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THE INSIGHT AND FACTORS THAT PROMOTE JOB LONGEVITY FOR CHILD WELFARE SOCIAL WORKERS

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THE INSIGHT AND FACTORS THAT PROMOTE JOB LONGEVITY
FOR CHILD WELFARE SOCIAL WORKERS

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
Dakota Caitlin Meza
Loretta Reyes Broadnax

June 2017

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ABSTRACT

The high turnover rate of child welfare social workers has been a chronic issue that society has yet to mitigate. To understand this problem, the researchers looked at contributing factors in comparison to the factors that promote job longevity. The researchers reviewed the multidimensional theory of burnout, to explore the ongoing issue of high turnover rates. Also, organizational support theory was examined to determine if support from organizations contributed to job longevity. The post-positivist approach was used to gather qualitative data from this study as to the potential factors promoting job longevity through individual interviews with seasoned child welfare social workers. The study participants identified potential barriers in the workplace, the skills needed for professional development, and the benefit of having a support system to effectively do their job. In addition, the study participants demonstrated a strong sense of self-awareness and utilization of internal traits that promoted job longevity. It was discovered that child welfare social workers who possess emotional intelligence had the ability to cope with stress better, had less health issues, and were more likely to promote to higher level positions. By understanding the factors that contribute to job longevity, child welfare agencies can implement measures to promote job retention. Furthermore, when agencies invest in child welfare social workers by providing them support, it is reflected in the quality of their work and client engagement.

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We would like to thank CSUSB and the Pathway Program for making our endeavor in pursuing higher education a feasible reality while employed.

DEDICATION

Thank you Mom and Dad for raising me in a home filled with love, kindness, and endless support. You have shown me that in this world, there are no limitations as to what can be achieved. Thank you for always believing in me and making my life full of light. Thank you Ben for seeing something in me and taking the time to build me up so I could see my own strengths. You have shown me what a true leader is and inspired me to keep going in my education. Thank you Professor Watson for always having my back and advocating on behalf of me. Thank you to my best friend for being there for me every step of the way and helping me become a better person. I love you <3. Thank you Janine, for being such a great co-worker and friend. We are Zumba sistas for life. Thank you Rocio, how could I have done this without all of your support and laughter in the chaos? Thank you Loretta for being a part of this research journey with me. I could not have asked for a more passionate, insightful and fun research partner!

Love, Dakota

Mom and Dad, this dedication begins with you...because of you. Thank you!

I'm thankful that this journey has provided the opportunity to stretch myself...grow my faith...and cling to my family. I truly believe that God gives you exactly what you need, when you need it, and the people to help support you through it. Like a beautifully woven basket, my family and friends have interlocked their love and carried me through. Words cannot begin to describe the amount of gratitude I have for those who have continually encouraged and supported my decision to continue my education. This accomplishment is not mine alone...I relied heavily on the strength of my rock, my encourager and number one supporter. *You held me up when I wanted to fall, you made me laugh when I chose to cry, you constantly reminded me that time was being kept in minutes when it felt like hours...thank you for hanging in there, patiently waiting for me to be present and one with you again...this Master's degree is as much yours, as it is mine.* To my girls...I missed you so much, thank you for hanging in there too! Dakota...thank you, thank you, thank you...you finished this journey with me and we worked hard, stayed up for HOURS, and laughed a lot! I love to learn...and I will never stop...but for now I must rest...and return to be one with my family, my daughters, and my everlasting love, Mark.

-Forever in my heart M.J.

Loretta <3

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CHAPTER ONE

ASSESSMENT

Introduction

Chapter one discusses the assessment process of the research study. It introduces the research focus of this study, the rationale behind the chosen paradigm used to drive the study, and the method that will be used to gather information from participants about the research focus. Further into the chapter, there is a literature review presented that explores the problem and potential solutions related to the research focus. Based on this, there are two theories derived from the literature review from the interpretation of the literature by the researchers to promote a better understanding. Lastly, this chapter will discuss the potential contribution of this study to the micro and macro social work practice.

Research Focus

The research focus of this study is intended to obtain insight as to the factors that promote job longevity for child welfare social workers. To further explore these factors, seasoned child welfare social workers were interviewed and asked open-ended questions to get a better understanding of what they perceived to be the factors that have assisted in their job longevity.

Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

The chosen paradigm for this research study is the post-positivist approach. The post-positivist approach takes an inductive exploratory approach to understanding an objective reality (Morris, 2006). By incorporating the post-positivist approach within this research study, it allowed the researchers to explore the contributing factors of the objective reality regarding high turnover rates and the factors that promote job longevity of child welfare social workers. This approach allowed the researchers to gather qualitative data in a naturalistic setting by interviewing seasoned child welfare social workers. The researchers gathered information from the literature review and derived two theories based on the interpretation of the literature. The researchers also used their work experience as child welfare social workers to provide additional insight.

