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SOCIAL WORK'S ROLE IN ADDRESSING POLICE OPPRESSION: SOCIAL WORKERS' PERSPECTIVES

Jess Husband
California State University - San Bernardino

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SOCIAL WORKERS' PERSPECTIVES

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A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

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by

Jess Husband

May 2023

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Approved by:

Caroline Lim, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Yawen Li, Ph.D., Research Coordinator

ABSTRACT

Background: Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) and other marginalized identities experience constant oppression by the systems of policing. Based on the NASW Code of Ethics, social workers have an ethical responsibility to challenge social injustices. Because of the interactions between the two professions, social workers are in a unique position to engage in this social justice issue. **Objective**: This research study explored social workers' perceptions of their ethical responsibilities in responding to oppressive policing. **Methods**: This concurrent nested mixed-method study gathered data from 12 participants. Participants were social workers within the state of Texas, recruited through purposive sampling methods. Each participant completed a questionnaire and individual interview. Questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data on participants' professional demographics, relationship with law enforcement, and view of the NASW Code of Ethics. Interviews were used to gather qualitative data on participants' perceptions of social workers' ethical responsibilities as well as their perceptions of the relationship between law enforcement and marginalized populations, social workers' role in policing, the alignment between social work and policing values, ways to address oppressive policing, the social work profession's response to social movements targeting oppressive policing, and ways to engage with social movements targeting policing. Quantitative data were analyzed using coding methods to run both univariate and bivariate analyses. Qualitative data were analyzed using a bottom-

up approach to thematic analysis by applying a combination of grammatical and elemental coding methods. *Findings:* The study sample featured 12 Texas social workers. Eight of the participants were licensed social workers (66.7%). Most participants were in the beginning of their social work career, having five or less years of experience (66.7%). Participants came from various fields of practice. All participants shared the perception that social workers have an ethical responsibility to challenge police oppression; however, perceptions of professional ethical responsibilities varied across five main categories of general responsibilities as members of the social work profession (91.7%), responsibilities expressed by the NASW Code of Ethics (50%), responsibilities to engage in macro practice (33.3%), responsibilities in engaging with law enforcement (25%), and responsibilities to engage in micro practice (16.7%). *Conclusion:* While this finding supports the idea that the social work profession does have an ethical responsibility to challenge social injustices within policing, it further demonstrates that individual social workers hold different perceptions as to what ethical engagement with the issue of oppressive policing looks like for the social work profession. This finding revealed a lack of consensus among social workers regarding best practice, demonstrating a need for greater direction from the NASW, improvement in social work education regarding ethics and systemic oppression, and greater emphasis on both implementing interventions that address oppressive policing practices as well as exploring ways that social workers can advocate for alternatives to policing.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND

Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction and overview of the foundations of this research on social workers' perceptions of their ethical responsibilities in responding to oppressive policing. A general background of the research topic is provided to establish the importance of this study. A brief history of policing is described along with a discussion of the ways that policing is used to oppress marginalized populations. The intersections of social work with policing and social justice issues is also examined. Lastly, a summary of this topic including gaps in current knowledge regarding the social work profession's role in challenging police oppression is explored to lay the foundation of this research study.

Background

Throughout American history, policing has served as a tool of oppression to maintain the social structure, often relying on acts of violence to do so. In 2021, there were only 15 days in which someone was not killed by American police (Mapping Police Violence, 2021). On many of the other days, up to seven lives were taken. These rates have remained staggeringly similar since 2013, as police officers have killed over 1,000 people each year for the past seven years

(Mapping Police Violence, 2021). However, police violence is not indiscriminate. The use of force by police is a leading cause of death for young men of color, specifically Black men, who have a one in 1,000 chance of being killed by a police officer (Edwards et al., 2019). A study found that Black people were 3.23 times more likely to be killed in police encounters than their white counterparts, which can be compared to Latinx people who were only 1.05 times more likely to be killed than a white individual (Schwartz & Jahn, 2020). Also at higher risk of being the targets of police misconduct are the disabled, LGBTQIA+, homeless individuals, those with mental illnesses, and women.

However, killings are only one of the ways in which police oppress vulnerable groups of people. Oppressive policing, or police oppression, can be broadly defined to include police brutality, unjustified killings, and the over policing of marginalized communities resulting in vulnerable populations being disproportionately targeted, arrested, victimized, and killed by acts of police misconduct. Police oppression has significant impacts on Black communities, as well as other marginalized communities, that detrimentally affects individuals' physical and mental health, increases psychological stress, contributes to economic and financial strain, and drives the systemic disempowerment of marginalized communities (Alang et al., 2017).

This study was developed upon two established facts. The first is that Black people and other marginalized identities experience oppression at the hands of police officers and through the systems of policing. The second fact is

that social workers must challenge social injustices (The National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021). According to the NASW Code of Ethics (2021), "social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people" (para. 20). Recognizing these two facts suggests that social workers have an ethical responsibility to pursue social change that would address the police oppression experienced by vulnerable and oppressed people.

However, there are vast limitations in terms of determining the ways in which social workers are to fulfill their ethical responsibility. While police oppression has been a constant experience for people of color and other marginalized communities throughout American history, recognizing and acknowledging this form of oppression is newly salient for many people with privilege as well as those who are in unique positions to interact with and influence the systems of U.S. policing, such as social workers. The social work profession has been disjointed in its engagement in the social issue of oppressive policing and almost as divisive in its opinions of police as the country as a whole. If social workers are called to challenge social injustices, then what is the social work profession's place in the current fight against police violence and oppression?

A Brief History of Policing

Modern policing has its roots in slave patrols created to capture and kill enslaved African people who resisted slavery or attempted to escape (Hutto &

Green, 2016). From these slave patrols, official police agencies emerged as institutional structures designed to strengthen the ruling class of slave owners and capitalists who are now represented by the predominantly white, socially elite. After slavery was abolished, new forms of oppressing and exploiting Black people were established (Alexander 2020). Jim Crow laws quickly replaced the direct enslavement of Black people and instead used police officers to enforce strategic legislation to target and arrest Black people. Similarly, the prison industrial complex (PIC) was soon developed and became a legal way for the ruling class to imprison and exploit labor from Black people (Alexander, 2020). Due to the scope of this literature review and research study, the PIC will not be discussed further than acknowledging that police play an essential role in which groups of people are imprisoned. Through slavery, Jim Crow, and the rise of mass incarceration, modern policing took shape and police officers remained the predominant tool of oppression.

Throughout its history, police have been used to maintain society's hierarchy, ultimately serving the needs of dominant society first and protecting the powerless only when it aligns with the desires of those in power (Vitale, 2018). The war on drugs initiated in the 1970s is another significant contributor to police oppression of people of color (Kamalu, 2016). Due to the politically-driven stereotyping of minorities as the primary drug offenders, law enforcement was again used to systematically round up people of color, much like during the times of slave patrols and Jim Crow laws. According to Williams (2015), police enforce

the law unevenly, paying a disproportionate amount of attention to poor people, people of color, and others who are considered to be at the bottom of the social pyramid. These same people are also most often the victims when police violate the law. However, as long as the police act to protect the interests of those in power by defending the status quo and promoting the existing systems in American society, their misconduct and violence will be largely overlooked (Williams, 2015).

From colonial times to present day, police officers have been one of the main tools used to maintain structural inequalities, particularly between white people and people of color (Edwards et al., 2019). Today, police are most clearly revealed as oppressive in their militaristic responses to social movements led by the most marginalized. Police regularly use rubber bullets and tear gas to beat down people protesting after a police officer has taken yet another life (Purnell, 2021). Although portrayed to the public as providing safety and protection, the primary existence of police is still to strictly control the behaviors of those whom the systems of exploitation rely upon (Vitale, 2018). This purpose is also demonstrated in the way that the push to bring police into schools has resulted in bolstering the school to prison pipeline experienced by Black and Brown children – particularly Black boys (Alexander, 2020). Despite any good intentions that individual police officers might have, the modern systems of policing have been molded specifically to ensure that the poor, socially marginalized, and nonwhite

continue to experience the inequality and injustices that allow America's social hierarchy to stand (Vitale, 2018).

<u>Oppressive Policing of Black Communities</u>

While current evidence demonstrates that police in the U.S. kill significantly more people than police in any other developed democracy, general data conducted on the prevalence of police violence and abuse is greatly lacking from official government databases, and research on police misconduct is limited (Edwards et al., 2019). However, one study that analyzed a sample of 812 fatalities resulting from police officers' use of lethal force between the years 2009 to 2012 found that victims were disproportionately Black and had a 2.8 times higher fatality rate than that of their white counterparts while also being more likely to be unarmed (DeGue et al., 2016). This study's findings were mirrored by a non-government affiliated database which compiled police killings over the past seven years. The information collected showed that Black people are three times more likely to be killed by police than their white counterparts, while also being 1.3 times more likely to be unarmed (Mapping Police Violence, 2021). Additionally, many of these deaths were a tragic end to what should have been a non-violent police encounter, such as the 113 people who were killed after being pulled over for a traffic violation (Mapping Police Violence, 2021).

Killings are only one of the ways in which policing oppresses Black communities. The disproportionate impact of police brutality on people of color was demonstrated by Alang (2020) in a study that found Black people worry

about police brutality at five times the rate of white people. Racial profiling by police, which is the disproportionate targeting of racial minorities for traffic stops, searches, arrests, detention, and charges, is yet another way in which policing operates to disadvantage and oppress people of color (Kamalu, 2016). Due to the development of social constructions over time, law enforcement has gained the support of the Supreme Court and legislation which subtly allows for police officers to identify a person of color as being a greater risk of criminal activity than a white person. This results in greater patrolling of Black and brown communities and the targeting of people of color for minor infractions as long as racial bias is not explicitly stated as the reason for suspicion (Kamalu, 2016). Recent surveys have found that 84% of Black Americans and 63% of white Americans believe that Black people are treated less fairly by police, which was supported by the responses showing that Black people are five times more likely than white people to say that they have been unfairly stopped by police (Desilver, et al., 2020).

These ways in which police oppress people of color also have direct impacts on physical health, mental health and psychological stress, racist public reactions, economic and financial strain, and the systematic disempowerment of marginalized communities (Alang et al., 2017). Brutality at the hands of police officers is a very real way in which policing impacts the physical health of people of color; however, not all instances of police encounters result in immediate death. While there has been insufficient investigation into the actual prevalence

of nonlethal police violence against people of color while in custody, there have been numerous documented cases in which Black people have experienced physical maltreatment while in police custody (Alang et al., 2017). Policing also has significant mental, emotional, and physiological impacts (Alang et al., 2017). Whether from trying to avoid the police, exposure to incidents of police brutality, or personal police encounters, policing is a significant source of stress and contributing factor to mental health issues such as depression for many people of color (Alang, 2020). Lastly, police oppression causes economic and financial strain and is a constant reminder of the historic and present experiences of racism in America (Alang et al., 2017). Both physical injuries and mental health concerns that are caused by policing have a detrimental impact on productivity and the economy of Black communities.

