that they need additional training to increase their knowledge in serving unaccompanied migrant children. It's important to note that newly graduated social workers are more likely to interact with unaccompanied migrant children due to the increased number of migrant children in social service agencies. There is a need for direct practice experiences such as partnerships with community organizations, social services agency programs, and colleges to increase field practicum placements for BSW and MSW students. This will ensure effective service delivery for unaccompanied migrant children and field experience for social work students.

Limitations and Strengths

The researchers encountered various limitations to the study. Due to the limited research regarding the topic of unaccompanied migrant children, the

researchers developed and adapted a questionnaire tool that best fits the topic. The researchers aimed to create a well-designed questionnaire tool that achieved the research objective, contained clear and balanced question framing. Furthermore, due to the time limit and lack of connection to neighboring universities, the researcher opted to keep the study local to BSW and MSW students at a specific university resulting in a smaller sample size. Another limitation identified was the use of the Qualtrics web-based software tools to distribute the questionnaire. This resulted in researchers having limited control over who responded to the questionnaire which led to a smaller BSW student sample size. Due to the nature of the questionnaire distribution researchers were not able to obtain participants' personal experiences in working with unaccompanied migrant children. After further analysis of the study, researchers concluded that a different data collection method such as the qualitative method would have been best suited to understanding participants' perception, knowledge, and preparedness. Similarly, a mixed methods approach of conducting interviews to understand participants' experiences and a questionnaire to gain insight on a larger scale would have been beneficial for this study.

Despite the various limitations of the study, the researchers concluded that there were some strengths. The strengths of the study were that the data collection was easily collected through the Qualtrics survey which made it convenient for the participant to access the questionnaire through mobile phones

and /or computers. Furthermore, the study had a good sample size, especially considering the limited time researchers had to collect data. Additionally, researchers provided an open-ended question that gave the participants the opportunity to include additional information and insight on the topic of unaccompanied migrant children. Lastly, there was a diverse collection of demographics among participants in age and ethnicity.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The results from this study helped identify gaps in knowledge and experience that BSW and MSW students lack in serving unaccompanied migrant children. The study found that students have little to no experience working with unaccompanied migrant children as well as having no dedicated coursework on this population. The gaps identified in this study imply that social work students have had no exposure to serving unaccompanied migrant children in either their curriculum or practicum in both the BSW and MSW programs at this university. In the social work profession, it is an ethical responsibility to be culturally competent and sensitive to better serve our clients. Without the proper knowledge and experience that should be provided in BSW and MSW programs, students feel unprepared to work with unique populations such as the unaccompanied migrant children population.

The main recommendation from our findings is that there is a need for social work programs to enhance the education and training being provided to

social work students by implementing a curriculum on working and providing services for unaccompanied migrant children in our community. Participants were asked at the end of the questionnaire if they had any additional information they would like to share about working with unaccompanied migrant children and a participant shared that the topic of unaccompanied migrant children “should be a topic in child welfare and social policy”. We recommend establishing dedicated coursework such as an elective course in which the main topic surrounds immigration and subtopics could be on unaccompanied migrant children, asylum seekers, policies, etc. Additionally, social work programs should seek partnerships with agencies that service unaccompanied migrant children to be able to provide and offer students with field placement opportunities in hopes to increase their experience in serving this population. Ultimately, it would be beneficial to implement these recommendations into the social work curriculum as CSUSB and its students are geographically surrounded by predominantly migrant communities and have a larger likelihood to provide services to unaccompanied migrant children. Making these changes can enhance the knowledge and preparedness of future social workers in providing the best quality services to this unique population.

In relation to social work policy, we recommend that social work students engage in advocacy work. The majority of participants in the study responded that unaccompanied migrant children coming to the U.S. should be offered support, refuge, and protection. Therefore, to actively work towards

providing this, social workers can begin by engaging in policy advocacy. According to the NASW, “Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for change in policy and legislation to improve social conditions to meet basic human needs and promote social justice” (NASW’s Code of Ethics, 2017). For unaccompanied migrant children, immigration laws and procedures can often affect their welfare and service delivery. Social workers are in a position to be able to provide support in navigating the immigration system and can further aid this population by advocating for policy change at a macro level. A few recommendations for social work students interested in getting involved in advocacy work and policy would be to familiarize themselves with immigration terminology, potential relief options, new policies, and available resources. By doing so they can help ensure the permanency, safety, and well-being of unaccompanied migrant children.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to provide insight into the general perception, knowledge, and preparedness of BSW and MSW students at Southern California University in serving unaccompanied migrant children. Our research suggests that there is a lack of exposure that students are receiving in their social work programs at this university causing a lack of knowledge and preparedness in serving this population. The research suggests that dedicated coursework and practicum opportunities specifically on unaccompanied migrant

children be implemented in the social work curriculum for both BSW and MSW programs at this university. By doing so students will graduate feeling competent in providing culturally responsive services to this vulnerable population.