Literature Review

High Turnover Rates

Since 1960, society has had a chronic issue of high turn-over rates of child welfare social workers without an effective solution (Strolin-Goltzman, 2008). The U.S. Government Accounting Office, (2003) reported that “there is an estimated turnover rate of child welfare social workers between 30-40% annually nationwide, with the average tenure being less than two years” (p. 35).

There are commonly reported contributing factors that lead to ongoing turnover rates. An article by Shier, Graham, Fukuda, Brownlee, Kline, Walj,

reported that ten key trends lead to child welfare social workers' leaving the workplace are the following:

High caseloads, bureaucratic and punitive agency practices, lack of resources, lack of intellectual challenge, lack of satisfaction with promotional opportunities, exclusion in the workplace, role ambiguity, lack of a work life balance, lack of organizational support, and lack of perceived organizational fairness in procedures and outcomes. (2012, p.1097).

For social workers, stress in the workplace has been found to be a contributing factor why many leave the workplace. Pines (1988) noted that the work demands and the high responsibility of a child welfare social worker could induce physical and psychological symptoms of burnout. Further, Howe (2004) reported that child welfare social workers are constantly working with complex human behavior in social contexts, which can have a great emotional impact on a social worker, causing their personal needs to go unmet. According to West (2015), negative psychological responses to the cumulative stress of working with high-risk populations can lead to social workers developing health issues (West, 2015).

An article written by the authors, Sprang, Craig, and Clark (2011), reported that child welfare social workers who are tasked with interviewing children and adults in which traumatic experiences are recounted on a regular basis, have the potential to develop Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS). STS refers to the symptoms caused by at least one indirect exposure to a traumatic

event. STS is the transfer of trauma related symptoms experienced by the trauma survivor onto family members and supportive individuals such as therapists and social workers. Further studies have shown that it is not exclusively one indirect event that can cause STS; it can also be a culmination of repeated exposure to incidents (Nelson-Gardell & Harris, 2003).

Job Longevity

A contributing factor to promote job longevity of child welfare social workers is when workers understand the complexities of their role in serving at-risk families because it can promote a sense of psychological empowerment (Lee, Weaver, and Hrostowski, 2011). The following benefits are linked to psychological empowerment:

Child welfare social workers are more likely to have a sense of control and competence, report a sense of ownership when answering questions about their tasks, and experience higher levels of job satisfaction and/or commitment to their organization. (2011, p. 480)

Another contributing factor to job longevity is the practice of self-care at home and at work. Adams (1980) conducted a study that listed the following practices to prevent compassion fatigue and psychological distress among social workers: a nutritious diet, regular physical exercise, participation in relaxing activities, being able to separate work from home life, separating oneself from strained personal relationships, and maintaining supportive friendships outside the work environment (Adams,1980). At work, Hook and Rothenberg (2009)

stated that healthy coping mechanisms to combat on the job stressors may include exercising, spending time with families, taking a break from the office, and leaving the office earlier. Child welfare organizations that provide manageable workloads and additional support within the workplace contribute to a social worker's stress reduction (Hook and Rothenberg, 2009).

Impact

High turnover rates and job longevity of child welfare social workers impact social work practice on the micro and macro level. On the micro level, there is a linkage between stress induced health issues of child welfare social workers and a decline in the quality of care provided to families that are being served (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Furthermore, high turnover rates impact social work practice according to an article written by Pryce and Shackelford (2007), which found that foster children are negatively affected by having multiple assigned social workers because they must undergo the retelling of their traumatic experiences multiple times which can escalate attachment and trust issues already present. In contrast, Chiarelli-Helminiak's (2015) study showed that job longevity is linked to an increase in job satisfaction and the reduction of burnout of social workers positively impacts the services provided to children. On the macro level, high turnover rates impact child welfare agencies according to Drake and Yadama (1996), who report that agencies that have a stressful work climate are less likely to offer comprehensive and continuous services for the families being served. In addition, the magnitude of high turnover rates can

affect agency resources, staff morale, and service continuity and quality (Smith, 2005). However, the study of Chiarelli-Helminiak (2015) demonstrated that organizations that develop practices and policies that support the mitigation of burnout amongst child welfare social workers could promote job longevity and positively impact society.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Two theories that were derived from the researchers' interpretation of the presented literature review are multidimensional theory of burnout and organizational support theory.

According to the multidimensional theory of burnout, individual stress experience is developed from an individual's perception of one's self and others in the context of complex social relationships (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). This can be applied to child welfare social workers' self-perceptions and their relationships with clients, colleagues, and supervisors. According to this theory, workplace relationships are a source of both emotional strain and reward when coping with job stress (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). The multidimensional theory of burnout describes burnout as "a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job" which includes the three core components of "emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment" (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). The literature review supports that child welfare social workers undergo the prolonged physical and mental symptoms of the components of

burnout, which can influence their decision to voluntarily leave their job positions, resulting in poor retention rates for this occupation.

