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Ron-Niece Qashaun Charesse Paul

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BLACK AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL WORKERS

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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  
Ron-Niece Qashaun Charesse Paul  
September 2011

BLACK AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL WORKERS

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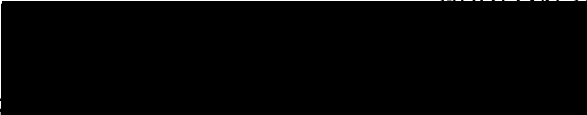
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by  
Ron-Niece Qashaun Charesse Paul

September 2011

Approved by:

  
Dr. Janet Chang, Faculty Supervisor  
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6/8/2011  
Date

  
Dr. Rosemary McCaslin,  
M.S.W. Research Coordinator

## ABSTRACT

This study examines Black Americans' perceptions of social workers and of the role of the Black church and extended family in assisting individuals in the Black community.

The study employed a survey design with self-administered questionnaires. Sixty respondents participated in the study and the study was conducted at two Black churches in the San Bernardino County. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (e.g., chi-square test) were used to summarize the characteristics of the respondents and the relationship between the participants' involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS) and the experiences the respondents had with social workers.

The study found that most of the respondents tended to have positive attitudes toward social workers. The study also revealed that respondents who have had prior involvement with CPS had mixed feelings toward social workers. The study also found that Black churches and extended family members were important sources for providing help and support in times of need.

One important recommendation for social work practice was to provide Black community members education on what social workers and CPS workers do and to engage Black Americans in the process of removing the negative stigma that may be attached to the social work profession. Further recommendations for how to change the perceptions Black Americans have in regards to social workers are discussed as well as suggestions for social work practice.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to give a special thanks to my cohort. There were a lot of days that I would not have been able to get through if it weren't for each and every one of you. I would also like to thank my professors and my research advisor, Dr. Chang, for without your continued support and encouragement this process would have been a lot harder. THANK YOU!

## DEDICATION

This project is first and foremost dedicated to the trials and tribulations that I had to go through to get here. Never let your trials and tribulation get the best of you or define you. Look to GOD, pull yourself up, and encourage yourself to be better and do better.

To my family and friends, I love you all and I thank you all for going on this journey with me. Thank you for your guidance, for taking my late night phone calls, for listening to me cry, and for making me laugh. I truly appreciate it. And when it's your turn I'll be right there providing the same support.

Lastly, to Marcelina Harris thank you for making the biggest impact on my life. Change is hard, but because of you, I've gained the courage I needed to better myself. I Love You!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the problem, the purpose of this study, and what this study will offer to social work practice.

#### Problem Statement

Social work is a profession that has been fighting for title rights and acknowledgement as a profession for years (Stoesen, 2005). It is now 2011, and it can be argued that many Black Americans do not know what the social work profession truly entails. It is hypothesized that Black Americans view all social workers as Child Protective Service workers (CPS) and this disallows other professional social workers from being able to help Black Americans.

The common perception Black Americans have of social workers as CPS workers is because that is the only professional social worker they have come in contact with. In 2009, there were approximately 575,538 Black American children under 18 in California and there were approximately 65,533 reported abuse allegations within the Black American communities (Needell, Webster, Armijo,

Lee, Dawson, Magruder, Exel, Cuccaro-Alamin, Putnam-Hornstein, Williams, Simon, Hamilton, Lou, Peng, Moore, Jacobs, & King, 2011). Particularly in San Bernardino County there were 63,229 Black American children and there were 6,373 reported allegations (Needell et al., 2011). There is little doubt that the percentage of Black American children in the Department of Children and Family Services system is disproportionate to the amount of black American children in San Bernardino County (Thompson, 2008). Social workers' job is to assist families with their basic needs so that they will not have to encounter CPS. In 2009 6,363 Black American children entered the Foster Care system (Needell et al., 2011). Though CPS is a protective measure for children many Black Americans who encounter CPS, encounter them when it is too late to truly do anything to prevent their children from being removed.