Unaccompanied minors enter the U.S. daily and social workers often are their only advocates. Recommendations made by the researchers encourage social work students to engage in advocacy by becoming well-versed in policies, immigration terminology, and relief options/resources to be able to provide this population with the best quality services and improve their well-being.

Researchers recommend that further research is needed to evaluate the curriculum in social work programs at this and neighboring universities.

APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL EMAIL



October 25, 2022

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2022-306

Carolyn McAllister Estela Flores Portillo, Miriam Flores Portillo
CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
[San Bernardino, California 92407](#)

Dear Carolyn McAllister Estela Flores Portillo, Miriam Flores Portillo:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Social Work Students Perception, Knowledge, and Preparedness In Serving Unaccompanied Migrant Children " 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.

- **Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.**
- **Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.**
- **Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.**
- **Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.**

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2022-306 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive from participants and/or others related to your research may be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

King-To Yeung

King-To Yeung, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to identify the perception, knowledge, and preparedness of social work students in serving unaccompanied migrant children in Southern California. The study is being conducted by Estela Flores Portillo and Miriam Flores Portillo, Master of Social Work Student's at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study will be supervised by Dr. Carolyn McAllister, Department Chair Professor and Director in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to answer the following research question: What is the perception, knowledge, and preparedness of BSW and MSW students on serving the unaccompanied migrant children population?

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked 16 questions about their current experience that have contributed to their perception, knowledge, and preparedness in working with the unaccompanied migrant children population.

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

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will remain confidential and remain anonymous. Participants will complete the survey online through online software, Qualtrics and any information collected will be redacted to maintain anonymity. All the data gathered will be stored in a locked, password protected computer.

DURATION: It will take 10 to 20 minutes to complete the survey.

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

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. However, findings from the study will contribute to our knowledge in this area of research.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Carolyn McAllister through email at cmcallis@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 2023.

APPENDIX C
UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN QUESTIONNAIRE

Unaccompanied Migrant Children Questionnaire

Q1. Select your gender (check all that apply)

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Rather not say

Q2. What is your age?

Input response ____

Q3. Which of the following race/ethnicity do you identify with? (Check all that apply)

- Hispanic/LatinX
- White/Caucasian
- African American
- Native American
- Asian American
- Prefer not to answer
- Other _____

Q4. What is your current student status?

- BASW Student
- MSW Student

Q5. The U.S. should NOT allow unaccompanied migrant children to stay because it will encourage others to ignore our laws and increase illegal immigration.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q6. Which statement comes closest to your views about what the U.S. should do about the unaccompanied migrant children? We should...

- Offer shelter and support while beginning a process to determine whether they should be deported or allowed to stay in the U.S.
- Deport them immediately back to their home countries
- None of these

Q7. Would you say that unaccompanied migrant children coming to the U.S is a problem?

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q8. We should provide refuge and protection for all unaccompanied migrant children who come to the U.S. when they are facing serious danger in their home country.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q9. While unaccompanied migrant children are waiting for their cases to be heard, they should be released to the care of relatives, host families, or churches rather than be detained by immigration authorities.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q10. I have taken dedicated coursework in culturally responsive practices for unaccompanied migrant children from diverse cultural backgrounds

- Yes
- No

Q11. How much knowledge do you have regarding community services that assist unaccompanied migrant children?

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

Q12. I am competent in providing trauma-informed care/interventions to unaccompanied migrant children who have experienced trauma

- Extremely incompetent
- Somewhat incompetent
- Neither competent nor incompetent
- Somewhat competent
- Extremely competent

Q13. I need additional training to increase my knowledge in serving unaccompanied migrant children.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q14. Do you know the roles that social workers play in working with unaccompanied migrant children?

- Yes
- No

Q15. Have you worked with unaccompanied migrant children?

- Yes
- No

Q16. For how long have you worked with unaccompanied migrant children?

- Have not worked
- Less than one year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6 or more years

Q17. In your degree program(s), did you take any classes that included the topic of unaccompanied migrant children?

- Yes
- No

Q18. During my field placement, I served unaccompanied migrant children.

- Yes
- No

Q19. I feel incompetent about serving unaccompanied migrant children

- Extremely incompetent
- Somewhat incompetent
- Neither competent nor incompetent
- Somewhat competent
- Extremely competent

Q20. Do you have any additional information you would like to share about working with unaccompanied migrant children?

Some questions from this questionnaire were partially adapted from the Religion and Politics Tracking Survey, conducted by the nonpartisan Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) in 2014

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

All chapters were completed together by research partners Estela Flores Portillo and Miriam Flores Portillo. The research partners collaborated in submitting IRB applications, generating informed consent, and questionnaires for participants. The research partners divided the chapters evenly throughout.