Racist reactions from the public often stem from the way in which the dominant group in society uplifts police as an honorable American institution. Prominent examples of these reactions can be found in the way that Black people are often forced to defend victims of police violence by proving that their death was unjustified and the ways in which protests and calls for police reform are met with scrutiny by the government, media, law enforcement, and other largely white institutions (Alang et al., 2017). The underwhelming reaction of most white people to the police brutality and killings of Black people has a detrimental impact by invalidating the humanity and basic human rights of people of color in America. Additionally, the lack of accountability of police officers is

overwhelming and holds great significance in the perpetuation of racism.

Between 2013 and 2020, 98.3% of killings by police resulted in no officers being

charged with a crime (Mapping Police Violence, 2021). This lack of accountability

can create feelings of hopelessness and serves as a way of disempowering

Black communities (Alang et al., 2017).

<u>Oppressive Policing of Other Marginalized Groups</u>

      Along with having an extensive history of oppressing Black people,

policing also has a history of oppressing other marginalized identities in order to

preserve the status quo and uphold those in power. While this research focuses

specifically on the police oppression of Black people, the researcher recognizes

that police are used to oppress other marginalized individuals as well and that

social workers have an ethical responsibility to challenge the oppression of all

people. Therefore, this literature review will briefly discuss the oppressive

policing of the Disabled and those with mental illnesses, the LGBTQIA

community, homeless individuals, and women.

      <u>Individuals With Mental Illnesses And The Disabled Community.</u> In 2021,

97 of the people killed by police had interacted with police officers due to a

mental health or welfare check (Mapping Police Violence, 2021). Individuals with

severe mental illnesses are around 16 times more likely than those without a

mental illness to be killed during a police encounter, demonstrating an alarming

lean towards violence rather than de-escalation (Myers, 2017). Attention has also

been called to acknowledge that Disabled people are involved in a significant

number of police use-of-force incidents and are overrepresented in rates of police killings (Morgan, 2021). Despite the lack of comprehensive data collected on the Disabled community and police relations, it is estimated that around 50% of people killed by police in the United States are disabled (Thompson, 2021). A major issue that the Disabled community has identified is the demand for immediate compliance before law enforcement has fully assessed the situation (Thompson, 2021). This prioritization of compliance often interferes with police officers' ability to recognize when an individual has a disability that inhibits their ability to comply. This results in traumatic and deadly consequences for the Disabled individual as police respond to the perceived noncompliance with the use of excessive force, unjustified arrest, or unnecessarily using pepper spray and tasers (Thompson, 2021).

The LGBTQIA Community. The LGBTQIA community has a long history of police brutality and oppression. For much of American history, it was illegal to be gay or transgender and police officers were the ones called upon to enforce the anti-LGBTQIA laws and maintain the heteronormativity of society. Police would physically assault and harass patrons at queer bars, patrol known gay neighborhoods waiting for an opportunity to arrest a couple for engaging in 'gay activity,' and even carry out sting operations pretending to be gay in order to entrap someone in admitting to being queer (Eckhouse & Saxen, 2017). The Stonewall Riots, which are considered to be the start of the modern-day

LGBTQIA rights movement, began in response to violent police raids against queer people existing in known queer establishments.

While police relations with the LGBTQIA community have improved over recent years as they have obtained more rights and protections under the law, queer people still experience a significant amount of police oppression. Research specifically looking at police interaction with the LGBTQIA community is scarce; however, the research that has been conducted has shown that LGBTQIA individuals largely have poor perceptions of police, have personal experiences of police harassment and misconduct, and have experienced problematic police responses to incidences of intimate partner violence and hate crimes (Shields, 2021). In 2015, a survey found that 58% of transgender respondents reported experiencing police violence, such as verbal harassment, physical and sexual assault, consistent misgendering, and being forced to perform sexual acts in exchange for not being arrested (Pride Legal, 2021). Likely as a result of the mistreatment carried out by policing, around 50% of the transgender respondents surveyed stated that they are uncomfortable contacting police, even in an emergency situation (Pride Legal, 2021).

The Homeless Population. The homeless population is another marginalized community vulnerable to oppressive acts of policing that is difficult to collect accurate data on. There have been numerous reports of police using unjustified or excessive force against a homeless person, some of which indicate that the individual being homeless was the factor contributing to their

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victimization (Zakrison et al., 2004). People who are homeless often experience oppressive policing in seemingly non-violent ways, often through the creation of laws that exist to control and perpetuate those living in poverty and criminalize behaviors associated with being homeless (Vitale, 2018). A significant impact that police oppression has on the homeless population is lowering their trust in police and willingness to seek help or assistance from police officers (Zakrison et al., 2004).

Women. Although highly underreported and often intertwined with other marginalized identities, women are yet another target of police violence and oppression. Policing used to support the patriarchal society is demonstrated in both the past and present police response to family violence and assisting survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault (Buzawa, 2012). While women are not the only victims of domestic and sexual violence, women make up a significant portion of domestic violence and sexual assault survivors. There is also great controversy regarding the percentage of police officers who are the actual perpetrators of domestic abuse as it is a difficult topic to attempt to survey police officers and their families on. However, older studies indicate that 28-40% of police officers abuse their spouses, although it is likely that any reports against police officers would underestimate the true size of the issue (Klugman, 2020). Additionally, the Cato Institute's National Police Misconduct Reporting Project (2010) found 618 police officers were involved in sexual misconduct complaints

in the year 2010 alone. Of that number, 354 were accused of engaging in forced, non-consensual sexual activity (Cato Institute, 2010).

The criminalization and regulation of sex work also demonstrates how policing is used to oppress women (Vitale, 2018). While all sex workers are not women, women make up the vast majority of both groups. Policing does little to eradicate prostitution or protect women from sex trafficking. To the contrary, policing actually strengthens pimps and traffickers ability to abuse women, as sex workers face extreme barriers in obtaining help when they've been raped, assaulted, or victimized (Vitale, 2018).

Intersectionality Within Minority Groups. In recognizing that policing is a tool to maintain all social inequalities, it would be remise to not acknowledge how intersectionality influences who is viewed as a greater target. A large number of the people of color who are killed by police were Disabled or had a mental health condition. Queer people experience high rates of police misconduct, but being a Black transwoman places one at a higher risk of violence. The lower class and homeless are oppressed by police, and often even more so if they are also Black, indigenous, and persons of color (BIPOC). Police mistreat women survivors of domestic violence, even more so if they are BIPOC. Police refuse sex workers protection, even more so if they are Black or transgender. This is why, while this study mainly focuses on the racial injustices perpetuated by policing, it also examines the injustices policing perpetuates on other

marginalized communities and the intersectionality that exists within each of these populations.

Social Work Intersections with Policing and Social Justice Issues

      The social work profession is deeply intertwined with the issue of police oppression because of the profession's connection to social justice, law enforcement, and marginalized communities. Social justice is one of the seven core values of the social work profession. Social work attempts to align itself with social justice issues and urges social work professionals to actively engage in challenging injustices alongside of, and on behalf of, vulnerable and marginalized people (NASW, 2017). Social workers also interact with police in a variety of different settings, for a variety of different reasons, and to varying levels of interaction. Additionally, most social workers who do not directly cross paths with law enforcement work with clients who are impacted by unjust policing. Police are often the first responders to situations in which social workers are a key part of intervention services such as domestic violence, homelessness, mental health crises, or substance use issues (Wilson & Wilson, 2020). Some social service agencies have even developed partnerships with local law enforcement in order to collaborate on shared community issues. In this way, social workers are in a unique position to engage with police and challenge the social injustices perpetuated by policing.

Summary

Despite the explicit racial oppression being carried out by policing, the social work profession, as a whole, has remained relatively passive. Performative statements about racial justice and politically neutral acknowledgements of how some police oppress Black people, and other marginalized communities, have demonstrated the immense controversy among social workers regarding social work's ethical responsibilities in challenging the social injustices perpetuated by police. If social workers are called to challenge social injustices, then it is essential for social work to take an active role in combatting oppressive policing (McCoy, 2020). Additionally, it is also important to consider the unique position that social workers are in, as many fields of social work have direct interactions and partnerships with law enforcement.

The purpose of this research study in developing an understanding of social workers' perceptions about social work's ethical responsibilities in addressing police oppression is to fill the gaps by beginning to develop consensus around strategies that will challenge and eradicate the injustices carried out by police while adhering to the NASW (2017) Code of Ethics that social workers are urged to embody. Recognizing that police oppression is experienced by a vast number of marginalized individuals and communities, while disproportionately targeting people of color, demonstrates the importance of this type of research. Policing has, and continues to be, a tool of social injustice wielded by the dominant in society to maintain a racial, patriarchal,

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ableist, and classist hierarchy. If social workers are called to challenge social injustices, then the social work profession needs to establish a clear understanding of its place in the current fight against police violence and oppression.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief literature review on social movements targeting unjust policing and social work's response to these movements. The research focus is described along with why this particular area of research is important and what the researcher hoped to discover by studying social workers' roles in addressing policing as a form of oppression. Critical race theory is explained as the theoretical orientation that provided an initial understanding of the problem focus for this study. Next, the post positivist paradigm is introduced along with why this specific paradigm was chosen to guide this research. This chapter also covers the significance of the study as well as potential contributions of this research to both macro and micro social work. Lastly, a summary and review of the information presented serves as the conclusion of chapter two.

Literature Review

There have been several prominent uprisings and social movements that have gained significant attention throughout American history. While the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s is historically recognized as being a turning point for racial progress in America, this perspective is far from reality (Sunstein, 1995). Since then, institutional racism has become less explicit but

has continued to be just as pervasive within the United States. The 1992 Los Angeles riots in response to the police beating of Rodney King, the year-long Ferguson unrest in response to the shooting of Michael Brown, and the George Floyd protests that were sparked by the filmed murder of George Floyd in June of 2020 are all significant and long-lasting social justice protests against police oppression.

The Black Lives Matter movement is perhaps the most organized and successful, currently active, social movement that has risen up to address the police oppression of people of color. Black Lives Matter (BLM) was established in 2013 after the man who murdered Trayvon Martin was acquitted. The mission of this social justice organization is to "eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes" (Black Lives Matter, 2021). Over the past several years, BLM has had an impressive influence on America, although there has also been significant backlash against the movement due to the attention it has brought to the violence and racial disparities in policing.

The slogans "Defund the Police" and "Police Abolition" are both connected to BLM as well as separate ideas regarding how to reduce oppressive acts of policing. Defund the Police, which is often chanted at BLM protests, refers to the idea that law enforcement funding should be reduced and reallocated to other non-policing community services that are better able to provide needed services, such as mental health crisis units, drug and alcohol rehabs, and community

shelters (Ray, 2020). The belief behind defunding the police is that, by reducing

police involvement in non-violent calls and enhancing community services, police

are less likely to cause harm since they will have less involvement in situations

outside their scope of practice (Ray, 2020). Police abolition is the idea that

society can be working towards a reality in which policing is obsolete (Purnell,

2021). This concept is based on the belief that there are more effective, safe, and

just ways to address the root causes of why we believe that we need police.

Police abolition is a long-term goal but it requires the present acknowledgement

that the systems of policing cannot be reformed because they are functioning

exactly as designed (Purnell, 2021).

