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SOCIAL WORKERS PERCEPTIONS OF CONCURRENT PLANNING

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

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Kelsey Marie Karr
Summer Renee Randall

June 2010

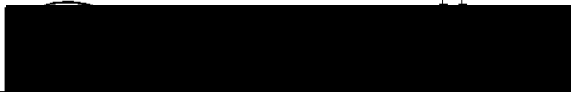
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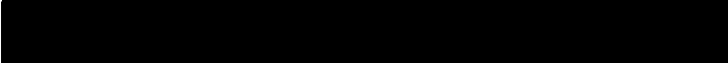
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ABSTRACT

Concurrent planning, the practice of working with families to reunify while also pursuing alternative plans for permanency should reunification fail, is an integral part of child welfare. Previous research on concurrent planning has found its success is largely based on child welfare agencies and social workers embracing and valuing concurrent planning principles. The purpose of this study was to examine how social workers perceive concurrent planning at Children and Families Services of San Bernardino County. One hundred and seventy six social workers responded to an online survey regarding the value they placed on concurrent planning, the usefulness of the concurrent planning procedures within the County, the biggest barriers to concurrent planning, as well as how the relationship is perceived between carrier social workers and adoption social workers. Results were compiled and analyzed to better understand how concurrent planning is perceived. The results were also compared to a similar study conducted in 2004, and changes were noted and described. This study also provides the foundation and history of theories behind concurrent planning, as

well as offer ideas for further research that would be beneficial to its practice and procedure.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to recognize our research advisor Dr. McAllister, who has been incredibly supportive and encouraging in assisting us with our project. We would also like to give our thanks to the San Bernardino County Children and Family Services Research Department and to everyone that supported us in this process.

DEDICATION

I would like to thank my wonderful parents Mike and Leann Karr. Not only have they supported me through my masters program, but have instilled in me the determination, drive, and the importance of an education. I would also like to thank my beautiful son Seth, who is the one shining light in my life. I also thank God every day, because without him, nothing is possible.

Kelsey Karr

This project is dedicated with much love and appreciation to my parents Laurel and Roger Randall for their constant encouragement, to my brother Matthew Randall who kept me laughing and to the rest of my family and friends for their never ending support that sustained me through this endeavor. I also dedicate this project to my research partner and friend Kelsey Karr.

Summer Randall

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Each and every day children become dependents of the court and are placed into protective care. The main goal for these children is to reunify them with their family when possible. In the event that reunification should fail, an alternative plan is also created regarding permanent care for children at the time of initial removal. This process is known as concurrent planning.

Concurrent planning is a strategy that attempts to shorten the length of time children are in foster care, as well as reduce the number of placements a child has during the duration of their dependency (D'Andrade, Frame, & Berrick, 2006). In 1997, through the Adoptions and Safe Families Act, concurrent planning became a federal law. This law requires children to have two plans for permanency running concomitantly. In the state of California, statutes require concurrent plan documentation to be present in child welfare court reports (D'Andrade, Frame, & Berrick, 2006).

There are several core principles involved in concurrent planning. The first core principle of concurrent planning centers on the implementation of the case plan. The responsibility of such implementation does not fall on any individual case worker, but rather the department as a whole. Concurrent planning values the belief that adults, not children, should take on the emotional risk involved in foster care as they are more equipped to handle its uncertainties (Northern California Training Academy [NCTA], 2009).

Another core principle of concurrent planning is the involvement of relative placements in the permanency plan at the earliest time possible. Relatives are often a source of security for a child, and can lessen the loss and grief children experience when being removed from their families. Full disclosure is an important principle to concurrent planning. The birth family, foster family, and children of appropriate age need to be fully informed about the nature of the case plan, role expectations, and the case status throughout its life (NCTA, 2009).

A fundamental principle of concurrent planning is to provide reunification services to birth parents in a timely fashion, including appropriately frequent

visitation. This principle includes the foster families support of and engagement in the reunification efforts with the birth family (NCTA, 2009).

Concurrent planning is a complex practice. It involves several distinct case activities which can vary, depending on individual state and county regulations. Potter and Klein-Rothschild (2002) found that one consistent factor to the effectiveness of a concurrent plan is the social worker. The attitude of, training in, and efforts toward concurrent planning on the part of the social worker have a great impact on the implementation and success of concurrent planning. For this reason, further research needs to be conducted regarding social workers perception of the concurrent planning process.

In San Bernardino County, concurrent planning is an integral part of the case planning process. It is mandated to begin at time of removal, by investigating and utilizing family members whenever possible. The process continues throughout the life of the case, requiring each client to have two consecutive plans for permanency. Concurrent Planning Review meetings (CPR's) are held every six months, and put into court reports of each client. Social workers are obligated to maintain an

active concurrent plan and work toward permanency whenever possible County of San Bernardino, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to elicit social workers perceptions of concurrent planning in San Bernardino County. Concurrent planning is valued by many people in the social work profession, but it requires additional work for social workers. Concurrent planning requires that social workers participate in Concurrent Planning Review (CPR) meetings and additional forms that need to be completed (County of San Bernardino, 2007). Because social workers are a key part of concurrent planning, having an understanding of their perceptions would lead to a better grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of concurrent planning in the county. This study examined how social workers perceive concurrent planning in San Bernardino County. This study also compared results with a previous study from 2004 to note any changes in the value social workers have toward concurrent planning.

In 2004 the San Bernardino County Quality Support Services department did a case review to see if social

workers were following through with concurrent planning. The review revealed a lack of follow-through in the concurrent planning process and documentation. In 2007 the case files were re-examined to see if the proper concurrent planning paper work had been done. The 2007 review showed that while there was improvement in some areas, as a whole there was still a consistent lack of follow-through with concurrent planning. Policy for concurrent planning has been changed at both the federal and state level, but little research was found that examined the implications of these changes on social workers (County of San Bernardino, 2007).

It is important to understand social workers' perception of concurrent planning because they play such a vital role in its implementation and success. Other issues the study looked at included the social workers' value of permanency, the concurrent planning process, as well as their perceptions of the relationship between carrier social workers and adoption social workers.

Adoption workers in San Bernardino County used to have their own unit locations. They recently were decentralized. Caseworkers and adoption workers now work together in the same unit. The study explored how they

feel about this change and if it appears to be beneficial to the concurrent planning process.

This study was a quantitative study to explore social work perceptions of Concurrent Planning in San Bernardino County. The survey also contained qualitative components to better understand social workers perceptions in further detail. An online survey was dispersed to all San Bernardino county child welfare social workers via email. The survey took approximately five to seven minutes.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

Extensive research has been published regarding child welfare policies and procedures. There appears to be a lack of research done on social workers perceptions. Social workers play a vital role in the implementation of policies and practices, which is why it is important to understand their perceptions of the work they perform (Vinzant & Crothers, 1996). Concurrent Planning is an important practice of child welfare. The goal of this research was to provide the county with their social workers perceptions of the current concurrent planning process.