Social work is designed to make sure individuals are performing to the best of their ability in their environment, assist in crises situations, and provide guidance and advocacy to individuals, families, and communities (NASW, 2010). It is argued here that Black Americans do not have an understanding of what social

workers do. Black Americans understand that CPS (also a part of the social work profession) is designed to protect the well-being of children and to provide parents with resources to assist them with caring for their children in the appropriate manner. But they are unaware that social workers work with people in their environment on an individual, family, and community level.

#### Purpose of the Study

This study is designed to raise awareness among the social work profession about the lack of knowledge Black Americans have about the profession and what social workers may be able to do in order to educate them.

The underlying idea that, black Americans do not know what the social work profession entails because they have only encountered CPS workers needs to be addressed within this study. This study will also try to examine if the reason that Black Americans know little about social workers is because of their cultural coping mechanisms.

A quantitative study was conducted in a church in San Bernardino County with a sample of 60 Black Americans over 18 years of age. This approach elicited more information from the participants and allowed them to

open up about their thoughts and feelings toward social workers. Many of their opinions were verbal which will be discussed in the limitations of the study. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-one questions that gauged the participant's views of social workers, extended family, and church support.

### Significance of the Project for Social Work

Social workers have a duty to enhance the nation's understanding of what they do and why the profession was created. As a profession, social workers need to also raise awareness about the profession, change the negative stigma that is attached to the profession, and create a positive schema. In doing this, Black Americans will begin to understand what the profession entails.

This research project will attempt to answer the question, What are the perceptions of social workers within the Black American community?

Hypothesis: Because many Black Americans have encountered CPS workers at least once in their life, whether directly or indirectly, they think that all social workers work with CPS. Further, American cinema and African American coping mechanisms are also the

reasons Black Americans' lack knowledge about what the social work profession entails.

If the hypothesis is found to be true this study would change the engagement process within the generalist intervention. When social workers are working with clients, clients will begin to know and understand the functions of the social worker.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Chapter Two focuses on churches and extended family as reasons why Black Americans do not know or understand what the social work profession entails.

#### What is Social Work?

The Social Work Dictionary defines social work as "The applied science of helping people achieve an effective level of psychosocial functioning and effecting societal changes to enhance the well-being of all people" (Barker, 1999). The social work profession is designed to assist individuals, groups, and communities by making their social ideology better and giving them the tools they need to meet their basic human needs (NASW, 2010).

Social workers assist individuals, families, groups, and communities in the following fields (note: social workers are not limited to these fields): Child Welfare Services, hospitals, jails, gerontology, schools, Adult Protective Services, and within the military.



## Individuals, Families, and Groups

When working with individuals, families, and groups social workers may perform the tasks of extensive case management, psychotherapy and counseling, and advocacy. (Note that social workers working with individuals and families are not limited to performing just these tasks). The social worker's goal is to increase their client's knowledge of societal challenges and assist them with meeting their full potential in society (Zastrow, 2006).

## Community Organizing

Social workers who work within community organizing assist communities and organization with advocacy on the political level. They are the social workers that go into the community to see what is working and not working, in doing this they are able to create policies that deal with the problems communities are facing.

All social workers pay particularly close attention to advocacy and empower those individuals, families, groups, and communities that are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (code of ethics NASW, 2010).

It is important to note that social workers work in a wide range of atmospheres, with a variety of cliental (different races, ages, and genders), and within

different interdisciplinary settings. Valentine and Freeman (2002) state that in order for America to know and understand what social workers do, social workers need to begin using their educational titles (MSW, BSW, PhD, DSW) instead of relying solely on the job/career title they were given. In doing this, those not understanding the role of a social worker will begin to understand what they do and what settings they work in.

#### Black American Coping Mechanisms

The Social Work Dictionary suggests that coping mechanisms are behavior patterns that individuals use to adapt to environmental stressors (Baker, 1999).

Social workers understand the use of coping mechanisms among Black Americans and because of this understanding, social workers aim to teach and/or enhance Black Americans coping skills. It is the job of the social worker to understand the coping mechanisms individuals have in place and give them additional skills to effectively respond to their stressors (Baker, 1999).