Social Workers' Response to Current Social Movements

As the NASW Code of Ethics (2021) urges, social workers are called to

challenge social injustices and respect the inherent dignity and worth of a human

being. However, social workers have passively followed several steps behind

these social movements rather than taking an active role in challenging

oppressive policing. The most recent resurgence of the BLM movement was

received by the NASW with numerous statements of solidarity, coming from the

NASW as a whole as well as individual state chapters. The NASW Texas

Chapter (NASW/TX) issued a statement of support for BLM, called out the need

for action from its social work members, and held an open forum for members to

discuss the issue of racism and its impact on social workers, the NASW, and the

individuals and communities they serve (Francis, 2020). A statement issued by

Dr. Bowie, a former NASW-CA president, stated that social workers must address the injustices in policing by calling for police reform that asks for changes in policing tactics, civilian oversight boards to investigate complaints against police officers, more community policing and more officers living in the communities they police, the demilitarization of police departments, and the use of restorative justice approaches when possible (Bowie, 2020). In recent years, the NASW has become clear that social workers need to be actively standing against the racial injustices carried out by policing. However, it is less clear as to what exactly social workers should be doing or how they should be using their positions to challenge these social injustices perpetuated by police.

With the recent attention the movements calling for defunding the police and police abolition have obtained, social workers are left in a difficult position to navigate the relationships and interactions the profession has with law enforcement while also taking a stance against social injustices. Disagreements regarding how social workers should show up in the fight against police oppression are rampant throughout the profession. While it is essential to recognize that individual social workers have actively embodied the NASW (2017) principle to challenge social injustices, there has yet to be a collective or in-depth exploration of how social workers can best use their position in the systems involved in policing to pursue social justice for all vulnerable and marginalized communities targeted by oppressive policing.

Research Focus and Question

This research explored social workers' workers' perceptions of their ethical responsibilities in responding to oppressive policing. Oppressive policing, or police oppression, can be broadly defined to include police brutality, unjustified killings, and the over policing of marginalized communities resulting in vulnerable populations being disproportionately targeted, arrested, and victimized by acts of police misconduct. Although policing has been used to oppress other marginalized identities such as the LGBTQIA+, Disabled, and homeless communities, as well as women and those with mental illnesses, this study mainly focused on racial oppression perpetuated by policing. However, it was also important to acknowledge the intersectionality of these identities.

The main focus of this research was to gain a better understanding of the social work profession's role in the current fight against police violence and oppression. In order to do that, this study pursued social workers' perceptions of three research questions. First, what are social workers' perceptions of the relationship between law enforcement and marginalized populations? Second, what are social workers' views on the social work profession's current roles in policing, response to oppressive policing, and practical ways social workers can address systemic oppression? Third, what are social workers' perceptions of their ethical responsibilities regarding working with law enforcement, engaging with current social movements targeting police oppression, and addressing the systemic oppression of marginalized populations perpetuated by policing.

Theoretical Orientation

In the post positivist paradigm, research is not guided by a theoretical orientation as the goal is to develop an inductive understanding of the problem focus (Morris, 2014). At the same time, the researcher must be aware of theories that are relevant to the study's focus, as these may need to be considered later on as the understanding of the problem focus evolves. Therefore, while this study began with the discussion of a theoretical orientation relevant to understanding the research focus, it was used to help develop an understanding of the problem rather than as a guiding framework (Morris, 2014). To better understand the problem focus, it was helpful to examine theories that help identify the systemic roots of police oppression and the mechanisms that cause police to perpetuate acts of oppression on BIPOC and other marginalized communities. Doing so would enable the researcher to build a more complete understanding of the interventions that social workers can implement to address the social injustices of policing. Considering this, the theoretical orientation identified by the researcher as a relevant component to understanding this research focus was Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Critical race theory originated as a collective movement of both activists and scholars dedicated to the study and reformation of the relationships between race, racism, and power (Delgado et al., 2017). CRT was created in the 1970s as a response to the recognition that the perceived progress of racial equity in

America during the civil rights era was either digressing or was never actually for the benefit of people of color in the first place. At this period in time, early scholars of CRT such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado, understood that new theories and strategies were needed in order to address the subtler forms of racism that were dominating society after the end of the civil rights era. Building upon ideas from both critical legal studies and radical feminism, CRT aims to better understand how society is organized by racial hierarchies and racial relationships so that action can be taken to create change that moves society closer towards racial equity (Delgado et al., 2017). Since the 1970s, CRT has evolved in its focus and original intention to be a movement in law, and has been quickly embraced by numerous other disciplines (Delgado et al., 2017). Additionally, CRT has expanded to include an intentional focus on Asian American, Latinx, American Indian, LGBTQ, and Muslim communities, although this theory is most often associated with the experiences of Black people in a white society (Delgado et al., 2017).

While not all scholars and areas of disciplines agree on the exact tenets of CRT, there are six major assumptions that consistently appear throughout the literature in different combinations that will be used in this study (Delgado et al., 2017; Hiraldo, 2010; Kolivoski et al., 2014). The first assumption of CRT is that racism is ordinary in the United States and is a common, everyday experience for people of color. CRT asserts that racism is so ordinary in American social structures and institutions that it has become normalized to the point of being

almost unrecognizable and much of the dominant group is oblivious of their own privilege (Delgado et al., 2017; Hiraldo, 2010). Interest convergence, the second tenet of CRT, states that progress towards racial equity is only achieved when the progress made aligns with the interests of whiteness. Because CRT sees the white elites in power positions as benefitting from racism, they have no incentive to eradicate racism from American systems and, therefore, only allow racial justice gains when they will not cause any major disruptions to the lives of white people (Kolivoski et al., 2014). Another tenet of CRT is that race is a social construction and has no real biological or genetic validity. CRT is interested in the way that society refuses to accept the scientific evidence that race is only a product of socially created ideas rather than nature and, instead, continues to attribute various characteristics to entire racial groups (Delgado et al., 2017).

Whiteness as ultimate property is the fourth tenet of CRT and asserts that an examination of the intersection between race and property is essential for understanding racial inequity. CRT states that status and position in society is a form of personal property and whiteness is attributed social, cultural, and economic privileges (Kolivoski et al., 2014). The fifth tenet of CRT states that the uniqueness of voices of color is essential to counter-storytelling when exploring race and power. Focusing on the lived experiences, narratives, and family histories of people of color allows white people to better understand the impact of racism and oppression in a way that they could not possibly know on their own while also contradicting whiteness by challenging the biased interpretation of

reality that is projected by the dominant group in America. The final tenet of CRT is the critique of liberalism and its acceptance of colorblindness, neutrality of the law, and incremental change as sufficient methods of addressing racism (Kolivoski et al., 2014). The liberalist strives for the achievement of equality as they believe all individuals have access to the same opportunities and start at the same place, whereas, CRT strives for equity as the pursuit of equality in all things ignores the vast history of oppression and disparities experienced by people of color and significant advantages afforded to white people (Delgado et al., 2017; Hiraldo, 2010; Kolivoski et al., 2014).

As an informing theoretical orientation for this research study, CRT provided an important lens for developing an understanding of policing as a power structure that operates to maintain racial inequities. CRT studies the relationship between race, racism, and power while viewing civil rights issues through a lens that incorporates economics, history, context, group and self-interests, feelings, and the unconscious in order to challenge normative social processes and standards that only support whiteness (Kolivoski et al., 2014). In doing so, this theory offers insight into how race, racism, and power relate to one another in ways that support and perpetuate racial inequality. Reflecting upon this theory also helped develop an understanding of the potential interventions social workers can implement to address these issues and produce real social change (Kolivoski et al., 2014). Adhering to the claims of CRT, radical and systemic change is required to eradicate the power dominance of white elites

over people of color from American institutions such as law enforcement. In order for this study to develop an understanding of the ways that social workers can challenge the pervasive racial injustices in policing, there needed to first be a clear understanding of how policing operates as a white supremacist tool of oppression.

Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

The post positivist paradigm was used to guide this research. This paradigm assumes that an objective reality exists but the laws and mechanisms that operate in this reality cannot be fully comprehended due to the subjectivity of the human experience (Morris, 2014). Post positivism is grounded in the assumption that one can never completely remove themselves from the human experience in order to study it. Recognizing this, the post positivist researcher strives for as much objectivity as possible by being aware of their own biases and the ways in which their own subjective human experience may influence the interpretation of the research. Ultimately, the post positivist researcher uses an inductive exploratory approach in order to gain a better understanding of an objective reality (Morris, 2014).

Conducting research from a post positivist approach means beginning with a problem focus that will continue to evolve into a more complete understanding of the problem as the study progresses (Morris, 2014). Because of the worldview the post positivist paradigm accepts, qualitative data gathered in a

naturalistic setting is recognized as the only way to truly capture the complexity of human experience. The broad question of this approach is to ask what is happening within a particular social phenomenon. The post positivist researcher balances adherence to the scientific rules of the methodology and the art of independent creativity in taking in all of the available data (Morris, 2014).

The post positivist approach was the best fit for this study as the goal of this research was to build theories of interventions social workers can implement to engage in challenging the social injustices of policing. The paradigm's worldview that an objective reality driven by laws and mechanisms exists aligns with the foundational premise of this study. This research was grounded on the idea that policing has served as an institution both historically and socially constructed to oppress marginalized populations while aiding the socially elite in maintaining power. Additionally, this research focus assumed that the social work profession has a unique responsibility to respond to social injustices. However, this research focus also recognized that social workers' perception of both of these assumptions incorporates subjective elements as a result of their personal human experience. This study specifically aimed to develop as close to an objective understanding of the social work profession's role in addressing police oppression as possible, which could best be obtained through the collection of qualitative data. In alignment with the post positivist approach, the researcher hoped that the outcome of this study would result in the development of theories

that identify interventions social workers can implement to effectively address the social injustices carried out through the act of policing.

Significance of Study

This study is timely given the political climate resulting from the recent resurgence in social movements against police brutality. Findings from this study can shed light on how social workers understand their ethical responsibilities in responding to oppressive policing. The knowledge obtained from this study can contribute to the development of interventions that social workers can implement to address the social injustices that marginalized populations experience through policing.

Potential Contribution of the Study to Micro and/or Macro Social Work Practice

This research study poses several potential contributions for both macro and micro social work practice. Social workers can play a significant role in advocating for policy changes that will alleviate the oppression perpetuated by police. The nature of this particular study has the potential to contribute additional knowledge and evidence needed to influence the way the social work profession engages with social justice issues related to policing in Texas. Because this research study explored how police oppress marginalized communities, there is the potential for macro social work to build upon this study to explore alternative programs and organizations to the current law enforcement systems of policing.

As this study hoped to touch on the interactions between marginalized communities and police, the knowledge produced may suggest alternative approaches to responding to situations in which police officers lack the best qualifications or effectiveness and instead utilize social workers and other helping professionals.

While this study was largely designed to contribute to macro social work, it also poses significant potential contributions to micro social work. It is hoped that the findings produced during this study will provide social workers with a better understanding of the ways in which their clients may be impacted by policing. Policing has significant impacts on many people of marginalized identities so it is important for any social worker who serves marginalized communities to be knowledgeable of the ways in which their clients experience oppressive relationships with surrounding systems. Additionally, this research hopes to contribute information to micro social practice that enables social workers who are serving individuals caught up in the criminal justice system to enhance their ability to competently work with their clients in a system designed to oppress.