Concurrent planning is a practice used to plan for the permanent placement of children. The findings of this study should add to the planning phase of the generalist model by helping to evaluate this social work planning practice. The results of this study should also help in the implementation phase. San Bernardino County wants to know what can be done to assure that concurrent planning is being implemented and understand the social workers perspectives, which could help in finding ways to make sure they are effectively implementing concurrent planning. Concurrent planning is very relevant to social work practice because it is a mandated process and there is not enough research done on its effectiveness.

The values in the National Association of Social Work (NASW) code of ethics are very apparent in the practice of concurrent planning (1981). The value of service, and helping those in need is evident in this practice because it is helping a child have a permanent place to live. Human relationships are another NASW core value directly related to concurrent planning. Children without lasting relationships with caregivers are at a high risk for attachment difficulties and having a hard

time making relationships the duration of their lives (Strijker, Knorth, & Knot-Dickscheit, 2008).

Finding of this study should help expand the knowledge of concurrent planning as a social work practice. The research found on social workers perspectives of child welfare practices is limited. This study sought out to give San Bernardino Child and Family Services information they can use to further evaluate the practice of concurrent planning.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter two consists of a discussion of the relevant literature and includes a historical overview and clarification of concurrent planning. Finally, the theories guiding conceptualization of the concurrent planning are discussed.

History and Effectiveness of Concurrent Planning

Historically, permanency planning was not a value in the child welfare system. In the 1960's, child welfare services were small, self-contained service systems with rigid rules and little public attention or press. The system made it very difficult for children to be returned to their natural family (McGowan & Walsh, 2000). Because of this, a phenomena coined by Rowe and Lambert (as cited in Monck, Reynolds, & Wigfall, 2004) as "foster care drift" was found to be common (p. 321). Children who were removed from their families had no permanent plan; instead they were just put in temporary homes until they came of age.

The foster care drift phenomenon began receiving attention when attachment theorists published research showing the psychological detriment of not having a permanent home can have on children, which can continue to negatively affect them throughout their lives (Monck, Reynolds, & Wigfall, 2004).

Researchers and child welfare organizations began to experiment with alternative placement plans for children in the late 1970's. Lutheran Social Services developed a program in which children who came into their care would be placed in a family who were willing to adopt them should reunification fail. These families were known as "pre-adoptive" homes (D'Andrade, Frame, & Berrick, 2006). This began the first documented concurrent planning in child welfare.

In 1980, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (AACWA) re-conceptualized foster care as a temporary solution, and emphasized permanency for children in out-of-home care. Its goal was to establish, strengthen, and improve child welfare and social services that involved dependent children. This law required reunification and preventative services to be provided to needy families.

The Lutheran Social Services' new philosophy and the enactment of the 1980 AACWA sparked an interest in several researchers. Katz (1990, 1999) became the leading researcher in the area of permanency and concurrent planning. Her work on the benefits and pitfalls of concurrent planning became the most influential body of work in the coming years for the continual development of concurrent planning.

In 1997 President Clinton put into action the Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA). The main goal of this law was to expedite permanency for children in out of home care by setting time frames that the state must follow in following a permanency plan for dependent children. It also required a concurrent plan be implemented for these children. Non-compliance of ASFA results in the denial of federal funds that finance foster care and child welfare services (McGowan & Walsh, 2000).

Since the enactment of ASFA, concurrent planning has become a priority in child welfare social services. Katz (1999) found that concurrent planning has the potential to give the case plan a clear sense of direction, to decrease the number of children in temporary placements,

and to shorten the overall length of time a child is in dependent care. Katz found that a concurrent plan helps keep out of home care a temporary solution, as it is intended.

Potter and Klein-Rothschild (2002) conducted a quantitative study of children in out of home care. Data was collected from case files in an effort to better understand what factors predicted timely permanence. The study found that when a concurrent plan was clearly identified in the service delivery plan, families are more likely to achieve timely permanence. They also found that the relationship between the social worker and the clients plays an important part in the outcome of the concurrent plans.

D'Andrade (2009) conducted a study with data taken from child welfare court reports from six counties in California. Analysis of the data concluded that effective concurrent planning was complex; involving skillful social workers and intensive service provisions, as well as a collaboration effort between reunification and adoption workers. The concurrent planning process is based on the expectation that high-functioning foster

families, social workers, and supervisors will be involved (D'Andrade, 2009).

Barriers to Concurrent Planning

There are many barriers that must be taken into consideration with the implementation of concurrent planning. Katz (as cited in D'Andrade & Berrick 2006) found that concurrent planning can add extra stress to foster parents. Concurrent planning asks caregivers to make a commitment to be willing to provide a permanent home for a child without knowing if the child will be available for adoption. The foster parents are also expected to be assisting the parents in reunification at the same time. The amount of emotional pressure put on these caregivers could result in it being hard to find families that are willing to be concurrent planning foster parents (D'Andrade & Berrick, 2006).

D'Andrade and Berrick (2006) recognized that concurrent planning required a lot of resources and are labor intensive. The study suggested that concurrent planning could really use two caseworkers; one to work on the possibility of reunification, and one to look into adoption options. To ask one worker to be responsible for

simultaneously working on both plans would most likely need to result in a caseload reduction. It takes a lot of time and resources for a caseworker to be able to search all possible options of placement with a family willing to provide either a temporary or permanent residence for a child.

It has been found that many children in the system do reunify with their families and that concurrent planning is more valuable for families where reunification is unlikely. A tool was developed by Katz and Robinson to help determine the probability of reunification. This study included a copy of the California version of the Katz tool. The study listed 21 indicators of poor prognosis for reunification; which is when concurrent planning is most beneficial. One barrier the study focused on was the concern that concurrent planning might hinder reunification efforts. An example of concurrent planning hindering reunification would be if caseworkers have a hard time providing services because of time constraints, and concurrent planning caregivers don't support the birth parents (D'Andrade & Berrick, 2006).

The United States General Accounting Office (2003) conducted a study by surveying 48 states on their concurrent planning process. Each state voiced the barriers they are facing with concurrent planning. Since ASFA was implemented, there has been an increase in adoptions, but most states stated that they do not collect data on the use of the ASFA. The states interviewed said that ASFA was important in achieving permanency for children, but the problems with existing data make it hard to assess how things are different than before ASFA was implemented. The survey showed that having reliable data is a common problem in the different states. Reliable data is important to foster care outcomes and the effectiveness of child welfare practices. This data is a necessity in improving the child welfare system and the lack of it is a major barrier to future improvements (United States General Accounting Office, 2003).

The study also found that problems within the court system create barriers to delaying child welfare cases and prolonging permanence. These barriers included inadequate number of judges and attorneys, with many of them having insufficient training in child welfare

(United States General Accounting Office, 2003). The lack of court resources creates further issues. States surveyed expressed the need for the recruitment of families willing to adopt children with special needs as a difficult task. In order to find foster homes many states publicly post profiles of children in foster care. The problem with this is that often times this leads to Inter-jurisdictional adoptions which cause further delays (United States General Accounting Office, 2003).