Within their culture Black Americans view religion and extended family as healthy coping mechanisms. In order to get through tough time Black Americans rely on

religion and extended family for material assistance and spiritual guidance (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997). They view these as supportive networks that assist them with getting through hard times (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997). Because Black Americans use these informal networks, social workers may have a hard time assisting Black Americans. Likewise, social workers may never get the chance to work with Black Americans because of their informal networks. It is important to note that these informal networks are a part of their culture and two of the most successful coping skills many Black Americans have in place (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997).

### Religion

Black Americans who participate in church are less likely to need formal assistance (i.e., social workers) because their Pastor or Preacher provides counseling and assists with their material needs. For Black Americans, churches are small communities where the members help each other (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997). Neville, Tynes, and Utsey (2009) state that Black Americans who habitually attend church services have less family, work, and financial stressors.

### Extended Family

It is not unusual for Black Americans to depend on their family outside of their immediate family nor is it unusual for Black Americans to depend on close friends (or fictive kin) (Neville, Tynes, & Utsey, 2009). For many decades, Black Americans only had themselves to rely on and because of this, it is difficult for them to look outside of their "circle" for assistance. Extended family members and fictive kin partake in support networks such as child care, household tasks, financial assistance, and the care for aging parents and grandparents (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997).

It is important to note that religion (or churches) and extended family also assist Black Americans with informal linkage to resources that will assist them in improving their wellbeing (Neville, Tynes, & Utsey, 2009; Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997).

### Perception of Social Workers in Cinema

In popular culture social work is portrayed both negatively and positively which contributes to the public's perception of social workers, of social problems with which social workers are involved, and of clients as

the consumers of social work services (Freeman & Valentine, 2004). There is no doubt that the media helps shape reality for many Americans (Reid & Misener, 2004); and because of this bell hooks argues, that in order to maintain the status quo of society groups need to be portrayed in a certain light (Freeman & Valentine, 2004).

Reid and Misener (2001) suggest a positive social work profession image is needed for the social workers to effectively do their job. Though media outlets are a great form to show what the profession entails many authors suggest that consultants are needed to explain what it is social workers do (Reid & Misener, 2001).

Because of the negative representation the media attaches to the profession it is difficult for Americans to understand what the social work profession entails. In the 1993 movie "Mrs. Doubtfire", there was a social worker whose function was to mediate a custody battle, she was straight to the point, did not focus on the clients strengths, and showed no empathy towards the clients (Freeman & Valentine, 2004). In the 1999 film "Big Daddy", the social worker was looking for adoptive parents for a young boy however, the adult who wanted to be the child's guardian and who had created an amazing

bond with the child, did not have a job and instead of assisting him with the tools he needed to be a parent the social worker decided to find other parents for the child (Freeman & Valentine, 2004). These films did not portray the social work profession in a positive light. In both films neither one of the social workers empowered their clients and neither one of the social workers looked at their system to assist in providing services for them.

#### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Social systems theory would help guide this study; it allows individuals to be intertwined with the social systems that help them succeed. These systems may include but are not limited to school, work, family, extended family, friends, church, and other community outlets (Turner, 1996). However, a disturbance of any part of the system affects the system as a whole.

Empowerment theory would also help guide this study; this theory assists individuals in defining the problem and finding a solution for the problem (Turner, 1996). It also allows the social worker to highlight the individual's strengths in order to empower the client to make a difference in their present situation.

### Summary

This chapter examined what the social work profession entails, coping mechanisms of Black Americans, and the perception of social workers in cinema.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This chapter introduces the methods that were used within this study. These methods include the study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and views of social workers through the eyes of Black Americans. The perceptions of social workers are guided through the experiences that Black Americans have had, whether directly or indirectly.

The literature review focused on churches and extended family as being two of the most powerful reasons why many Black Americans may have not come in contact with social workers. The purpose of this study and the problem statement brought to light the need for the study and the reasons why Black Americans view social workers as CPS workers.



A quantitative survey was conducted at two churches within San Bernardino County. A quantitative study was important because it allowed the respondents to remain anonymous and gives them the ability to respond to all the questions honestly without fear of being judged. This study design was also chosen so that the study could examine the correlations between Black Americans involvement in CPS and their views of social workers.