Summary

This chapter consisted of a literature review that provided a brief history of social movements targeting unjust policing as well as social work's response to these movements. The research focus and its importance were described along with a summary of what the researcher hoped to discover by studying the social

work profession's role in addressing policing as a form of oppressing marginalized identities. Critical race theory was then explained as the theoretical orientation used to provide an initial understanding of the problem focus for this study. A description of post positivism and explanation for its use as the guiding paradigm for this research was provided. This chapter concluded with a summary of the study's significance as well as potential contributions that this research study may offer to both macro and micro social work.

CHAPTER THREE

PREPARATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter addresses various questions regarding the initial engagement phase of this research study. The first section provides a general explanation of the location focus for this study. The ways in which the researcher prepared for this research study are addressed as well. Additionally, diversity issues that the researcher needs to be aware of are also identified. Two separate sections then discuss potential ethical and political issues that were introduced during this study. Ways in which technology played a role in this research study are also covered. Lastly, a summary and review of the information presented serves as the conclusion of chapter two.

Self-Preparation

The researcher gave significant thought to the self-preparation necessary for this research study to be carried out effectively. The largest issue that threatened the integrity of this study was that the researcher needed to be mindful of their personal biases and how they could influence the way they approached this study. As the topic of policing is an area of major interest for the researcher, they already have formed opinions, beliefs, and perceptions about policing as well as social workers' ethical responsibilities in addressing these

social injustices. In order to prepare for engaging in this study, the researcher actively examined their biases regarding policing so as to improve their self-awareness. Doing the work to understand their own biases allowed the researcher to be as objective as possible when implementing this study. Additionally, to assist in the preparation of conducting interviews and developing interview questions, the researcher worked with the research supervisor to ensure that the questions being asked were not leading the participants and would gather the richest data.

Diversity Issues

There were two prominent diversity issues present in this study. The first relates to the diversity conflict at the core of the research focus, and the second relates to the diversity of the study participants. This study topic required a close examination of the ways in which police engage with people of different identities. As an example, evidence supporting policing as oppressive to marginalized identities such as BIPOC, women, the LGBTQ+ community, Disabled People, and individuals experiencing mental health crises needed to be explored and understood (Kraska & Kappeler, 1995; Lamb et al., 2002; Mallory et al., 2015; Pugliese, 2017).

The second diversity issue that was salient in this research were the identities of the social workers recruited to participate in the study. Ideally, this study would include participants who reflected the identities of the communities

who are detrimentally impacted by policing. While it was the researcher's intention to recruit a diverse set of participants, the size and scope of this study created significant challenges to this strategic recruitment goal. The researcher hoped to also address this diversity issue by including participants who have experience working with diverse populations. Because it was unlikely that the social workers who participated in this study would be incarcerated or experiencing homelessness, mental health crises, or domestic violence, the researcher hoped to recruit participants who have worked in these particular fields of social work and could bring second-hand knowledge of the way police interact with these vulnerable populations.

Ethical Issues

In order to ensure that there were not any ethical concerns, a study proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. The researcher did not anticipate any significant ethical issues outside of those that are present within any research study. Such ethical concerns that were prepared for were informed consent and the confidentiality of participants. Prior to participating in the research, all interested participants received a consent form that described the purpose of the study in detail along with any potential risks or benefits to participating. Prior to starting the interview, participants also had the opportunity to ask any questions that they had regarding the purpose and course of the project. Every effort was made to maintain the confidentiality of

participants. Data collected was coded by participant number so that names were not attached to the interview transcripts or reported findings. Any personally identifying information that was not relevant to the research was excluded from the published results.

<p style="text-align: center;">Political Issues</p>

The focus of this research study including an exploration of policing presented several political issues. Recent presidential administrations and current social movements such as BLM and Defund the Police have resulted in strong politicization of any critiques or attempts to hold law enforcement accountable for their interactions with marginalized communities (Black Lives Matter, 2021). While it was likely that keeping this study unattached to any single agency would prevent participants from feeling negative political pressure as a result of participating in this study, some social workers who were invited to participate in the study may have been concerned about how the sharing of their experiences may be received by the researcher or others in the social work profession. This concern was exasperated by the recent media coverage and politicization of social justice efforts to hold law enforcement accountable for the police killings of people of color. The precariousness of racial justice progress within Texas is demonstrated in the quick reversal of Austin legislation that, just a year prior, had made budget cuts to the Austin Police Department in response to

activists demanding justice for the Black lives that have been taken by law enforcement officers (Fechtner, 2021).

While there was little that the researcher could do to ease internal political discomfort for participants, it was expected that this potential discomfort was a necessary part of the process and is critical to the data that was collected in this study. Despite politics not being an initial focus of this study, the researcher was aware of how politically charged the topic of policing and social justice has become. Therefore, political discomfort was expected and even welcome as the influence that politics have within the social work profession may have a significant impact on the ways that social workers engage with police.

The Role of Technology

Throughout the course of this research study, technology played a role in preparation, communication, and the gathering and interpreting of data. Technology played a significant role in the researcher's preparation for this research study as well as in the process of reviewing the literature relevant to understanding the background of this research focus. Technology was also used to communicate with and engage participants. Email and social media messaging provided efficient and convenient ways of recruiting participants and exchanging information. Technology was used to collect, analyze, and store the data collected throughout the study. Technological devices, such as audio recording and statistical software, played an essential role in this study when it

came to transcribing and analyzing data. Audio recordings were heavily relied on for the accurate collection of data from interviews. The software program SPSS was then used to carry out statistical analysis of the data. In order to maintain organization, the researcher used technology as a means of storage for the recordings and data collected throughout the study.

Summary

This chapter addressed a variety of questions involved in the initial engagement phase of this research study. This study included social workers from a variety of social work fields within Texas. Texas was acknowledged as the study location that was used to conduct this research along with the reasoning for not partnering with a single agency to conduct the study. The individual work required of the researcher to be prepared to carry out this study was conveyed along with methods that were used to prepare for interviews. The diversity issues of the research topic itself and representation among participants were identified. The potential ethical issue of informed consent and confidentiality were also addressed along with actions that were taken to ensure participant confidentiality was maintained. Strategies for managing the political nature of this research focus and the political issues that it presented were also acknowledged. Additionally, an overview of the roles that technology played throughout the process of this study was provided.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the various methods involved in the implementation of this research study. The first two sections discuss the characteristics of participants and the sampling methods used to identify participants. The next section addressed how the data was gathered. After this, the methods of recording the collected data were addressed. The process of analyzing the data were described. The termination and follow-up process is then explained. Lastly, the plan for communicating and disseminating the findings is provided. A summary highlighting the information covered in each section concludes this chapter.

Study Design

This was an exploratory research project as the researcher hopes to gain insight into new variables regarding social workers' perceptions of their ethical responsibilities regarding addressing oppressive policing. To carry out this study, the researcher implemented a concurrent triangulation design, collecting quantitative and qualitative data separately, yet concurrently, and utilized both types of data to explore the research focus.

Study Site

For this research study, there was not a specific study site or partner agency, as the goal of the study was to recruit social workers with a variety of backgrounds and experiences to participate. Due to the scope of this study, as well as the researcher's location, all participants were social workers licensed within the state of Texas and the issues of policing discussed were both spoken about broadly as well as narrowed to specifically within Texas.

Study Participants

All participants in this study were social workers practicing in Texas. Eligible participants were 18 years or older and either held a degree in social work (BSW, MSW, LMSW, LCSW, DSW, or PhD in Social Work) or were currently enrolled in an MSW degree program. The researcher attempted to recruit social workers from micro, mezzo, and macro levels of social work as well as from numerous different practice fields such as behavioral health, mental health, education, criminal and juvenile justice, crisis intervention, homeless shelters, emergency services, etc. It was important to the researcher to include social workers who have direct experiences with police officers and observing police interactions with vulnerable and marginalized people as well as social workers who do not have direct experience. Study participants represented a variety of years of experience and level of positions.

Recruitment of Participants

Purposive sampling methods were used to recruit participants for this study, with maximum variation sampling being the main method used. This method was implemented by posting in various Texas mental health and social work groups on the social media platform, Facebook, whose members are from different areas of social work, career backgrounds and experiences, diverse identities, and level of interaction with police. Snowball sampling was also used in order to obtain a larger number of participants. The researcher used this method of selecting participants by asking already recruited participants to identify other social workers who they believed would be interested in participating in this study. Twelve participants were recruited between May 2022 and August 2022.

Data Gathering

The primary method for gathering both quantitative and qualitative data throughout this study was interviewing each participant. Quantitative data on participants' years of social work experience, perspectives on police discrimination, and types of encounters with law enforcement within their personal life and professional role were gathered. Qualitative data related to participants' perspectives on the ethical responsibilities they have to challenge the ways that policing oppresses marginalized communities, the roles that social workers currently play in policing and how they can shift these roles to support

the pursuit of social justice, and the practical ways that social workers can address the systemic oppression carried out by policing that is experienced by people of color and other marginalized identities. Interviews were also used to gain a better understanding of each participant's views toward law enforcement, ideas of potential interventions that can be implemented to address these social issues, as well as opening up space for each participant to share further insights and perspectives regarding the research focus of this study.

Data Recording

Audio recording and live transcription through the Zoom platform was used during interviews in order to accurately and efficiently capture the information shared by each participant. Verbal consent to audio record was obtained from each participant prior to starting the interview. The researcher utilized the audio recordings to review the automated transcription of each interview and correct any errors.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred throughout this study as data was gathered, as the researcher was constantly looking for emerging data to further inform the direction of the research. Because the data collected needed to be coded before it could be properly analyzed, a codebook was created for both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was coded by assigning numerical values

to each survey response option. Once coded, SPSS software was used to run univariate and bivariate analyses on the quantitative data collected.

This study largely relied on qualitative data, which required a more in-depth thematic analysis. A bottom-up approach was used to analyze the qualitative data collected throughout this study, as it allowed for an inductive and open-ended process of interpreting data to develop a theory (Morris, 2014). This involved coding the qualitative data by applying both first-level coding and second-level coding (Grinnell & Unrau, 2018). The researcher began with first-level coding by identifying meaningful units within the transcribed data and then assigning a code to each unit. The researcher applied a combination of grammatical and elemental coding methods. As second-level coding, the researcher assessed for similarities and differences between coded data and then grouped similarly-coded data into categories. In the final stage of data analysis, the researcher looked for meaningful relationships within the data by interpreting the categories and relationships identified in previous steps of data analysis and assessing the trustworthiness through establishing researcher credibility, ensuring consistency through documentation, and documenting how biases and preconceptions were controlled (Grinnell & Unrau, 2018).

Termination and Follow Up

Termination consisted of debriefing each participant and thanking them for their time and involvement. This was done at the end of the interview both

verbally as well as through a written email. Participants were provided with contact information should they desire any additional follow-up after the termination of the study.