An extensive study conducted in six of California's 58 counties examined some of the barriers hindering concurrent planning. In each county initial interviews were conducted with designated liaisons, and focus groups were held. Three hundred and thirty seven individuals participated in this study. The study put a lot of the responsibility on management. There was a strong feeling that if management valued concurrent planning more, it would be greatly improved. It was shown that the county where concurrent planning was most successful, the process and understanding of concurrent planning was valued at all levels of staff. The suggestion was made that supervisors should make concurrent planning a more

obvious priority for staff (Frame, Berrick, & Coakley, 2006).

Another hindrance that was pointed out in this study is that of paternity issues. For concurrent planning to happen, birth parents have to be found and all possible family issues have to be examined. Each county has its own way of solving paternity issues. As in many other studies, documentation was found to be a key component to the concurrent planning process. The study also discussed in length the roles of child welfare workers. It noted that the concurrent planning approach was challenging and difficult, stating workers felt they needed more training and a collaborative approach to decision-making (Frame et al., 2006).

A previous study was conducted in 2004 by the County of San Bernardino research department, run by Jason Babiera. The study was sent out via county mailbox to 433 eligible staff and supervisors. The study had a response rate of 77%. The survey began by asking if the participants felt they understood the agency's concurrent planning policy and the related forms and procedure. Ninety four percent of unit staff and supervisors replied

they had at least a basic knowledge of concurrent planning and its related procedures (Babiera, 2004).

The survey continued by asking if concurrent planning was a core value to their work with families and children. 53% of the participants stated they always used concurrent planning that it is a core value in their practice with children and families. 22% felt that concurrent planning was one of their core values but that there are more important values in their work with children and families. 11% of participants felt that concurrent planning is a core value in their work, but felt there were barriers to its implementation. 5% of the participants did not consider concurrent planning as a core value in their practice (Babiera, 2004).

The 2004 survey asked the participants if they participated in a Concurrent Planning Review (CPR) meeting in the last month. 68% of participants responded that they had participated in the CPR meetings in the past month. The survey also asked if they felt the CPR meetings were useful to them. 56% of participants replied that the meetings were sometimes useful to them. Twenty four percent responded that the CPR meetings were always useful to them, and 8% did not feel that the CPR meetings

were useful to them at all. For participants that felt that the CPR meetings were not useful, they were asked why they felt they weren't. The primary reason given as to why they were not useful was that the meetings were followed by no further discussion or not enough discussion about the case (Babiera, 2004).

Participants were asked to identify what they felt were the biggest barriers to concurrent planning. 247 of the 333 staff and supervisors that filled out the survey responded to this question. The top barriers included lack of appropriate concurrent planning placements, caseworkers lack of time and availability due to full caseloads, personal biases, and that the adoptions process and policy was slow and tedious with timelines that can be hard to comply with (Babiera, 2004). Other barriers indicated that there were barriers related to the relationship between adoptions workers and carrying case workers, as well as supervisor's lack of knowledge and training about concurrent planning. Babiera (2004) grouped the barriers into common themes. They included staff related barriers (36%), barriers related to placement (19%), barriers related to child and family

(9%), barriers related to training (9%), and barriers related to court (7%).

Participants were then asked what resources they felt were needed to assist workers in concurrent planning. Of the 433 participants of the survey, 170 responded to this question. The resources that were identified included more training and education about adoptions, more supervisor input, more cultural education, more knowledge of the cases, availability of an updated list of appropriate concurrent planning homes, assistance with searching and assessing possible placements, smaller caseloads and more availability and accessibility of adoption and Concurrent Planning Review meetings (Babiera, 2004).

Participants were asked how they generally felt about the relationship between carrying case social workers and adoptions social workers regarding case opinion, concurrent planning support, and permanency recommendations. 63% of the staff and supervisors felt that the relationship was mutually valued. Only 8% of the participants felt that there was a lack of mutual respect. When asked what suggestions participant felt would improve the relationship between carrying case

social workers and adoptions social workers, 74% agreed that there needed to be staff and supervisor buy-in, including better attitudes, communication and teamwork, looking at what is best for the children, and being respectful of roles, ideas, and opinions. 26% also suggested that better training and education was needed regarding roles of various workers, (Babiera, 2004).

This study was used in accordance with the research that was conducted in this study regarding social workers perceptions of concurrent planning. The previous study results were compared with results of the recent study to understand any possible changes the perceptions social workers have regarding various aspects of concurrent planning.

Theories Guiding the Concurrent Planning

Concurrent planning is built upon previous research and theoretical frameworks from promising practices in child welfare. Understanding these theoretical frameworks helps aid in the true understanding of concurrent planning. Two of the related theories discussed below include attachment theory and systems theory.

Attachment theory became a topic of discussion in child welfare in the 1970's. Attachment theories raised concerns about the detrimental psychological effects the system was causing children by not providing them a permanent living situation. Research has shown that having secure attachments to our primary caregivers is positively correlated to success in adulthood. When a child is placed in several temporary placements, it puts the child at an increased risk for adjustment issues, externalizing behaviors, social isolation, and attachment disorders (Strijker, Knorth, & Knot-Dickscheit, 2008).

Strijker, Knorth, and Knot-Dickscheit (2008) conducted a retrospective longitudinal study on 419 foster children. The findings revealed that the average foster child has a placement change one time per year. It also discovered that children who were diagnosed with attachment disorders at the time of study had previous placement histories that were twice the amount of foster children without an attachment disorder diagnosis. Because of the nature of the study however, causal inferences could not be confirmed.

Newton, Litrownik, and Landsverk (2000) were able to make a causal relationship between children who

experienced many placements and an increase in problem behavior. The study was conducted using 415 case files of children in foster care in San Diego, California. A measurement tool was used in analyzing foster children's behavioral problems. The study findings suggested that children with volatile and unstable placement histories increased a child's odds for deleterious effects, as well as an increase in problematic internalizing and externalizing behaviors.

A study with findings that are contradictory to the bulk of research on attachment and placement history was conducted by Kritzberger and Peria (1994). Foster parents were asked to rate the attachment patterns found with the children in their care. Data was also taken regarding the children's placement history. Findings showed that while insecure attachments decreased the number of placement the child had increased. This is not what other empirical research has found. Discrepancy could pertain to the data coming from the foster parent's perception of the child's attachment behavior. The child may be looking for acceptance with their current placement, possibly showing behaviors that would indicate stable attachment patterns.