One limitation of this study was that it was not a representation of the whole Black American population. However, the sample size was large enough to get a good understanding of perceptions.

#### Sampling

A total of 60, Black American, church goers within San Bernardino County participated in this study. This study was only conducted with individuals over 18 years of age. Purposive convenient sampling was conducted with the study because a subset of a population was used. The subset population is knowledgeable about their experiences with social workers and they are the only individuals who know how they perceive social workers.

## Data Collection and Instruments

The data was collected through a questionnaire. Participants were asked demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity, and educational level) and questions to assess their attitudes toward social workers as well as questions assessing extended family and church involvement. The questionnaire did not ask anything that would identify the participant, as to not breach confidentiality.

The instrument that was used in this study was created for this project (Appendix A) and reliability and validity were not tested. Through a variety of questions this instrument examined (1) if they had ever been involved with CPS, (2) if they had ever encountered a social worker outside of CPS, (3) if they could identify what agencies/organizations social workers worked in, (4) if they could turn to their church for support and assistance, and (5) if they can count on their extended family for support and assistance.

## Procedures

The data was gathered at two Black American churches in San Bernardino County. The researcher contacted the

churches to get permission to conduct the study at their church. After church concluded, the Pastor and researcher asked that anyone willing to participate in the study stay after church for a few minutes to complete the questionnaire. The researcher then gave the participants directions on how to fill out the questionnaire. Once they had understood how the process went they were given an informed consent letter (Appendix B) to sign and the questionnaire. Once the participants completed the questionnaire they handed it in to the researcher who placed the forms in a secure box to protect their confidentiality. When they handed in their questionnaire they were given a debriefing statement (Appendix C).

Data collection was conducted over a four-week period.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

Participants were not asked for their name, address, or phone number as to protect their identity and confidentiality. Each participant had the right to withdraw from the study at any given time and information to do so will be located in the debriefing statement (Appendix C).

Once the study was complete the data was shredded to further protect the respondents that participated in the study.

### Data Analysis

The data was collected in the form of surveys to test the hypotheses. This quantitative data assessed the relationship between the independent variable of Black American perceptions and the dependent variables of how they view social workers through related concepts such as, their involvement with social workers, church support, and extended family support. The analysis provided insight as to whether Black Americans view social workers as just CPS workers and if they view social workers as just people who take children away from their families. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used to analyze the quantitative data that was collected.

### Summary

A quantitative study design was conducted at Black American churches in San Bernardino County to examine Black American perceptions of social workers.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter will present the quantitative results on the perceptions of social workers using descriptive statistics. Demographic information about the participants will be reported. A cross tabulation test was conducted to test the relationships between the independent variable (previous experience with social workers) and the dependent variable (attitudes toward social workers).

#### Presentation of the Findings

Table 1 describes the demographics of the participants that were involved in this study. More than 71% of the participants were women ( $n = 43$ ) and 28% were men ( $n = 17$ ). Of the 60 participants, approximately 20% of the participants had some high school education ( $n = 12$ ), 25% of the participants completed high school ( $n = 15$ ), 13% had some college education ( $n = 8$ ), 16% completed college ( $n = 10$ ), 5% attended trade school ( $n = 3$ ), and 20% attended graduate school ( $n = 12$ ).

Twenty-five percent of the participants were between the ages of 18-30 (n = 15), 16% were between the ages of 31-40 (n = 10), 20% were between the ages of 41-50 (n = 12), 27% of the participants were between the ages of 51-60 (n = 16), and 11% were between the ages of 61-76 (n = 7).

Table 1. Demographics of the Participants

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	17	28.3
Female	43	71.7
Education		
Some High School	12	20.0
Completed High School	15	25.0
Some College	8	13.3
Completed College	10	16.7
Trade School	3	5.0
Graduate School	12	20.0
Age		
18-30	15	25.0
31-40	10	16.7
41-50	12	20.0
51-60	16	26.7
61-76	7	11.7

Table 2 illustrates the Black American Perceptions toward Social Workers and defines the participants level of agreeableness on a 5-point scale; strongly agree,

agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and unsure. For the purposes of analysis the questions in table two were re-numbered and the original questions numbers four through eight were omitted from table two because, they will be used in a different section of the analysis (chi-square testing).