Communication of Findings and Dissemination Plan

The findings of this research were presented in document format to the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino. Study participants were provided with access to the research findings upon publication. A research poster was also created to communicate the findings of this study and was displayed at the CSU, San Bernardino's Social Work Research Symposium.

Summary

This chapter addressed a variety of methods involved in implementing this research study. The criterion for all participants to be social workers was discussed and maximum variation sampling and snowball sampling were identified as the methods of selecting participants. Data was collected through literature reviews and individual interviews, and was carried out in two phases. All interviews were audio recorded and transcriptions were developed with the assistance of live automated transcription software. A bottom-up approach was used to analyze the qualitative data gathered during this study. The termination and follow-up process was explained. Lastly, the ways in which the research

findings were communicated and the plan for disseminating these findings

through the university was discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

Introduction

Findings are presented in three sections: descriptive statistics, bivariate analysis, and thematic analysis. Descriptive statistics were derived to understand participants' demographic characteristics, such as professional experience, political views, alignment with the NASW Code of Ethics, and participants' interactions with law enforcement. Bivariate analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between the participants' characteristic of NASW Code of Ethics influence and their perception of how social workers should work with law enforcement. Thematic analyses were performed to identify themes related to participants' perceptions of: the relationship between law enforcement and marginalized populations, social workers' role in policing, the alignment of social work values and policing, ways to address oppressive policing, the social work profession's response to social movements, ways to engage with social movements targeting policing, and social workers' ethical responsibilities in challenging police oppression.

Findings of Univariate Analyses

The following sections provide a univariate analysis of the quantitative data collected from the participant interviews. The quantitative data is divided into

four categories that will be discussed separately: participants' professional experience, participants' political views, participants' alignment with the NASW Code of Ethics, and participants' interaction with law enforcement. A table displaying participant responses is provided at the end of this section.

<u>Participants' Professional Experience</u>

Table 1 displays the summary statistics of participants' professional experience ($N = 12$). Most of the participants were licensed social workers (66.7%), in the beginning of their social work career having five or less years of experience (66.7%), and had experience working at a non-profit (66.7%). Participants came from various fields of practice, including private practice (16.7%), social services (16.7%), and medical social work (16.7%). Overall, participants indicated experience working with various marginalized populations. Four participants (33.3%) reported having experience working with individuals from each of the marginalized populations listed within the questionnaire. The two most common populations that participants had experience working with were the LGBTQIA+ community (75%) and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault (75%).

<u>Participants' Political Views</u>

Table 1 also displays the summary statistics of participants' political views. While participants predominantly identified as politically liberal, with 75% ($n = 9$) indicating being either slightly or very liberal, this sample also included politically moderate (16.7%) and conservative participants (8.3%).

Participants' Alignment with the NASW Code of Ethics

Table 1 displays the summary statistics of participants' view of social

workers' ethical responsibilities. All 12 participants (100%) stated that the NASW

Code of Ethics either strongly or completely aligns with their own personal

values, and 91.7% ($n = 11$) of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that

all social workers should be expected to uphold the NASW Code of Ethics.

However, of the 12 participants, two reported that the NASW Code of Ethics only

has a moderate influence on them as a social worker (16.7%), eight indicated a

strong influence (66.7%), and two indicated complete influence (16.7%).

Participants' Interaction with Law Enforcement

Table 1 also displays the summary statistics of participants' interaction

with law enforcement as well as their perception of law enforcement ($N = 12$).

Most participants reported interaction with law enforcement, although of varied

frequency and nature, and viewed police officers as somewhat fair but racially

biased.

The majority of participants, 75% ($n = 9$), had some level of personal

connection to at least one law enforcement officer through either family, friends,

acquaintances, or professional relationships. Almost all participants (91.7%) had

at least one officer-civilian interaction with law enforcement, such as being pulled

over or requiring police assistance, as well as knew family members and friends

who had these types of police encounters, 75% ($n = 9$) and 66.7% ($n = 8$)

respectively. Only slightly less common, 83.3% of participants reported having

had professional interactions with law enforcement within their role as a social worker.

Participants' Perception of Law Enforcement. Although most participants (66.7%) perceived police officers as treating people at least somewhat fairly, all participants agreed that some, if not most, police officers are racially bias and believed that discriminatory policing is an issue in Texas. Additionally, most participants (75%) confirmed that discriminatory policing shows up in their work, either through client reports (66.7%) or directly witnessing it themselves (8.3%). Despite viewing police officers are racially bias, the majority of participants agreed with the statement that social workers should work within law enforcement (66.7%), agreed with the statement that social workers should work in partnership with law enforcement (75%), and disagreed with the statement that social workers should work separately from law enforcement (75%).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Professional Characteristics and Perceptions (N = 12)

Variables	n (%)
Educational Attainment	
Licensed	8 (66.7)
MSW / MSSW[a]	2 (16.7)
MSW Student	2 (16.7)
Years of Experience	
Less than a year	4 (33.3)
1-5 years	4 (33.3)
15+ years	4 (33.3)
Lifetime Career Agency Experience[bc]	
Non-profit	8 (66.7)
For profit	5 (41.7)
Government	5 (41.7)

Private practice	4 (33.3)
Current Field	
Medical	2 (16.7)
Mental health/private practice	2 (16.7)
Social Services	2 (16.7)
Student	2 (16.7)
Children & Family	1 (8.3)
DV/SA[d]	1 (8.3)
Federal Government/VHA[e]	1 (8.3)
Hospice	1 (8.3)
Populations Worked With[bc]	
DV/SA	9 (75)
LGBTQIA+	9 (75)
Disabled	8 (66.7)
SMI[f]	7 (58.3)
Homeless	7 (58.3)
Addiction	6 (50)
Incarcerated	6 (50)
Political View	
Very liberal	5 (41.7)
Slightly liberal	4 (33.3)
Moderate	2 (16.7)
Slightly conservative	1 (8.3)
Code of Ethics alignment with personal values	
Strongly	9 (75)
Completely	2 (16.7)
Social workers should uphold Code of Ethics	
Strongly agree/agree	11 (91.7)
Neutral	1 (8.3)
Code of Ethics influence[g]	
Moderate	2 (16.7)
Strong	8 (66.7)
Complete	2 (16.7)
Connections to LE[h]	
None	3 (25)
Yes[b]	

Family	6 (50)
Professional relationships	5 (41.7)
Acquaintances	4 (33.3)
Friends	2 (16.7)
Personal Experience	
None	1 (8.3)
Yes[b]	
Personal interactions	11 (91.7)
Family had interactions	9 (75)
Friends/acquaintances had interactions	8 (66.7)
Professional Interactions	
None	2 (16.7)
Occasional	8 (66.7)
Regular	2 (16.7)
Police Officers' Fairness	
Somewhat fair	8 (66.7)
Not very fair	4 (33.3)
Police Officers' Racial Bias	
Some	7 (58.3)
Most	3 (25)
Almost all	2 (16.7)
Discriminatory Policing in TX	12 (100)
Discriminatory Policing at Work	
Clients report	8 (66.7)
Social worker witnesses	1 (8.3)
Social workers employed by LE[i]	
Agree/Strongly agree	8 (66.7)
Neutral	1 (8.3)
Disagree/Strongly disagree	3 (25)
Social workers partner with LE[j]	
Agree/Strongly agree	9 (75)
Neutral	1 (8.3)
Disagree/Strongly disagree	2 (16.7)
Social workers work separately from LE[k]	
Agree/Strongly agree	2 (16.7)
Neutral	1 (8.3)
Disagree/Strongly disagree	9 (75)

[a]MSSW is an abbreviation for Master's of Science in Social Work

[b]Indicates a variable in which participants could choose more than one response and therefore the total does not sum to 100% or the full sample

[c]Indicates a variable asking for lifetime experience

[d]DV/SA is an abbreviation for domestic violence and sexual abuse

[e]VHA is an abbreviation for Veterans Health Administration

[f]SMI is an abbreviation for severe mental illness

[g]Code of Ethics refers to the National Association of Social Worker's (NASW) ethical principles

[h]LE is an abbreviation for law enforcement

[i]Participants were asked to select their level of agreement with the following statement: Social workers should work within law enforcement.

[j]Participants were asked to select their level of agreement with the following statement: Social workers should work in partnership with police officers.

[k]Participants were asked to select their level of agreement with the following statement: Social workers and police officers should work separately from each other.

Findings of Bivariate Analyses

The following sections present the results of two bivariate analyses that examined the relationship between the NASW Code of Ethics' influence on participants and participants' perception of working within and in partnership with law enforcement. Due to the smaller sample size, bivariate analyses using cross-tabulations were performed.

Social Workers Should Work Within Law Enforcement

In general, participants identified strongly with the code of ethics and believe that social workers and law enforcement need to work together. All four of the social workers who indicated either a moderate or complete influence from the NASW Code of Ethics also agreed that social workers should work within law enforcement. Of those who are strongly influenced by the NASW Code of Ethics,

50% agreed that social workers should work within law enforcement while 37.5% disagreed.

Social Workers Should Partner with Law Enforcement

The majority of participants agreed with the statement that social workers should work in partnership with law enforcement (75%). Of those who are strongly influenced by the NASW Code of Ethics, 62.5% agreed that social workers should work in partnership with law enforcement while 25% disagreed. All four of the social workers who indicated either a moderate or complete influence from the NASW Code of Ethics also agreed that social workers should work in partnership with law enforcement.

Findings of Thematic Analyses

The following sections provide a thematic analysis of the data collected from qualitative sections of participant interviews. The thematic analyses conducted are divided into seven categories based on responses to each of the interview questions: 1) participants' perceptions of the relationship between law enforcement and marginalized populations, 2) participants' perceptions of social workers' role in policing, 3) participants' perceptions of the alignment between social work and policing values, 4) participants' suggestions for addressing oppressive policing, 5) participants' perceptions of the social work profession's response to social movements targeting oppressive policing, 6) participants'

suggestions for engaging with social movements targeting policing, and 7)

participants' perceptions of social workers' ethical responsibilities.

Relationship between Law Enforcement and Marginalized Populations

Participants' responses regarding the relationship between law

enforcement and marginalized populations could be separated into the following

three themes: negative relationship, systemically flawed relationship, and positive

relationship. Additionally, participants' responses could fall within more than one

theme. Almost all participants (91.67%) perceived the relationship between law

enforcement and marginalized populations to be either negative and/or

systemically flawed, including those who also identified a positive aspect.

Negative Relationship. The majority of participants (83.3%) described the

relationship between law enforcement and marginalized populations negatively.

Participants most commonly reported the relationship as often involving fear,

difficult interactions, and heightened vulnerability for marginalized individuals.

Other perceptions that were shared by at least two participants were that the

relationship between law enforcement and marginalized populations is unjust and

that police officers are often perceived by individuals within marginalized

communities as a threat. One participant shared the following:

"…when speaking with marginalized populations…they definitely have a

negative perception of police officers to the point where, when you discuss

like going to the police officers for legitimate reasons, they absolutely do

not even consider that an option for themselves because they've had so

many negative experiences in the past and they see the police as a bigger threat than they do a help."