As previously discussed, a core principle of concurrent planning is that the implementation and success of the plan is not dependent upon a single case worker but rather the department of children and family services as a whole. This is the same belief that guides systems theory. "A system is a set of elements that are orderly and interrelated to function as a whole" (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2004, p. 6). This is how the department of children services and the concurrent planning team operates. All individuals involved come together, bringing different strengths and attributes for a common goal, being a permanent plan for dependent children. Another related aspect of systems theory is the concept of equifinality, which is the understanding that there is not a single means to an end (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2004). This idea is utilized in each concurrent plan, as all children and their circumstances are different, making it impossible to be inflexible and rigid in making a concurrent plan.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter addresses the research methods that were used to collect and analyze data for this study. This was primarily a quantitative study using a survey design. Qualitative components were also utilized. The areas covered in this chapter include the study's design, sampling methods, data collection and instruments, procedures, the protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

Social workers are an important part of concurrent planning. The purpose of this study was to better understand concurrent planning from the perspective of child welfare workers. The primary focus of the current study was to examine social workers perceptions of concurrent planning. This study asked several questions used in Barbria's (2004) study that was previously conducted with the same sample population. The reason for this was to compare any possible changes that have occurred regarding social workers' perceptions of

concurrent planning. Quantitative and qualitative methodology was used to examine the perceptions of child welfare workers on concurrent planning in San Bernardino County. The research method utilized was an online survey. An online survey was chosen as a way to involve social workers without demanding too much of their time, as they are often very busy.

An online survey was a very practical method to use, as it is easy to distribute as well as monitor who has responded and is cost efficient. A survey takes less time than many of the other methods of research, which often results in a higher likelihood of participation (Grinnell & Unrau, 2008). Another reason the survey method was the best approach for this study, is that it provided an opportunity to compare the data obtained from the data collected in 2004.

There are several strengths of the instrument that was used. A strength of this survey method was that it allowed questions to be asked covering several areas of interest in a short amount of time. The survey method allowed for many variables to be measured without increasing cost or time. Using the survey method also allowed the study to have a larger sample (Grinnell &

Unrau, 2008). This survey was given to the entire population of social workers in San Bernardino County and is representative of the thoughts and behaviors of that population. The results may not be generalizable to other Counties in California or to workers in other states. There may also be some responder bias in this study which we cannot measure.

A limitation of the study design was that only so much information could be collected in a survey designed to last a maximum of 7 minutes. Another limitation of using a survey design versus a focus group is that it is harder for the researchers to ask participants to clarify an answer if it is not clearly understood (Grinnell & Unrau, 2008). Also, because the survey was through email, it was hard to assure participants that their responses would remain anonymous. A final limitation was the lack of a large incentive for the child welfare workers who participated in this study, as they are extremely busy individuals.

Sampling

A convenience sample was used to look at child welfare workers' perceptions of concurrent planning. The

sample was drawn from the seven child welfare offices throughout San Bernardino County. The email list for the online survey was extracted from the San Bernardino County website. Selection criteria for the study's sample consisted of all social workers who are currently employed with Child and Family Services of San Bernardino at the time the survey was given. This included every levels of carrier social workers, intake social workers, adoption social workers and supervisors. The participants for the study sample were identified by their current positions.

Data Collection and Instruments

This study used an online survey as its method for collecting data. It was distributed via county email to all San Bernardino County Social Workers. The participants were supplied a twelve question online survey questionnaire. A copy of the survey questionnaire is located in appendix A. The data collected was compared and analyzed with the data collected in the 2004 study. There have been changes made in San Bernardino County regarding concurrent planning since the survey was done in 2004. The purpose of the comparison was to see what,

if any, effect the changes have made. To improve the survey additional questions were added. Questions were added regarding the relationships between carrier social workers and adoption social workers. One independent variable for this study was time. This study compared the dependent variables from 2004 to see what has or has not changed. The dependent variables also included child welfare workers understanding and value of concurrent planning, Concurrent Planning Reviews (CPR), barriers of concurrent planning, and relationships between carrier and adoption social workers. The data collected was nominal, ordinal, and ratio.

The study had some reliability as the questions had been previously distributed to the county. The survey has not been tested for reliability or validity, however the ability to compare the results of this study to the previous results from this County make the choice of instrument an appropriate one. The results only reliable within the county of San Bernardino. This study has limitations to its validity because it has not been previously tested.

Procedures

To obtain permission from San Bernardino County a meeting was held with Ms. Kathy Watkins a Program Manager from the Research Division, to discuss the steps that would be needed in order to conduct research on concurrent planning in San Bernardino County. Ms. Watkins recommended that a meeting with Mr. David Harryman from Human Services/Program Development Division, be held, as he has done research on concurrent planning. The meeting with Mr. Harryman was helpful in deciphering what questions would be beneficial to add to the survey.

It was also suggested a meeting be held with Ms. Marlene Hagan from Child Welfare Service Manager/Adoptions/ILP/Wrap/ Placement Resource Division, to also discuss possible survey questions. Ms. Hagan suggested different ways to phrase questions that might make more sense to the participants of the study. She also suggested adding questions regarding a new procedure in concurrent planning, the Concurrent Planning Review (CPR) Agenda. The CPR Agenda was a recently added protocol to aid workers in making CPR meetings more efficient. Ms. Hagan felt it would be beneficial to know

if workers were even aware of the CPR agenda and if it is being utilized.

Upon completion of the survey design it was pre-tested by San Bernardino County social work interns. Final corrections were made to the survey, and then distributed through County email to all San Bernardino County social workers. To increase the return rate, the survey was available online for 6 weeks, with a reminder email sent out two weeks in, to those who had not yet responded. A cover letter explaining the study and informed consent was included in the email.

A strength of the instrument was that it allowed the data that was collected in 2004 to be compared to the data that was collected in the current study. It made it possible to see if the concurrent planning changes that have been implemented in San Bernardino County have made an impact to social workers perception of the concurrent planning process in San Bernardino County.

Protection of Human Subjects

The survey did not ask for the participants' names or any information that would make it possible to identify them. With each survey, there was a detailed

letter attached. The letter had a description of the study and a purpose statement. The letter ensured that confidentiality would be kept. The letter attached to the study took the place of both the debriefing statement and the informed consent, per San Bernardino research department standards. The letter stated that all data collected will be kept confidential. The letter also stated that by clicking on to the survey to take it, the participants were indicating they had read the letter and were agreeing to participate in the study. Participants were informed that all records would be destroyed after the study was completed and a copy of the study would be located in the Pfau Library, California State University, San Bernardino, after September 2010. For a copy of the cover letter sent out with the online survey see Appendix B.

Data Analysis

After data collection of the surveys was completed quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were used to describe and interpret the completed results. A descriptive analysis was used to summarize and describe the perceptions of the child welfare workers. This study

was interested in whether the time period of five years had on the data. The data was analyzed, and compared to results that were collected in 2004.

This study had ten research questions that were both quantitative and qualitative. SPSS was used to analyze the data. Demographics were run on both the positions held and years worked for the county. Frequencies were run and analyzed to examine concurrent planning reviews (CPR's) to distinguish how often social workers attend them, if they were useful, as well as if they were familiar with CPR agenda's. Somers'd was used to observe whether there was a correlation between participants who were familiar with the CPR Agenda and those who found CPR's useful. Frequencies were studied to understand whether social worker found CPR meetings useful. The participants who responded that they did not find Concurrent Planning Review's useful had an opportunity to explain. Their responses were examined through qualitative analysis. A comparison was done to see if there was a difference in how useful the meetings were perceived in 2004 and the current study.