Due to the length of the questionnaire and the number of response categories the following response categories will be combined: strongly agree and agree will be analyzed as agree; disagree and strongly disagree will be analyzed as disagree; unsure is a single category and will be analyzed alone and will not be combined with any other category.

In regards to item 1, "I believe Social Workers only remove kids from their home," 30 % agreed, 51.7% disagreed, and 18% were unsure. Item 2, "Do you feel that social workers take the time to understand the family and the situation before removing the child from the home," 61.6% agreed, 30% disagreed, and 8.3% were unsure. With respect to item 3, "I believe that Social Workers are helpful," 75% agreed, 16.7% disagreed, and 8.3% were unsure. For item 4, "I believe that Social Workers help change the world," 66.6% agreed, 25% disagreed, and 8.3%

were unsure. Item 5, "Social Workers only work with kids," 21.6% agreed, 71.6% disagreed, and 6.7% were unsure. With respect to item 6, "I believe that Social Workers can't do anything for me," 31.7% agreed, 61.7% disagreed, and 6.7% were unsure.

With respect to item 7, "My church members (counselors, Deacons, mother of the church, etc.) are people I can turn to when I need assistance with personal matters (e.g., family, financial assistance, counseling)," 93.3% agreed, 17% disagreed, and 6.7% were unsure. Item 8, "My Pastor is someone I can turn to when I need assistance with personal matters (e.g., family, financial assistance, counseling)," 85% agreed, 8.3% disagreed, and 6.7% were unsure. In regards to item 9, "My extended family (cousins, friends, aunts, uncles, God parents & siblings) help me when I'm having problems with life (e.g., family, financial assistance, counseling)," 78.3% agreed, 15% disagreed, and 6.7% were unsure.

Item ten states, "I believe in professional counseling and therapy," 86.7% agreed, 10% disagreed, and 3.3% were unsure. Item eleven states, "I believe that counseling and therapy are things that I can get at my church," 81.7% agreed, 11.7% disagreed, and 6.7% were



unsure. With respect to item twelve, "I believe the church can benefit from an integration of professional and Christian counseling/therapy conducted by a Social Worker with a biblical foundation," 83.4% agreed, 15% disagreed, and 1.7% was unsure. Lastly, item thirteen states, "I believe that the media (News, TV Shows, Movies, Radio, and Newspapers) helped shape my view of Social Workers," 45% agreed, 41.7 disagreed, and 13.3% were unsure.

Table 2. Attitudes toward Social Workers

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
I believe Social Workers only remove kids from their home		
Agree	18	30.0
Disagree	31	51.7
Unsure	11	18.0
Do you feel that social workers take the time to understand the family and the situation before removing the child from the home		
Agree	37	61.6
Disagree	18	30.0
Unsure	5	8.3
I believe that Social Workers are helpful		
Agree	45	75.0
Disagree	10	16.7
Unsure	5	8.3

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
I believe that Social Workers help change the world		
Agree	40	66.6
Disagree	15	25.0
Unsure	5	8.3
Social Workers only work with kids		
Agree	13	21.6
Disagree	43	71.6
Unsure	4	6.7
I believe that Social Workers can't do anything for me		
Agree	19	31.7
Disagree	37	61.7
Unsure	4	6.7
My church members are people I can turn to when I need assistance with personal matters		
Agree	56	93.3
Disagree	1	1.7
Unsure	3	5.0
My Pastor is someone I can turn to when I need assistance with personal matters		
Agree	51	85.0
Disagree	5	8.3
Unsure	4	6.7
My extended family help me when I'm having problems with life (e.g., family, financial assistance, counseling)		
Agree	47	78.3
Disagree	9	15.0
Unsure	4	6.7