Systemically Flawed Relationship. Half of the participants (50%) in this study described the relationship between law enforcement and marginalized populations as systemically flawed in some way. Themes that were included in this category still identified the relationship as negative, but attributed the nature of the negative relationship to be rooted in systemic issues rather than direct confrontations between marginalized individuals and police officers. Within this category, participants described the relationship between law enforcement and marginalized populations as tainted by systemic oppression, such as discriminatory laws and policies, racism, and historical tension; biases; the power imbalance between the two groups; and police officers operating outside of their scope of practice. One participant stated, "I think, due to some systems of oppression and inherent bias in all of us, especially with the amount of power that law enforcement has, the relationship is really complex and not just."

Positive Relationship. Only a minority of participants (33.3%) described the relationship between law enforcement and marginalized populations positively. It is noteworthy that only one participant described the relationship solely in a positive way. The other three participants who mentioned a positive aspect of the relationship also discussed at least two negative components. Two participants described police officers as addressing the safety needs of marginalized communities, one discussed how police officers are working to

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positively change the dynamics in the current relationship, and one participant "perceive[s] the relationship to be good most of the time."

Perception of Social Workers' Role in Policing

Participants' responses were divided into three themes of mandated reporting and other legal responsibilities, Child Protective Services, and social workers employed by or partnering with law enforcement. Within each theme, participant perceptions regarding any needed shifts are discussed. Additionally, two participants (16.7%) were uncertain about the roles that social workers play in policing.

Mandated Reporting and Other Legal Responsibilities. Three participants (25%) identified mandated reporting and following other legal requirements when working with clients as a role that social work plays in policing. However, each of the three participants provided a different perspective on the need for social work to shift in this role. One participant (8.3%) didn't believe that social workers needed to change but rather law enforcement needs to be open to receiving more education and trainings from social workers regarding how to better engage with marginalized populations. One participant (8.3%) expressed that a shift is needed to better pursue social justice but is unsure what that would look like, and one participant (8.3%) suggested utilizing alternative mental health resources rather than relying on calling law enforcement.

Child Protective Services. Two participants (16.7%) identified Child Protective Services (CPS) as a role that social work plays in policing, describing

social workers in CPS as both assisting police as well as engaging in acts of policing themselves. Both participants identified that the social work profession needs to examine and address the racism and other systemic oppression imbedded in CPS procedures in order to better pursue social justice. One participant even stated that, "even better than that would be to just not join in the first place."

        <u>Social Workers Employed by or Partnering With Law Enforcement.</u> Six participants (50%) discussed roles that social workers currently play directly within law enforcement through victim advocacy, accompanying law enforcement on mental health and crisis calls, providing mental health services within jail and prison systems, and responding to low-level calls instead of dispatching police officers. None of the four participants who discussed victim advocacy identified any needed shifts to better pursue social justice. All five participants (41.7%) who identified ways social workers respond to low-level calls, respond to mental health calls alongside law enforcement, and provide mental health services within jails and prisons indicated that these roles need to be increased and expanded upon to better pursue social justice.

<u>Perception of Social Work Values' Alignment with Policing</u>

        Participants' responses were divided into the three categories of aligned, not aligned, and somewhat aligned or not carried out in practice. Due to a change to one of the interview questions after interviewing the first participant, only eleven participant responses were obtained for this question and therefore

the sample size used to analyze this category is $N = 11$. The majority of

participants (63.6%) provided responses that fell within two or all three of the

categories. Three participants (27.3%) solely perceive the values of social work

and policing as unaligned, and one participant (9.1%) solely perceives the values

of social work and policing as aligned. The most common overall perceptions of

the relationship between social work values and policing values was that they are

unaligned ($n = 3$), or that they are both aligned and also somewhat aligned or not

carried out in practice ($n = 3$).

Aligned. Seven participants (63.6%) identified ways that social work

values are aligned with the values of law enforcement. The most common

responses expressed alignment between the two professions in their values of

service, safety, and protecting individuals' rights. One participant shared the

following:

"I do believe that the police's goal is to protect and serve people, and in

that way social workers are aligned. Our number one priority is safety and

we are there to help people achieve safer, healthier lives…so in that way

our goals are very aligned."

Other responses included acknowledgement of shared values of justice,

empowerment, promoting the dignity and worth of individuals, and providing

access to resources.

Not Aligned. Seven participants (63.6%) also identified ways that social

work values are not aligned with the values of law enforcement. Five participants

(45.5%) perceived the values of the two professions as contradictory. The absence of the value of self-determination within policing was identified by four participants (36.7%) as unaligned with social work. Other responses provided by participants included the lack of both equality and respect for individuals' dignity and worth demonstrated in policing, as well as the use of power and control within law enforcement. One participant shared the following:

> "one of our primary code of ethics is that clients have a right to self-determination. The police's job in general is not to let people make their own self-determination. We believe…that you should treat all people equally. And their job is in direct contradiction to our job, in that their job is to keep people safe, and those two sets of ethics often come into conflict."

Somewhat Aligned or Not Carried out in Practice. Six participants (54.5%) perceive the two professions to either be somewhat aligned in their values or that law enforcement shares social work values but does not carry them out in practice. Common responses were that the alignment of values is dependent on the location and population being policed, as well as varies by individual police officers. Additionally, two participants (18.2%) identified that discriminatory laws and policies prevent police officers from upholding similar values as social workers, and one participant (9.1%) cited differences in the purpose of the two professions as a reason for why they are not more aligned in their values.

<u>Suggestions for Addressing Oppressive Policing</u>

Participants' responses to the question: "what are practical ways that social workers can address the systemic oppression carried out by policing that is experienced by people of color and other marginalized identities," were divided into two general themes of actions targeting law enforcement and actions targeting social workers. Within the theme of actions targeting social workers, participants provided suggestions that were focused on individual action, micro practice, and macro practice.

<u>Action Targeting Law Enforcement.</u> Half of the participants in this study (n = 6) identified practical ways to address systemic oppression carried out by policing that directly targeted law enforcement. Five participants (41.7%) discussed a need for police officers to receive additional education and trainings related to mental health, implicit bias, or diversity and inclusion (DEI) issues. Three participants (25%) identified a need for either incorporating specific mental health police officers into law enforcement or increased attention given to ensuring police officers are operating within their scope of practice and training. One participant (8.3%) described potential benefits of implementing programs specifically designed for offenders who are living with a mental illness.

<u>Action Targeting Social Workers.</u> Almost all participants (91.7%) identified practical ways to address systemic oppression carried out by policing that directly targeted social workers. The actions discussed fell within the following three subcategories: individual action, micro practice action, and macro practice action.

While each of the eleven participants discussed strategies that aligned with one of these three categories, three participants (25%) also provided suggestions that applied to the social work profession as a whole, such as de-escalating situations without calling in law enforcement, greater social work education on implicit bias, and acting as a uniting force by listening to both marginalized populations and police officers.

Individual Action. Seven participants (58.3%) discussed individual action that social workers can take to address the systemic oppression carried out by policing. Four participants (43.3%) identified various acts of political engagement, such as voting and engaging in activism through participating in rallies and donating to relevant causes. Three participants (25%) suggested that social workers be more vocal about these social justice issues by talking about policing and amplifying marginalized voices. Two participants (16.7%) discussed the need for social workers to better educate themselves on issues of race and systemic oppression.

Micro Practice Action. Three participants (25%) identified micro practice actions that will address systemic oppression in policing, such as creating safe spaces for marginalized individuals to seek help by believing clients when they express experiencing police oppression and offering tangible resources. One participant shared the following:

"First and foremost, we need to have a place where people feel safe and comfortable sharing their stories. Where they come in and they don't feel

silenced…And then to not just listen, but to provide some – I'm a very

practical social worker, so I like to give people something that they can

walk out with. You know, like these are your rights, you know, that sounds

like someone might

have violated your civil rights, or that sounds like you might need to, you

know, file a formal complaint, and not to just say, well you know, that's too

bad for you, and you know move on. But actually give them some tangible

solutions."

Macro Practice Action. Five participants (41.7%) identified macro practice

actions that will address systemic oppression in policing, such as targeting macro

level systems through legislation, lobbying, and coalition building. One participant

shared the following:

"…being more involved in macro level things like being aware of what bills

are being passed, voting, I think, would be a really huge one. Going to

certain rallies…just being more outspoken towards our representatives

and making sure that our voices are being listened to since we're the ones

listening to those marginalized groups more than they are."

Response to Social Movements

Participants' responses to the social work profession's response to social

movements targeting policing such as Black Lives Matter, defund the police, and

police abolition, were divided into five themes: the profession has responded

well, the profession has done too much, the profession has not done enough,

uncertain of the profession's response; and the NASW as neutral. Most participants (83.3%) perceived the social work profession's response to these social movements as multidimensional as demonstrated in their responses reflecting two or even three of the themes described. Despite common responses among participants within each theme, only two participants shared the same overall perception of the profession's response to these social movements, which was that social work had both responded well and had not done enough. Although not in agreement of what needed to be done differently, almost all of the participants (91.7%) expressed criticisms of the social work profession's response to social movements.

Responded Well. Eight participants (66.67%) perceived the social work profession as having responded well to recent social movements addressing policing. Six participants (50%) perceived the social work profession as responding well due to its support of these social movements. Other shared responses from participants who perceived the social work profession as responding well to these social movements expressed excitement regarding the response, viewed the profession as making progress toward greater social justice, and identified activism as an important element of the profession. One participant shared the following: "social work has taken a very like activist role in doing so, especially with those [social movements]. And it has been really awesome to see that they have kind of gathered a large audience, and have like taken more steps towards progress of like defunding the police and stuff like

that." Two participants identified the profession as responding well to Black Lives Matter while expressing differing perceptions of the response to defund the police due to lack of cohesive agreement around the meaning of the movement.

Too Much. Among those who expressed criticism for the profession's response, four participants (33.3%) believed the profession was doing too much. The most common responses stated that the social work profession had become too involved in the social movements targeting police oppression, expressed that the profession had become too extreme and divisive, and that social works role needs to remain as more of a mediator rather than taking a side. One participant shared the following:

"As a Texas social worker, I have been disappointed in my profession…I feel like as a whole, as a nation, NASW has been a little bit extreme. I feel like being divisive is not helping the problem. I think that social workers need to try to work within the framework of the policing system…my profession has gotten so radical that there seems to be little common ground."

Not Enough. In contrast, the other seven participants (58.3%) who critiqued the social work profession's response to social movements targeting policing believed that social work wasn't doing enough. The specific reasons provided varied significantly, however, participants generally indicated one of the following ideas: there is a lack of urgency and guidance from the profession, social workers need to examine their own profession as involved in perpetuating

oppression, social work needs to separate itself from policing, or social workers need to do more in addressing the conditions that police are working under.

Uncertain of Response. Four participants (33.3%) stated they were unaware of how the profession has responded to these social movements, either because this social issue is less relevant to their current position and community, or because they haven't heard anything come from the NASW as a whole. The reasons participants expressed that contributed to their uncertainty of the profession's response suggest a low priority of engagement with this social justice issue and a lack of cohesion among social workers' stance on police oppression.