Frequencies were also run to understand the survey question "Is Concurrent Planning a core value in your

practice with children and families?" A somers'd test was conducted to understand whether the position the participant held would have an effect on the value they placed on concurrent planning. A somers'd was also run to see if there is a connection between the amount of time social workers had worked for the county, and their value of concurrent planning. A comparison was then done to see if the value placed on concurrent planning among social workers had changed since 2004.

Frequencies were run to see if participants felt that decentralization of adoption workers was beneficial to concurrent planning. A somers'd analysis was examined to see if there was a correlation between participants who find decentralization beneficial and those who find the relationship between carrier and adoption social workers mutually valued. Frequencies were also run to see if the majority of adoption social workers and carrier social workers valued the relationship with each other. The results were compared with the 2004 study.

Participants were asked to give suggestions for improving the relationship between adoption social workers and carrier social workers. The qualitative responses were analyzed to find any common themes.

Participants were also asked to explain what they felt were the barriers of concurrent planning. Responses were examined and grouped into four main categories. The data was then compared to responses from the identical question on the 2004 study.

Summary

The preceding chapter discussed the research methods that were utilized to examine social workers perceptions of concurrent planning. The chapter reviewed the techniques that were used in order to collect and analyze data. The chapter also addressed the limitations and strengths to the method that was chosen and explained in detail the specific research questions that were analyzed.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter includes a presentation of the findings regarding social worker perceptions of concurrent planning. Topic areas include the value, understanding, and usefulness of concurrent planning and its process in San Bernardino County. Both qualitative and quantitative univariate findings are described as well and tables are given. Further understanding of the findings are discussed and evaluated in chapter five.

Presentation of the Findings

The total sample of social workers from San Bernardino County who participated in this study was 176. The participants demographic characteristics were examined according to the position they held as well as the amount of time they had worked for the county. Of the participants, 35 (19.9%) were Supervisor Social Service Practitioners (SSSP). Thirty-one people (17.6%) were Social Service Practitioner (SSP) Adoption workers. The largest group included 55 (31.3%) Social Service Practitioner (SSP) Carrier workers. Twenty-four (13.6%)

of the participants were Social Service Practitioner (SSP) Intake workers.

Also included positions were Social Work (SW) II Adoptions with one participant (0.6%), twelve (6.8%) Social Work (SW) II Carrier workers, and 7 (4.0%) included Social Work (SW) Intake workers (see table 1).

Participants were also classified according to how many years they worked for the County of San Bernardino. Twenty four point four percent were workers who were with the county for 1-5 years. There were 30.7% of workers who have worked there for 11-15. The 16-20 year category included 15.5% of participants. There were 14.8% of workers who had been with the County of 21 or more years (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables (N=176)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Position Held		
SSSP	35	19.9
SSP Adoptions	31	17.6
SSP Carrier	55	31.3
SSP Intake	24	13.6
SW II Adoptions	1	0.6
SW II Carrier	12	6.8
SW II Intake	7	4.0
Other	11	6.3
Years Worked for San Bernardino Child and Family Services		
1-5 Years	43	24.4
6-10 Years	54	30.7
11-15 Years	38	21.6
16-20 Years	27	15.3
21 or More Years	14	8.0

San Bernardino uses Concurrent Planning Review (CPR) meetings as a way to address the various permanent plans for each client involved in the child welfare system. The participants were first asked if they had participated in a CPR meeting within the last week. Of the 162 participants who responded, 38.1% of workers said they had participated and 54.0% of the workers said they had

not participated in a CPR meeting in the last week (see Table 2).

Social workers were then asked if they were familiar with the newly implemented CPR Agenda. Ten point eight percent of the survey participants stated they considered themselves an expert in utilizing the CPR Agenda. There were 65.9% who felt they had sufficient knowledge regarding the Agenda, and 6.8% said they know the basics of the Agenda but feel they need additional knowledge and training (See Table 2).

It was hypothesized that people who were familiar with the concurrent planning agenda would find CPR's more useful than those who were not familiar with it. A Somers'd test was conducted and means were examined to understand the relation. Somers'd was significant (Somers'd = .250, $p < .001$). Social workers who were familiar with the CPR Agenda were more likely to find CPR's useful.

Social workers were asked if they found mandated Concurrent Planning Review (CPR) meetings useful. 26.7% of social workers interviewed always found CPR meetings useful, 62.9% found CPR meetings sometimes useful, and 7.5% felt the meetings were never useful (See Table 2).

Of the participants who felt the CPR's were never useful, they were asked to explain. The main reasons that were given included that they were not helpful, but rather just another paperwork requirement. It was noted that there was no new information shared at the meeting, but rather just re-stating what was previously stated and going with the recommendation that was decided before the meeting occurred. Overall, of the 12 social workers who found the CPR meetings not useful, the main reason that was given was that the CPR meetings were simply another requirement to fulfill, and not productive.

Table 2. Concurrent Planning Review Meetings

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
In the last week have you participated in a CPR meeting? (N = 162)		
Yes	67	38.1
No	95	54.0
Are you familiar with the CPR Agenda? (N = 170)		
I consider myself an expert in utilizing the CPR Agenda	19	10.8
I have sufficient knowledge regarding the CPR Agenda	116	65.9
I know the basics of the CPR Agenda, but I feel I need additional knowledge and training	12	6.8
Have you found the CPR meetings useful? (N = 159)		
Always	47	26.7
Sometimes	100	56.8
Never	12	6.8
2004 Study		
Have you found the CPR meetings useful? (N = 295)		
Always	80	24.0
Sometimes	187	56.0
Never	28	8.0

Upon comparing the results of both the current study and the study conducted in 2004, it appears that there was no significant difference in how useful the meetings

were perceived. How the meetings are perceived from 2004 is relatively equal to how they were perceived in the current study.

An imperative question of the study included whether social workers felt concurrent planning was a core value in their work with children and families. Of the 170 people who responded 127 (72.2%) of them responded that yes, they always use concurrent planning. Twenty-nine (17.1%) said that it was one of their values, but others were more important. There were 10 participants (5.7%) felt that concurrent planning was a value of theirs, but that there are too many barriers to implement. Four social workers, (2.4%) responded that no, they never use it (see Table 3).

Table 3. Value of Concurrent Planning

Variables (N = 170)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Is Concurrent Planning a core value in your work with children and families?		
Yes, I always use it	127	72.2
It is one of my values, but others are more important	29	17.1
It is a value, but there are too many barriers to implement	10	5.7
No, I never use it	4	2.4
2004 Study (N = 261)		
Is Concurrent Planning a core value in your work with children and families?		
Yes, I always use it	151	52.0
It is one of my values, but others are more important	65	22.0
It is a value, but there are too many barriers to implement	31	11.0
No, I never use it	14	14.5

It was hypothesized that the value placed on concurrent planning would vary according to what position the social worker held. A somer's test was used and means were examined to understand this concept. Somers's was significant (somers'd = .178, $p < .0005$). The analyzed data found that Social Work II positions placed the least value on concurrent planning, where as masters level

Social Service Practitioners (SSP) and Supervisors (SSSP) valued concurrent planning more.