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
I believe in professional counseling and therapy		
Agree	52	86.7
Disagree	6	10.0
Unsure	2	3.3
I believe that counseling and therapy are things that I can get at my church		
Agree	49	81.7
Disagree	7	11.7
Unsure	4	6.7
I believe the church can benefit from an integration of professional and Christian counseling/therapy conducted by a Social Worker with a biblical foundation		
Agree	50	83.4
Disagree	9	15.0
Unsure	1	1.7
I believe that the media (News, TV Shows, Movies, Radio, Newspapers) helped shape my view of Social Workers		
Agree	27	45.0
Disagree	25	41.7
Unsure	8	13.3

Table 3 illustrates what agencies and organizations the participants believe social workers work in. Twenty-seven participants (10.9%) indicated that social workers work within Child Protective Services, 21 participants (8.5%) reported that social workers work

within Adult Protective Services, 16 participants (6.5%) indicated that social workers work within Department of Social Services, 19 participants (7.7%) reported that social workers work in the Hospital setting, 18 participants (7.3%) indicated that social workers work in the School setting, 14 participants (5.6%) reported that social workers work in Nursing Homes, 12 participants (4.8%) indicated that social workers work in the Jail system, 19 participants (7.7%) reported that social workers work as Eligibility Workers.

Four participants (1.6%) indicated that social workers work in the Military, 16 participants (6.6%) reported that social workers work within the Public Health system, 9 participants (3.6%) indicated that social workers work within the Local & State Government, 11 participants (4.4%) reported that social workers work in Residential Treatment Centers, 9 participants (3.6%) indicated that social workers work in Community Agencies, 9 participants (3.6%) reported that social workers work in the Court House, 15 participants (6.0%) indicated that social workers work in the Social Security Office, 21 participants (8.4%) reported that social workers work within all of the organizations listed, while 8

participants (3.2%) indicated that they do not know what agencies/organizations social workers work within.

Table 3. Social Work Agencies/Organizations

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Child Protective Service	27	10.9
Adult Protective Services	21	8.5
Department of Social Services	16	6.5
Hospitals	19	7.7
Schools	18	7.3
Nursing Homes	14	5.6
Jails	12	4.8
Eligibility Workers	19	7.7
Military	4	1.6
Public Health	16	6.6
Local & State Government	9	3.6
Residential Treatment Centers	11	4.4
Community Agencies	9	3.6
Court House	9	3.6
Social Security Office	15	6.0
All of the Above	21	8.4
I don't know	8	3.2

A Chi-square test was conducted to determine the relationship between the participants' involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS) and the experiences the respondents have had with social workers; and the

findings were statistically significant (Chi-square = 10.762, df = 2, P = .005). Respondents who had no prior involvement with CPS have had positive experiences with social workers. However, respondents who have had prior involvement with CPS were nearly split with their experience being positive (n = 16) or negative (n = 17) with a social worker. Participants who have had prior experience with CPS, more likely had a negative experience with social workers they have come in contact with.

#### Summary

This chapter presented the findings for the quantitative data that was collected. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency distribution, and Chi-square test using cross tabulation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This study assessed Black American's perceptions of social workers and this chapter will discuss the findings that were presented in chapter 4, limitations to this study, and recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research.

#### Discussion

The results of the demographic characteristics suggested that women were overrepresented in this study, many of the respondents were highly educated, and the age of the respondents were evenly distributed.

The overall results of the respondents' perception of social workers show that their views of social workers are positive. However, the respondents who have had prior experience with Child Protective Service workers have a negative view about social workers. Therefore, based on the information provided by Reid and Misener (2004), the negative view of CPS workers would most likely make it difficult for those workers to do their job.

An important finding was that respondents believe that social workers are indeed helpful. They know that social workers do not only work with kids and they also are aware that social workers help change the world.

The findings of the study imply that respondents know who social workers are; however, to know and to understand is different. Within the study the researcher listed multiple agencies/organization that social workers work within and the result were scattered. Only 21 respondents out of 60 respondents believe that social workers work within all the agencies that they were listed. On the other hand, 27 respondents know that social workers work within CPS.