NASW as Neutral. The fourth theme that emerged from how participants perceived the social work profession's response to these social movements was that the NASW has remained fairly neutral. Four participants (33.3%) expressed this idea, each citing politics as playing a role in how the NASW can and cannot respond to social movements targeting police oppression. One participant stated, "I think because [the NASW] represent[s], you know, all the social workers…I think they kind of take that more moderate middle ground approach so as not to maybe alienate more social workers."

Suggestions for Engaging with Social Movements Targeting Policing

Participants' responses were divided into four categories related to the social work profession's ethical responsibilities regarding engagement in social movements targeting policing: the profession should engage, the profession

should remain neutral, the profession should not engage, and the profession should act as mediators. Participants' responses could fall within more than one category. Almost all of the participants (91.7%) stated that the social work profession should engage with these social movements, and half of the participants *only* discussed ways for the profession to engage. The only participant who did not believe that the social work profession should engage with these social movements provided responses that suggested aspects of the social movements where the profession should not engage as well as ways that the profession should remain neutral.

Engage. Eleven participants (91.7%) indicated that the social work profession should engage with social movements that target oppressive policing. Six participants (50%) cited the social work profession's values and code of ethics as reasons why social workers should be supportive and active in these social movements. One participant shared the following:

"I think we should definitely be involved in social justice issues. I think we're called to do that as social workers, and then if we're not doing that then we're not living up to part of our obligation as social workers. I mean, if we're not going to do it, who will."

Neutral. Two participants (16.7%) discussed ways that the social work profession should remain neutral in regards to social movements addressing police oppression. One participant (8.3%) also discussed the values and ethics of

the social work profession, however, their perception of social work ethics requires a neutral response. They shared the following:

"I think that we need to remain neutral in order to best serve our clients in the incarcerated world and in the jail systems…attending protests and putting yourself on the news just pisses them off, and it is not helpful…it just is not solution focused. And to me that is ethically wrong, as ethically wrong as doing nothing."

Do Not Engage. Five participants (41.7%) perceived that there are aspects of these social movements in which the social work profession should not engage. Common responses emphasized that social workers should not be supportive of any of the harmful behaviors associated with these social movements, as well as viewed ways that engaging in these social movements could be divisive and alienating. One participant shared the following:

"…we need to be not alienating other people. So a lot of these movements have become very politicized to the point where certain people are not going to want to seek out a social worker to get help from because they've seen us at certain places..."

Act as Mediators. One participant (8.3%) identified an ethical responsibility for the profession to act as a mediator within these social movements. This participant described the social work profession as ethically responsible for being a uniting force and supporting both sides. They shared the following:

"I think social workers should be a uniting force…not vilifying individual officers who are like doing the best they can within these racist systems that have been set up…I think justice is justice for everybody. And I think, as social workers, for these movements it's targeting people at the top, because that's where those systems come from and they crush us all. That whole, nobody's free 'til everybody's free, right? So this idea that when you use police as a system of oppression, it oppresses everybody…I'm not suggesting police are oppressed in the way that Black people are oppressed…what I'm suggesting is that police officers are morally injured because they're used as a tool of oppression. They don't escape without damage. And so I think justice is justice for everybody."

Perception of Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities

All participants agreed that social workers have an ethical responsibility to challenge the social injustices experienced by marginalized communities through the acts of policing. Participants' responses were divided into personal and professional ethical responsibilities. Additionally, responses that fit within the category of professional ethical responsibilities were sorted based on general professional responsibilities, micro practice responsibilities, and macro practice responsibilities.

Personal Ethical Responsibilities. Three participants (25%) discussed personal ethical responsibilities that social workers have to challenge the social

injustices experienced by marginalized communities through the acts of policing.

Two participants (16.7%) perceived that social workers have a personal

responsibility to educate themselves on social justice issues related to policing.

One participant (8.3%) also identified the personal ethical responsibility that

social workers have to vote.

      <u>Professional Ethical Responsibilities.</u> All participants identified

professional ethical responsibilities that social workers have to challenge the

social injustices experienced by marginalized communities through the acts of

policing. Participants' responses regarding social workers' ethical responsibilities

created the following five themes: general social workers, NASW Code of Ethics,

macro practice, engagement with law enforcement, and micro practice.

        <u>General Social Workers.</u> Eleven participants (91.7%) identified

professional ethical responsibilities that social workers have in general as

members of the profession. Six participants (50%) identified an ethical

responsibility to speak out as well as advocate on behalf of marginalized

populations. Other common responses discussed the ethical responsibility social

workers have to pursue accountability when witnessing an injustice (33.3%) and

educate others (25%). One participant shared the following:

    "If [social workers] don't point out what's going on and provide an avenue

    for [police officers] to learn and understand what this behavior is, why this

    is wrong, and what a more appropriate reaction or action would be, then

they're never going to know, they're never going to make changes, and

we're going to continue in the cycle."

NASW Code of Ethics. Six participants (50%) discussed social

workers' professional ethical responsibilities as directly tied to the NASW Code of

Ethics. Five participants (41.7%) identified the ethical principle of social justice as

evidence that social workers have an ethical responsibility to challenge

oppressive acts of policing. The ethical principle of dignity and worth of the

individual was also cited by two participants (16.7%) as contributing to social

workers ethical responsibility to address oppressive policing. One participant

shared the following:

"…we have it in our social work code that we are supposed to be reaching

out to those marginalized people, to be helping those people that are not

usually represented. And so it's baked into our work as social workers that

we are supposed to be combating these types of injustice when and

where we can."

Macro Practice. Four participants (33.3%) recognized professional

ethical responsibilities to challenge the social injustices within policing related to

macro practice. The most common response was that social workers have an

ethical responsibility to address systems of oppression (25%) and engage in

change-making at the macro level (16.7%). One participant (8.3%) specifically

spoke to social workers' ethical responsibility to pursue criminal justice reform.

Engagement with Law Enforcement. Three participants (25%) identified professional ethical responsibilities that social workers have in their engagement with law enforcement. Two participants (16.7%) perceived social workers as having an ethical responsibility to either bypass involving law enforcement whenever possible or use their professional power in interactions with law enforcement to address oppressive practices. However, one participant (8.3%) perceived social workers as having an ethical responsibility to also support law enforcement and their families.

Micro Practice. Two participants (16.7%) recognized professional ethical responsibilities to challenge the social injustices within policing related to micro practice. Perceived micro practice related ethical responsibilities included listening to the experiences of marginalized individuals and providing resources to populations impacted by oppressive policing. One participants shared: "There are people who need help and that's what social workers are here for. We're the people who serve those individuals and if we're not listening to them, then nobody's listening to them."

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This research study explored social workers' perceptions of their ethical responsibilities in responding to oppressive policing. It aimed to better understand the role that social workers are ethically called to play in addressing this prominent social justice issue that affects many vulnerable populations. All participants agreed that social workers have an ethical responsibility to challenge the social injustices experienced by marginalized communities through the acts of policing, identifying both personal and professional responsibilities. While all participants believed social workers have professional ethical responsibilities, perceptions of what these responsibilities are varied across five main categories of general responsibilities as members of the social work profession (91.7%), responsibilities expressed by the NASW Code of Ethics (50%), responsibilities to engage in macro practice (33.3%), responsibilities in engaging with law enforcement (25%), and responsibilities to engage in micro practice (16.7%). Overall, the data suggests that social workers do have an ethical responsibility, as members of the social work profession, to challenge police oppression. However, the data also suggests that social workers have many different perceptions regarding what their ethical responsibilities actually are when it

comes to addressing the social injustices marginalized populations experience at the hands of police.

Main Study Finding

All participants shared the perception that social workers have an ethical responsibility to challenge police oppression, but held differing views as to what role social workers should ethically play when engaging in this particular social justice issue. This finding aligns with conclusions drawn in other articles and texts exploring social work and social justice issues specific to anti-oppressive practice, the criminal justice system, and social work ethics (Bussey et al., 2022; Dominelli, 2002; Dominelli, 2018; Husband, 1995; Patterson, 2020). Unfortunately, it is challenging to compare findings of the specific ethical responsibilities discussed in this study, as there is a lack of research focusing on identifying ethical roles that individual social workers have in the fight against oppressive policing. Additionally, the previous findings mentioned focus almost exclusively on analyzing literature as support for the social work profession's ethical responsibilities rather than exploring individual social workers' interpretations of their professional ethical responsibilities as members of the social work profession. While this finding offers additional support to the previously suggested idea that the social work profession does have an ethical responsibility to challenge social injustices within policing, it also further

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demonstrates that individual social workers hold a variety of perceptions as to how social workers should ethically engage with policing.

<u>Supplemental Study Findings</u>

The majority of participants (91.7%) perceived the social work profession as responding poorly to social movements targeting police, although there was disagreement as to whether the profession was doing too much (33.3%) or not enough (58.3%). Also noteworthy, 33.3% of participants perceived the social work profession as remaining neutral. The highly political nature of this social justice issue, as well as the frequent professional interactions between the social work profession and law enforcement, may create significant challenges in the social work profession deciding a unified response to social movements such as Black Lives Matter, defund the police, and police abolition, which then contributes to the divide in social workers' perceptions of how the profession has responded. Police oppression is a highly politicized social issue, resulting in general support from the social work profession while lacking commitment to any specific actions that may create political polarization within the profession or in the profession's relationship with law enforcement. This can appear as a neutral stance to some, but a poor response to other social workers who may hold stronger political views that fall on both sides of this social justice issue.

Almost all participants (91.7%) stated that, ethically, the social work profession should engage with social movements targeting policing; however, 41.7% of participants also identified aspects of these social movements that

social workers should not engage with. However, these findings may not be an accurate representation of social workers' perceptions of each of the different social movements, as participants that were in support of the Black Lives Matter movement did not always perceive engagement in the defund the police or police abolition movements as ethical for the social work profession. The Black Lives Matter movement appears to be widely accepted as a movement social workers should engage in, while movements that target police more directly are perceived as unethical for social workers to engage with. Similar to participants' perceptions about social workers' ethical responsibilities to challenge police oppression, participants generally agreed that social workers have an ethical responsibility to engage in social movements targeting oppressive policing while disagreeing on what that engagement should look like and which movements the social work profession should ethically be involved with.

Only a minority of participants perceived social work and policing values to be completely aligned (9.1%) or completely unaligned (27.3%), whereas a majority of participants perceived the values of the two professions to be a combination of aligned, unaligned, as well as not carried out in practice. However, this finding is likely skewed due to a lack of clarity on the values of policing. Participants' responses reflected their own understanding of the values of policing rather than a direct comparison between the NASW Code of Ethics and the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics. Nonetheless, a general understanding of what law enforcement stands for appears to share some similar values as the

social work profession, while other policing practices seem to be unaligned or even directly contradictory to social work values.

Despite the strong influence of the NASW Code of Ethics, the majority of participants endorsed the idea that social workers should work both within and in partnership with law enforcement, 66.7% and 75% respectively. This finding aligned with the half of participants (50%) whose responses regarding shifts in roles social workers currently play in policing involved either no change or expanding social workers presence in prisons and involvement in responding to low-level and mental health related calls. Most participants believe that a stronger social work presence within the criminal justice system and policing will help reduce the occurrence of police oppression. These findings follow the common narrative that system change starts from the inside.