It was also hypothesized that the amount of time social workers worked for the county would have an effect on the value they placed on concurrent planning in their work with children and families. A somers' d was run and means were examined to find any relation. The analyzed data established that there was no significant findings. The amount of time a social worker worked for the county did not affect the value they place on concurrent planning.

Another question was raised regarding whether the amount of value placed on concurrent planning would increase from 2004 to the current study. In comparing the results from the two studies, it appears that yes, social workers placed more value on concurrent planning than was found in the 2004 study (See table 3).

A component of the questions asked regarding social workers perceptions of concurrent planning focused on the decentralization of adoption workers. Participants were asked whether they felt the decentralization of adoption workers was beneficial to concurrent planning. Thirteen social workers (7.4%) found the decentralization was very

beneficial, while 37 social workers (21.0%) felt it was beneficial. Twenty participants felt that the decentralization was somewhat beneficial (11.4%), while 23 (13.1%) felt it was not beneficial at all (See table 4).

Table 4. Decentralization of Adoption Workers

Variables (N = 93)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very Beneficial	13	7.4
Beneficial	37	21.0
Somewhat Beneficial	20	11.4
Not at all.	23	13.1

It was hypothesized that there would be a correlation between participants who found decentralization beneficial and those who find the relationship mutually valued. A somers'd test was run and means were examined to find any correlation. Findings show that there is no significant relationship between the two groups.

Participants were asked how they felt the relationship between carrier social workers and adoption social workers was generally regarding case opinion,

concurrent planning support and permanency recommendations. The study found of the 146 participants 42.6% felt the relationship is mutually valued even if there are differences in opinion. Thirty three percent felt that the relationship is somewhat harmonious, but needs to improve, while 6.8% felt that the relationship lacked a mutual respect. There was .06% who felt the relationship was unnecessary (See table 5).

Table 5. Relationship of Carrier Social Workers and Adoption Social Workers

Variables (N = 146)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Are mutually valued even if there are differences in opinion	75	42.6
Are somewhat harmonious, but need to improve	58	33.0
Lack mutual respect	12	6.8
Are unnecessary	1	0.6
2004 Study (N = 302)		
Are mutually valued even if there are differences in opinion	211	63.0
Are somewhat harmonious, but need to improve	54	16.0
Lack mutual respect	26	8.0
Are unnecessary	11	3.0

Upon comparing the participant's perceptions of whether they felt the relationship between adoption social workers and carrier social workers was mutually valued, differences were noted. In the previous study, 63% of workers felt it was mutually valued, where are only 42.6% felt it was mutually valued in the current survey. This was the opposite result of what was hypothesized.

It was hypothesized that the amount of time social workers had been with the county would affect how they viewed the relationship between carrier and adoption workers. A somers' d test was run and means were evaluated to understand any possible connection. Upon examination, there was not significant findings. The amount of time participants had worked for the county did not affect how they viewed the relationship.

Another qualitative question was asked regarding what social workers felt could improve the relationship between adoption workers and carrier workers. Upon examination of the 81 responses, many common themes were found. The most recurring theme was the idea that there needs to be more communication between carrier and adoption workers. This communication was suggested to

occur more often than just in the Concurrent Planning Review (CPR) meetings, but rather be frequent and consistent. Another common theme found when looking at suggestions to improve the relationship included the adoption and carrier social workers working more closely together. Many felt it would be beneficial for the adoptions worker to be involved with the case from its inception. Understanding the roles of the other workers was also something that was suggested. If both adoption workers and carrier workers clearly understood the job duties of each other, it would better aid in improving their relationship. Other themes that were found throughout the qualitative responses included management and supervisor hindrances as well as high caseloads.

Social workers were asked what they felt the biggest barriers to concurrent planning were. There were 121 participants who responded to this question. The responses were categorized into four main categories. They were as follows: family/relative/foster family barriers, staff related barriers, department barriers, and court related barriers.

The category with the greatest response was related to the barriers that are caused by family, relative and

foster families. These barriers included but were not limited to financial issues that would keep family members from being able to care for the children as well as families withholding information about relatives who could be potential caregivers. Another reason given related to relatives who were unwilling to commit, relative homes not meeting Child and Family Services criteria, and lack of cooperation from parents in providing timely information about their relatives. This category also included barriers related to priority being given to relatives who might not adopt, relatives being hard to locate, relatives changing their minds about wanting the kids, cooperation from parents when they are working on their reunification plans, parents lack of knowledge about their family, as well as families fearing they might not be able to care for the children.

Staff related concerns were another common barrier raised among the social workers surveyed. The most common barrier discussed in this category was time. Social workers discussed that often when they need to make decisions they are not yet provided with the proper information, such as information on the child's family. Intake workers expressed there is limited time allowed

before the initial court hearing? must take place, which doesn't provide sufficient time to look into possible concurrent plans with family members. The workers expressed that because they are often overwhelmed by caseloads, they look to the quickest solution at the time even if it might not always be optimal. Other concerns shared related to staff barriers were resistance to concurrent planning, lack of available staff, high workloads, concurrent planning workers not being asked to be involved early enough, and case workers feeling that management at Child and Family Services do not take it seriously enough. There was also a feeling expressed that many workers do not understand the components of concurrent planning enough and felt more training would be beneficial.

Another barrier that social workers expressed they struggle with is related to placement issues. It was stated that there are not enough concurrent planning placements available. Many reasons were given for what contributes to the lack of concurrent planning placements. One reason included families who are hesitant about providing a permanent home because they know the child may reunify with their birth parents. Social

workers also shared that appropriate placements can be a challenge to find even without considering concurrent planning. Other placement barriers include large sibling sets, a lack of foster homes that are equipped with the skills to deal with children with special needs, as well as finding permanent placements for older children.

The final category related to concurrent planning barriers was surrounded around the court and department regulations. Participants shared a frustration with changing regulations and competing policies. Feelings were also expressed that there are times when court officials differ in opinion about what social workers felt the best plan for the child was.

The barriers of concurrent planning were also examined in 2004. The 2004 study had 359 responses. Findings show there were both similarities and differences between the 2004 study and the present one. The similarities outnumbered the differences. In both studies the largest concerns included a lack of appropriate concurrent planning homes, social workers not having enough time to devote to concurrent planning, and staff having personal biases that might conflict with concurrent planning. The largest difference between the

two studies was that the 2004 study found staff related barriers to be the largest concern, whereas the present study found family/relative/foster family barriers to be the largest concern. Overall however, themes were fairly consistent between the two studies and responses fell into similar categories.

Summary

This chapter discussed the findings related to social worker perceptions of concurrent planning. The topics discussed in chapter four include the value, understanding, and usefulness of concurrent planning and its process in San Bernardino County as well as the perceived barriers. The qualitative and quantitative univariate findings of the 176 participants were described in the preceding chapter. The chapter presented tables to provide a visual description of the quantitative outcomes. The findings that were presented in chapter four will be discussed in length in subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This final chapter will discuss in greater depth the findings of this research, as well as how it correlates with previous research on concurrent planning. The strengths and limitations of the findings will be addressed, and recommendations for concurrent planning procedure and policy within San Bernardino County will be given.