As a profession social workers are equipped to empower people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty; likewise social workers assist people with meeting their basic needs while trying to enhance their quality of life (NASW, 2010). Social workers follow a set of Ethical Principles that include; service, social justice, dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (NASW, 2010). Of these Ethical Principles, service is the one principle that is needed to accurately reach the Black



American community. According to this principle, social workers provide services will putting others interests above their own; they also use their skills, knowledge, and values to help people solve issues they may have; however social workers also seek opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge without ever seeking monetary rewards; this means social workers need to provide pro bono services (NASW, 2010). Social workers need to begin branching out in various Black American communities and openly talk about the profession to demystify any false beliefs some may have. To some extent, this may include providing pro bono services to Black American communities; which could be a form of prevention services.

The overall results of the respondents' coping skills show that the respondents can get assistance with personal matters (e.g., family, financial assistance, and counseling) from their church members, their pastors, and their extended family. Previous studies state that Black Americans often turn to their immediate and extended family as well as their church system as formal and informal resources for assistance (Neville, Tynes, &

Utsey, 2009; Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997; Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997).

However, Lewis and Trulear (2008) assert that, new ideas are needed to increase services and improve policies and outcomes because African American churches are changing and the problems faced by families today are increasing too quickly for the churches to met each families' needs. If new ideas are created social workers will be able to collaborate with churches and learn different methods for program development, economic management, and program evaluation and accountability; if social workers do this successfully they will improve communities and their collaboration with churches while bringing in more funding sources for social services (Billingsley & Morrison-Rodriguez, 1998).

Respondents overwhelmingly believe in professional counseling and therapy and these are things that they feel they can receive from their church. However, the respondents also strongly believe that the church could benefit from an integration of professional and Christian counseling/therapy from a biblical foundation conducted by a social worker. Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997, would agree with this belief because these authors noted

that Black Americans use various systems for support. Therefore, an integration of professionals would only enhance the networks and resources available to these families.

Overall, respondents view social workers as professionals that are helpers. They believe that social workers help change the world and they also believe that the church could benefit by having social workers. It is important for social workers to consider providing pro-bono services in the church setting to reach the community.

#### Limitations

A limitation of this study was the sample size. The researcher only had four weeks to collect the data, limiting the number of possible participants. Another limitation was that the data was only collected from two churches in San Bernardino County so the sample participants included does not reflect the entire Black American population in San Bernardino County.

Another limitation was that the female population was overrepresented. This may be because the research

data collection was conducted in a church setting and it is believed that more women attend church than men.

A final limitation to this study was that the data collected from the church, could have skewed many of the participants to be more positive. Many of the participants would walk up to the table, receive their survey, smile, and say "I'll be nice (Personal Communication, Anonymous, March 13, 2011)." The researcher had to continuously verbalize to the participants to be honest.

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

Education on what the social work profession is and what being a social worker means to the communities' social workers serve is something that needs to be addressed within the social work profession. This study suggests that waiting until a crisis occurs is not effective in providing an accurate outlook on the profession.

In regards to policy, social workers should advocate for the integration of social work services into the churches services/programs. Though church and state is said to be "separate," the church reaps many of the same

benefits a regular organization would (e.g., grants and funding). The combination of the social work profession and church would assist in improving services and outreach to the community.

Additional research with a younger Black American population is suggested. Conducting the research in a qualitative study would also give more feedback as to the views participants have regarding social workers. Doing a qualitative study may also give participants the chance to speak on what social workers and CPS workers can do to engage them and remove the negative stigma that may be attached to the profession.

### Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the Black American perceptions of social workers. The study also examined the role the Black church and extended family have in assisting individuals.

This study utilized a survey questionnaire design that examined the respondents' view of social workers, their church family, and extended family. Sixty respondents participated in the study and data collection

took place at two Black American churches in San Bernardino County.

The study found that Black Americans tend to have positive attitudes toward social workers. The study also found that the participants' involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS) and the experiences the respondents had with social workers.

Recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research include (1) providing education to Black Americans on what the social work profession is and what being a social worker means to the Black American communities social workers serve, (2) advocating for the integration of social work services into the churches services/programs, and (3) conducting a qualitative study to give participants the chance to speak on what social workers and CPS workers can do to engage them and remove the negative stigma that may be attached to the profession.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

## BLACK AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Please answer as honestly as possible. All survey's are anonymous and are only seen by the researcher.