Limitations

This study had several significant limitations. First, the sample size is too small to generalize any of the findings as applicable to all social workers. Secondly, data was not gathered on participant demographics such as race/ethnicity or gender, which prevented this study from being able to determine whether the participant sample was diverse. This further impacts the inability to generalize findings to the entire social work population, as well as inhibits any analysis of the role personal identity might play in social workers' perceptions of their ethical responsibilities in addressing police oppression. Lastly, participant

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responses may have been influenced by the wording of interview questions. The terms used may have been unclear or unintentionally led participants to answer a specific way.

Conclusion

This study examined social workers' understanding of their own ethical responsibilities in challenging the social injustices perpetuated by policing that are experienced by marginalized populations. This study made clear the political nature of this issue; however, at this critical point in the fight for liberation from police oppression, it is essential that the social work profession takes a firm stance in advocating for the rights of the marginalized. The NASW must develop a unified position on the issue of oppressive policing along with clear guidelines of the professional ethical responsibilities all social workers are expected to uphold, regardless of personal political views. Furthermore, this study demonstrated ways social work is intertwined with law enforcement, suggesting a need to prioritize the exploration of interventions that help address different aspects of oppressive policing as well as alternatives to policing that do not involve controlling and oppressing already vulnerable people. Additionally, if social workers are to challenge police oppression by working within and in partnership with law enforcement, the profession must be extremely intentional so that social workers do not contribute to, or perpetuate, the oppression that marginalized communities experience. There is also room for improvement in the

way social work education teaches about ethics and systemic oppression. Given the study's small sample size, the findings should be considered preliminary and replication with a diverse and larger sample size will enhance the understanding of this study's outcomes. Additionally, replicating this study with social workers from different states, particularly states that are politically liberal, would enhance the understanding of the influence social workers' political views may play when engaging with the social issue of police oppression that were merely highlighted in this study.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your highest social work degree obtained?

    a. Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)

    b. Currently enrolled in an MSW program (MSW student)

    c. Master of Social Work (MSW)

    d. Licensed Master of Social Work (LMSW)

    e. Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)

    f. Doctorate of Social Work (DSW)

    g. Ph.D. in Social Work

2. How many years have you been a social worker?

    a. Less than a year

    b. 1-5 years

    c. 5-10 years

    d. 10-15 years

    e. 15-20 years

    f. 20-25 years

    g. More than 25 years

3. What types of agencies have you worked at (select all that apply):

    a. Non-profit

    b. For profit

    c. Private practice

    d. Government

4. What field of social work are you currently employed in? _____

5. Which populations do you have experience working with? Select all that apply:

    a. LGBTQIA

    b. Disabled

    c. Individuals with severe mental illnesses

    d. Homeless

    e. Survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault

    f. Incarcerated

    g. Individuals recovering from substance abuse

6. Do you have any connection to law enforcement officials? Select all that apply:

    a. No, I have no connection to anyone in law enforcement

    b. Yes, I have friend(s) who are in law enforcement

    c. Yes, I have family who are in law enforcement

    d. Yes, I have acquaintances in law enforcement

    e. Yes, I have professional relationships with individuals in law enforcement

7. Please select your level of **personal experience** with law enforcement (in the role of police officer and civilian). Select as many as apply:

    a. No personal experience

    b. 1 – 2 personal interactions

    c. 2+ personal interactions

d. Family member(s) have had police interactions

e. Friends have had police interactions

f. Known acquaintances who have had police interactions

8. Please select your level of **professional experience** with law enforcement.

   a. No professional interactions

   b. A few professional interactions

   c. Occasional professional interactions

   d. Frequent professional interactions

   e. Regular professional interactions

9. What is your current perception of police officers' racial bias?

   a. Police officers are not racially biased

   b. A few police officers are racially biased

   c. Some police officers are racially biased

   d. Most police officers are racially biased

   e. Almost all police officers are racially biased

10. To what extent do you believe police officers treat people fairly?

    a. Not at all fair

    b. Not very fair

    c. Somewhat fair

    d. Very fair

11. Do you believe that discriminatory policing is an issue in Texas? (Ex. When police treat people differently because of their race/ethnicity, or when police target or highly surveille certain communities)

    a. Yes

    b. No

12. Does discriminatory policing show up in your work, whether directly with police or in your clients' experiences?

    a. Clients report discriminatory policing

    b. I witness discriminatory policing

    c. Discriminatory policing does not show up in my work

13. On a scale of 1-5, how strong of an influence does the NASW Code of Ethics have on you as a social worker?

    a. 1 – No influence

    b. 2 – Weak influence

    c. 3 – Moderate influence

    d. 4 – Strong influence

    e. 5 – Complete influence

14. On a scale of 1-5, how strongly does the NASW Code of Ethics align with your personal values?

    a. 1 – No alignment

    b. 2 – Weakly align

    c. 3 – Moderately align

d. 4 – Strongly align

e. 5 – Completely align

15. Please select your level of agreement with this statement: All social

workers should be expected to uphold the core values and ethical

principles laid out by the NASW Code of Ethics.

a. Strongly agree

b. Agree

c. Neutral

d. Disagree

e. Strongly disagree

16. How would you describe your political view?

a. Very liberal

b. Slightly liberal

c. Moderate

d. Slightly conservative

e. Very conservative

f. Prefer not to answer

17. Considering social workers' ethical responsibilities, please select your

level of agreement with the following statements:

a. Social workers should work within law enforcement.

i. Strongly agree

ii. Agree

  iii. Neutral

  iv. Disagree

  v. Strongly disagree

b. Social workers should work in partnership with police officers.

  i. Strongly agree

  ii. Agree

  iii. Neutral

  iv. Disagree

  v. Strongly disagree

c. Social workers and police officers should work separately from

each other.

  i. Strongly agree

  ii. Agree

  iii. Neutral

  iv. Disagree

  v. Strongly disagree

<div align="right">Developed by Jess Husband.</div>

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. From a social work lens and your own professional experience, how do you perceive the relationship between police officers and marginalized populations (such as people of color, the homeless, women, the LGBTQIA community, Disabled people, and individuals with mental illnesses)?

    a. *If not addressed in first answer:* In your perspective, to what extent is policing consistent with or aligns with the ethical values of social work?

2. What are your thoughts on the ways that social workers, and the social work profession as a whole, have responded to recent social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, Defund the Police, or police abolition?

3. Ethically, should the social work profession engage in these types of social movements, oppose these movements, or remain neutral?

4. What are practical ways that social workers can address the systemic oppression carried out by policing that is experienced by people of color and other marginalized identities?

5. What roles do social workers currently play in policing?

    a. Should these roles shift? *If yes:* How can these roles shift to support the pursuit of social justice?

6. What ethical responsibilities, if any, do social workers have in challenging the social injustices experienced by marginalized communities through the acts of policing?

Developed by Jess Husband.

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

April 4, 2022

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2022-173

Caroline Lim Jessica Husband
CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Caroline Lim Jessica Husband:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Social Work's Role in Addressing Police Oppression: Social Workers' Perspectives" 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-FY2022-173 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,

Nicole Dabbs

Nicole Dabbs, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

ND/MG

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the roles and responsibilities of social workers in responding to the oppression that is perpetuated through policing. This study is being conducted by Jess Husband under the supervision of Dr. Caroline Lim, Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE:
The purpose of this study is to understand social workers' perceptions of their ethical responsibilities in responding to oppressive policing (broadly defined to include police brutality, unjustified killings, and the disproportionate policing of marginalized communities). This study makes two assumptions: (1) People of color and other marginalized identities experience oppression through the systems of policing, and (2) social workers should challenge social injustices. This study hopes to contribute knowledge to the way that social workers understand their ethical responsibilities regarding police oppression, develop interventions that address the social injustices perpetuated by policing, and engage in social policy related to policing.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:
- 18 years or older
- Hold a degree in social work: BSW, MSW, LMSW, LCSW, DSW, or PhD in Social Work
  - OR are currently enrolled in an MSW degree program
- Live and practice in the state of Texas
- Willing to discuss oppressive policing from the perspective of the social work profession
- Able to commit at least 30 minutes to this study: 1 virtual interview

DESCRIPTION:
Participation consists of one, 30-minute interview. Interested participants will receive an email link to schedule an interview time, which will be conducted via Zoom.

PARTICIPATION:
Your participation is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions and can freely withdraw from participation at any time.

CONFIDENTIAL:
This research study will protect participants' confidentiality as best as possible. While interviews will be audio recorded, all audio files will be stored on a

password protected computer and labeled with code rather than participant names. You will not be required to have your camera turned on during the duration of the interview. The audio recordings will be destroyed 3 years after the project has ended. All interviews will be coded and all identifying information will be removed before publishing.

DURATION:
The expected duration of participation in this research is expected to be around 30 minutes for the virtual interview.

RISKS:
There are only minimal risks expected for participants in this study. These anticipated risks are psychological discomfort due to the topics of social injustice, police, oppression, and violence; participants' own identity as a minority; or any cognitive dissonance that may arise when exploring the roles and responsibilities of social workers as outlined in the NASW Code of Ethics. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions and can freely withdraw from participation at any time.

BENEFITS:
There are no guaranteed benefits from participating in this study. Possible benefits are gaining a greater understanding of one's responsibilities as a social worker and contributing to the ongoing fight against the social injustices within law enforcement. There is also the hopeful benefit of contributing to the current knowledge on social injustices within policing and related legislation.

VIDEO/AUDIO/PHOTOGRAPH:
By selecting "I agree," you are confirming that you understand that all interviews for this research will be audio recorded.

CONTACT:
For all questions regarding the research, research participants' rights, or in the event of a research-related injury to a participant, please contact Dr. Caroline Lim, Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino, at Caroline.Lim@csusb.edu or 909.537.5584.

RESULTS:
Results of this study will be available on California State University, San Bernardino's university scholar works website, https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu. Participants will receive a direct link through email upon study completion.

SIGNATURE:

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

I have read and understand this consent form and:

- I AGREE to participate in this research study.

APPENDIX E

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Hello,

Thank you for your participation in this research. The purpose of this study was to build a better understanding of social workers' perceptions and understanding of how policing impacts social justice issues in order to develop theories of what the social work profession's roles and responsibilities are in intervening and challenging the oppression perpetuated by policing. The results of this research have the potential to provide insight into current and past interactions, observations, and perceptions of policing that can be used to improve the ways that social workers interact with police and engage in addressing unjust policing. It is the researcher's hope that this study will be used to empower social workers to engage in action that challenges the social injustices perpetuated by policing.

Results of this study will be available on California State University, San Bernardino's university scholar works website, https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu. Participants will receive an email with a direct link to access the study findings. If you have experienced emotional distress as a result of participating in this study, please use one of the following mental health resource websites to find a mental health provider near you:

- Mental Health Texas (https://mentalhealthtx.org/)
- Open Counseling: Texas Mental Health Services Guide (https://www.opencounseling.com/public-mental-health-tx)

Thank you for your time and contributions to this research. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Jess Husband or Dr. Caroline Lim at Caroline.Lim@csusb.edu or by phone at 909.537.5584.

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