Discussion

Concurrent Planning Review (CPR) meetings are an integral part of the concurrent planning process in San Bernardino County. Frame, Berrick, and Coakley (2006) found that the consistent collaborative review of cases is essential to successful concurrent planning. The current study sought to understand if social workers also found these meetings to be useful and imperative to concurrent planning. The results found that the majority of workers (89.6%) felt that the CPR meetings were always or sometimes useful.

It was hypothesized that social workers would perceive the CPR meetings to be more useful than in previous years. The reason this was suggested was because the county policy has put more emphasis on concurrent planning policy after case reviews in 2007 indicated there was a lack of follow through regarding the CPR meetings and subsequent paperwork (County of San Bernardino, 2007). This hypothesis was not found to be correct. Social workers appear to find the meetings to be as useful today, as they did in 2004 (Babiera, 2004).

A recent addition to CPR meetings and policy is the implementation of the CPR Agenda. This agenda was added to increase the usefulness and effectiveness of CPR meetings. It was hypothesized that social workers who were familiar with the CPR Agenda would find the meetings more useful than those who were not familiar with it. The findings of this study support this idea. Social workers who were familiar with the agenda found the CPR meetings to be notably more useful.

Previous research has found that for concurrent planning to be successful, workers at all levels within child welfare need to be devoted to and value concurrent planning (Frame et al., 2006). The current study asked

social workers whether concurrent planning was a core value in their work with children and families. It was found that 72.2% of social workers interviewed valued concurrent planning and always used it in their work. Only 2.4% of participants felt that concurrent planning was not a value and never used it.

It was hypothesized that the value a social worker placed on concurrent planning would depend on the position they held within the county. Social workers at the Social Service Practitioner (SSP) level, and Supervising Social Service Practitioner (SSSP) level require the completion of a master's degree. The reason this correlation was made was because permanency is often an integral part of advanced degree education. This hypothesis was found to be correct. The participants who placed the most value on concurrent planning were at the occupation level requiring them to have a master's level education.

Another correlation was expected regarding an increase in the value placed on concurrent planning from 2004 to today, as the county has been continually more stringent in its concurrent planning policy requirements. This was found to also be correct. There was a

significant increase in the social workers who valued concurrent planning and always used it in their work with children and family.

Research has found that for concurrent planning to be successful, there needs to be a cooperative and mutually valued working relationship between adoption social workers and carrier social workers. In the last few years, San Bernardino County has changed their practice and decentralized adoption social workers to work alongside carrier and intake social workers. They now work in a unit together, working side by side and share supervisors. This change was hypothesized to aid in the concurrent planning process as well as assist in a better working relationship between adoption and carrier social workers (County of San Bernardino, 2007). This study was interested in understanding whether social workers felt the decentralization was helpful, as well as whether it had changed the relationship between adoption carrier workers. Of the 93 respondents only 7.4% found the change to be very beneficial.

The participants were also asked how they perceived the relationship between carrier and adoption social workers to be generally, regarding case opinion,

concurrent planning support, and permanency recommendations. Of the respondents, 42.6% felt that relationship was mutually valued even if there are differences in opinion, 33% felt the relationship was somewhat harmonious but needed to improve and 6.8% felt there was a lack of mutual respect. These findings suggest that continual adjustments need to be made in order for adoption social workers and carrier social workers to work together and collaborate in a harmonious and effective way.

It was hypothesized that the relationship between carrier and adoption social workers would have become more agreeable and harmonious since 2004. The reason for this correlation also falls in line with the changing concurrent planning policy and the decentralization of adoptions. Interestingly, our findings suggest this to not be the case. There was a significant decrease in how the relationship was perceived from 2004 to today. In 2004, 63% of social workers felt the relationship to be mutually valued, and currently only 42.6% of social workers felt that way. Further research needs to be conducted to better understand this change how the relationship was perceived (Babiera, 2004).

To better understand social workers perceptions of the relationship between adoption social workers and carrier social workers, participants were asked to give suggestions for improvement. Suggestions given were consistent with previous research. The most recurring theme given by participants was the need for more frequent and consistent communication between adoption and carrier workers. Previous research has also found this to be a key component of concurrent planning success. This involves collaborating as a team and using each other's ideas and philosophy's to incorporate the best plan into each case (Frame et al., 2006).

Another suggestion provided by San Bernardino County social workers was that adoption and carrier workers need to work more closely together. This again was a suggestion given by Frame, Berrick, and Coakley, stating "to promote concurrent planning, the goals of child welfare adoption units and agencies need to be integrated" (2006, p. 364).

Limitations

The major limitation of the study was that participants were all employed at San Bernardino County

Child and Family Services. This limits generalizability only within the County, and cannot be seen as valid for any other County agencies. Another limitation was the sample size. While 176 participants is an adequate number to validate and generalize the findings within the county, it may not be representative of the entire population of social workers in Southern California. An additional limitation is the primarily quantitative nature of the questions, which may have increased participant rate but does not give opportunity to explain or elaborate their answers. Finally, a limitation that should be noted is the reliability of the questions. While some questions were used from the 2004 study, others were written and added by the researchers and only pre-tested on a small sample of San Bernardino County Social Work Interns.

Overall, the strengths of this study outweigh the limitations. A major strength of this study is the ability to compare the results with a similar study conducted by Babiera in 2004. This allows for further generalizability and reliability. Another strength of this study was the sample population including all social workers in San Bernardino County Child and Family

Services, with a response rate of 176. This sample size allows for a fair representation of the counties perceptions of concurrent planning. The final strength of this study is the survey method. This allowed for several areas of interest to be covered without increasing cost or time. It also allowed for increased response rate by only requiring social workers to give 5-7 minutes of their time (Grinnell & Unrau, 2008). The final strength of the survey method was that both quantitative and qualitative questions were asked, allowing statistical data to be analyzed, while also allowing for explanations and specific areas of concurrent planning to be addressed that were not previously mentioned.

Recommendations

The results of this study point for the need to continually monitor the use and effectiveness of concurrent planning in San Bernardino County. It is suggested that extensive training be provided to all county social workers. Training should include policy measures and procedure, understanding the roles of other workers, and ways of recruiting and advocating for concurrent planning homes.

It is also recommended that another case review be conducted to evaluate whether there has been an increase in documentation of concurrent planning in case files. This information can be analyzed and compared to the case review that was completed in 2007 (San Bernardino County). This will help to better understand not only how social workers perceive concurrent planning and its related policies and procedures, but also how often requirements and documentation is being appropriately implemented.

It is recommended that further research be conducted to better understand the dynamics between carrier social workers and adoption social workers. Research has found how important a collaborative approach is between these two roles, and the lack of unity and camaraderie between them could contribute to hindering concurrent planning success (Frame et al., 2006). This research is suggested to be conducted in a qualitative fashion to better understand the complexities of their relationship.