Circle the answer that pertains to **you**

1. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Educational Level
  - a. Some high school
  - b. Completed high school
  - c. Some college
  - d. Completed college (obtained degree)
  - e. Trade school
  - f. Graduate School
4. I believe Social Workers only remove kids from their home
  - a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure
5. I or someone I know has come in contact with a social worker
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Unsure
6. If you answered **YES** to Question 5, was it a positive or negative experience? (If you answered **NO**, proceed to Question 7)
  - a. Positive
  - b. Negative
  - c. Unsure
7. I or someone I know has been involved with Child Protective Services (CPS)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No



8. If you answered YES to Question 7, was it a positive or negative experience? (If you answered NO, proceed to Question 9)
- a. Positive
  - b. Negative

Do you Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, or Unsure about the following questions:

9. Do you feel that social workers take the time to understand the family and the situation before removing the child from the home
- a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure
10. I believe that Social Workers are helpful
- a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure
11. I believe that Social Workers help change the world
- a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure
12. Social Workers only work with kids
- a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure
13. I believe that Social Workers can't do anything for me
- a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure

14. My church members (counselors, Deacons, mother of the church, etc.) are people I can turn to when I need assistance with personal matters (e.g., family, financial assistance, counseling)
  - a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure
15. My Pastor is someone I can turn to when I need assistance with personal matters (e.g., family, financial assistance, counseling)
  - a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure
16. My extended family (cousins, friends, aunts, uncles, God parents & siblings) help me when I'm having problems with life (e.g., family, financial assistance, counseling)
  - a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure
17. I believe in professional counseling and therapy
  - a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure
18. I believe that counseling and therapy are things that I can get at my church
  - a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure

19. I believe the church can benefit from an integration of professional and Christian counseling/therapy conducted by a Social Worker with a biblical foundation
- a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure
20. I believe that the media (News, TV Shows, Movies, Radio, Newspapers) helped shape my view of Social Workers
- a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
  - e. Unsure
21. Social workers work in the following agencies/organizations: **(Circle all that apply)**
- a. Child Protective Services
  - b. Adult Protective Services
  - c. County Building (DPSS)
  - d. Hospitals
  - e. Schools
  - f. Nursing Homes
  - g. Jails
  - h. Eligibility Workers at the County Building
  - i. Military (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines)
  - j. Public Health
  - k. Local & State Government
  - l. Residential Treatment Facilities
  - m. Community Agencies
  - n. Court House
  - o. Social Security Office
  - p. All of the above
  - q. I don't know

Developed by: Ron-Niece Paul

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

## **Informed Consent**

You are invited to participate in a study about Black Americans perceptions of social workers. This study is being conducted by Ron-Niece Paul, MSW student under the supervision of Dr. Janet Chang, Faculty Supervisor at California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the CSUSB Institutional Review Board.

In this study you will be asked to respond to numerous questions in regards to your view of social workers. This questionnaire should take no more than 15 minutes. This questionnaire is anonymous and no record will be made or kept of your name or any identifying information. You are free to skip any questions you do not want to answer.

All of the information contained will be held confidential by the researcher and only the researcher, the faculty advisor, and the research coordinator will view the data and/or results. There are no foreseeable risks to taking part and no personal benefits involved.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Janet Chang at (909) 537-5184.

\_\_\_\_\_ By placing a mark on the line, I acknowledge that I have been fully informed about this survey and are volunteering to take part and that I am at least 18 years old.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date

APPENDIX C  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

## **DEBRIEFING STATEMENT**

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire you just completed is about Black American perceptions of social workers. It was conducted by Ron-Niece Paul, MSW student at California State University, San Bernardino.

If you have any questions and/or concerns please contact Dr. Janet Chang at (909) 537-5184.

If you would like more information on what the Social Work profession is about, please visit the following websites.

National Association of Social Workers

[www.naswdc.org](http://www.naswdc.org)

Bureau of Labor Statistics

[www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov) (search: social work)

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