The final recommendation is regarding the Concurrent Planning Review (CPR) meetings. The current study found that social workers who were familiar with the Concurrent Planning Agenda found CPR's more useful than those who

were not familiar with it. This research finding points to the need for all county employees to become familiar with the CPR Agenda. This can be done through brief training procedures, as well as mandating supervisors to utilize this tool in all CPR meetings.

It should also be noted that social work education continue to promote the importance of permanency and long lasting relationships for children. This should be implemented at the bachelors and masters levels of education. It is recommended to take place in the classroom setting through specialized permanency trainings as well as requiring students to stay current on concurrent planning and permanency research. Continuing to aid social workers in valuing permanency through their education will influence their future concurrent planning strategies when working with children and families.

Conclusions

Concurrent planning, the practice of working with families to reunify while pursuing alternative plans for permanency should reunification fail, is an integral part of child welfare. Concurrent planning is a strategy that

attempts to shorten the length of time children are in foster care, as well as reduce the number of placements a child has during the duration of their dependency. It also allows dependent children an opportunity for a permanent home at the earliest point possible (D'Andrade et al., 2006).

Previous research on concurrent planning has found its success largely based on child welfare agencies valuing concurrent planning, as well as social workers at all levels embracing concurrent planning principles (NCTA, 2009). Previous studies have also found that it is imperative of child welfare agencies to have formal systems in place to ensure concurrent planning policies are taking place, that the agency collaborates as a team, and that all permanency options are explored at consistent and appropriate time intervals (Frame et al., 2006).

The purpose of this study was to examine how social workers perceive concurrent planning at Child and Family Services of San Bernardino County. One hundred and seventy six social workers responded to an online survey received via San Bernardino County email. Questions were asked regarding the value they placed on concurrent

planning, the usefulness of the concurrent planning procedures within the county, the biggest barriers to concurrent planning, as well as how the relationship is perceived between carrier social workers and adoption social workers. Questions were given in both a qualitative and quantitative fashion. Results were compiled and analyzed to better understand how concurrent planning is perceived. The results were also compared to a similar study conducted in 2004, and changes were noted and described.

Findings suggest that how concurrent planning is perceived in San Bernardino County is largely consistent with previous research conducted on the topic. Findings of this study contribute to the body of knowledge already existing on concurrent planning. The current study recognizes the complexity to the concurrent planning process and provides valuable information San Bernardino County in order to aid in the evaluation and further practice of current policies and procedures in concurrent planning. Limitations of the research have been noted, and recommendation on areas of further research has been provided.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Position held: (check one)
 - Social Service Practitioner, Adoptions
 - Social Worker II, Adoptions
 - Social Service Practitioner, Carrier
 - Social Service Practitioner, Intake
 - Social Work II, Carrier
 - Social Work II, Intake
 - Supervisor Social Service Practitioner
 - Other, please specify _____

2. How long have you worked for San Bernardino County? Specify in years (round to the nearest year): _____

3. Do you feel you understand the agency's Concurrent Planning Policy and the related procedures/forms? (check one)
 - I consider myself an expert in Concurrent Planning
 - I have sufficient knowledge to develop Concurrent Planning
 - I know the basics but I feel I need additional knowledge and training
 - Not at all understand

4. Is Concurrent Planning a core value in your practice with children and families? (check one)
 - Yes, I always use it
 - It is one of my values, but others are more important
 - It is a value, but there are too many barriers to implement
 - No, I never use it
 - Not applicable

- 4a. Please explain why concurrent planning is not a core value in your position:

5. Do you feel that Concurrent Planning is a core value of your co-workers in their work with children and families? (check one)
 - Yes No Unknown

6. In the last week have you participated in a Concurrent Planning Review (CPR) meeting? (check one)
 - Yes No Not applicable

7. Have you found the CPR meetings useful? (check one)
- Always Sometimes Never Not Applicable

7a. Please explain why the CPR meetings were not useful. _____

8. Are you familiar with the Concurrent Planning Review (CPR) Agenda? (check one)

- I consider myself an expert in utilizing the Concurrent Planning Agenda
 I have sufficient knowledge regarding the Concurrent Planning Agenda
 I know the basics of the Concurrent Planning Agenda, but I feel I need additional knowledge and training
 Not at all familiar

9. What are the biggest barriers to Concurrent Planning? _____

10. In the last 2 months, have you utilized any of the following methods/tools to search for relatives/NREFM's/enduring connections for children on your caseloads? (check all that apply)

- Reviewed/mined case file
 Paternity and Family Information Questionnaire
 Family Finding and Engagement
 Interviews with child
 Interviews with child's family
 Reviewed birth and/or death certificate
 Contacted former caseworker
 Used an Internet search engine
 Worked with service provider that conducts family searches (e.g. Wraparound providers)

Other, please specify: _____

11. How useful have you found the Reunification Prognosis Assessment to be for Concurrent Planning and in better understanding your case? (check one)

- Very useful
 Somewhat useful
 Neutral
 Not useful at all
 Have not used the Reunification Prognosis Assessment

12. What would you say is the relationship between Carrier Social Workers and Adoptions Social Workers regarding case opinion, concurrent planning support, and permanency recommendations, generally: (check one)

- Are mutually valued even if there are differences in opinion
- Are somewhat harmonious, but need to improve
- Lack mutual respect
- Are unnecessary
- Unknown

13. Suggestions to improve relationships between Carrier Social Workers and Adoptions Social Workers: _____

14. Has the decentralization of Adoptions been beneficial to Concurrent Planning? (check one)

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Very Beneficial | Beneficial | Somewhat | Not at All | Unknown |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Children and Family Services Staff:

We would like to learn about social workers' perceptions of Concurrent Planning. So, **if you are a Supervisor, Social Service Practitioner, or Social Worker II, please take about five minutes to complete the Concurrent Planning survey at the link below.** Prior experience with Concurrent Planning is not necessary. Completion of the survey is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to you. There are no foreseeable risks or benefits to your participation in this survey. Be assured that your responses will be kept confidential and data will be destroyed after the study is completed. Please complete the survey by February 26, 2009.

Link to Survey:

<http://hss.sbcounty.gov/SelectSurveyNET/TakeSurvey.aspx?SurveyID=92K17m7>

Your input is valuable to us. Data from this survey will help ensure that CFS is providing the best Concurrent Planning services possible to the children and families we serve. This study is conducted by Kelsey Karr & Summer Randall, Master of Social Work graduate students under the supervision of Carolyn McAllister, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Social Work Human Subjects Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino. If you have any questions or need assistance with the survey, please contact Dr. Carolyn McAllister, at cmcallis@csusb.edu or at (909)537-5559. Results of this survey will be available at the Phau Library, California State University, San Bernardino after September, 2010. CFS research department will also have a copy of the completed results.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Karr & Summer Randall
MSW Interns

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Kelsey Karr & Summer Randall

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Kelsey Karr & Summer Randall

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Kelsey Karr & Summer Randall

b. Methods

Team Effort: Kelsey Karr & Summer Randall

c. Results

Team Effort: Kelsey Karr & Summer Randall

d. Discussion

Team Effort: Kelsey Karr & Summer Randall