A theory derived to support child welfare social workers is organizational support theory, which draws from the idea of mutual exchange between the employee and an agency. “Organizational support theory suggests that employees view the caring or uncaring treatment they receive as an indication that the organization favors or disfavors them” (Vardaman, Allen, Otondo, Hancock, Shore, Rogers, 2016, p1485). Mutual exchange within a place of employment is best identified as support. Research suggests that an employee’s response to receiving support is reciprocated in the manner of commitment and dedication to the organization (Vardaman, et. al, 2016). More specifically, support has been shown to be extremely valuable for human service workers when received from their supervisors (Nissly, Mor Barak, Levin (2005). This theory can be implemented to counteract the effects that stress has on child welfare social workers and provide insight to support job retention.

Although child welfare social workers have limited control as to their work environment, which is shaped by social, political, and economic factors, both theories suggest that they have the power to change their perception of their workplace environment. The theories suggest that an individual’s view of stress, how one copes with the stress, and how one perceives relationships with others in the workplace are factors relating to the development of burnout. The focus of this study explored the insight and factors that have kept seasoned child welfare

social workers in their job position for several years, and to promote ideas of job retention within the child welfare field.

Potential Contribution to Social Work Practice

This study encouraged seasoned child welfare social workers in exploring and identifying their own strengths, support systems, and resources that assist in job longevity. Also, this study has the potential to empower newer child welfare social workers in developing their skill set to include coping with on the job stressors and explore alternative methods to promote health, wellness, and job retention.

Summary

This chapter presented the research focus of the insight and the factors that promote job longevity for child welfare social workers. The post-positivist paradigm approach was introduced and used in the literature review to understand the high turnover rates and factors that promote job longevity. The literature also discussed the impact of both, on a micro and macro level. The two theories, multidimensional theory of burnout and organizational support theory, were used to explore interpretation of the literature. Lastly, this chapter discussed the potential contribution of the study to micro and macro social work practice.

CHAPTER TWO

ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Chapter two discusses the engagement process of the research study. It discusses the researcher's self-preparation for this study and addresses potential barriers of the study regarding diversity, ethical, and political issues. The chapter also discusses the role of technology in engagement of participants of the study.

Self-Preparation

In preparation for this study, the researchers explored what paradigm would best guide this research and learned the role as the researchers for the study before deciding on the post-positivist approach. Also, the researchers educated themselves about understanding the contributing factors that deter social workers from continuing to work within the child welfare sector and those that contribute to their longevity through the gathering of a literature review. In addition, the researchers of this study are both "seasoned" social workers and reflected on their experiences as self-preparation. It was important for the researchers to be aware of personal biases as to the child welfare system and personal experience and knowledge of the varied ways in which case management occurs. Research went into determining the appropriate instrument for obtaining the qualitative data for this study. It was reviewed to ensure that all

the questions were easily understood and open-ended to allow for a broad range of answers. The researchers ensured that all measures were in place so that no harm would come to the participants in any way during this study.

Diversity Issues

In doing this type of research, it is critical to be aware of the potential differences between the researchers and the social workers who are the participants of this study. Issues of diversity range from differences in work experience, educational background, gender, ethnicity, spirituality, sexual orientation, physical appearance, verbal articulation, and body language/mannerisms/gestures.

Ethical Issues

A potential ethical issue in this post-positivist study is maintaining the confidentiality of the study participants. The researchers ensured the protection of the study participants' identities from being published or known to others by keeping their information and interviews in a locked drawer that was only accessible to the researchers. During the initial introductory interviews with study participants, the researchers explained that their identities would remain confidential. Ensuring the confidentiality assisted with having the participants share their experiences without the fear of being identified by their agency of employment and dealing with any repercussions

Political Issues

The researchers remained sensitive to the fact that this study is one that engaged current child welfare social workers in exploring their role and job responsibilities as a child welfare employee. The questions asked allowed for the social workers to give thought to, and explore their current job satisfaction and any areas of concern about their job. This type of self-exploration has potential to initiate a political issue should any of the participants feel the need to contact their local union to report any of the issues they shared or concerns they may have. These concerns have the potential to change in policy and procedure within the agency.

The Role of Technology in Engagement

The role of technology in engagement for this study will be the method in which the researchers use to get the required qualitative data. The following technological devices used throughout this research study: personal cellular telephones, personal laptops that only the researchers have access to, the Internet, and electronic mail for correspondence with study participants. These technological devices were essential in abetting the communication between all parties involved in the study, gathering related literature on the topic, organizing the gathered data, and writing and publishing of the research study

Summary

Chapter two discussed the engagement process of this research study. The researchers' initial engagement with the participants was crucial in developing trust to obtain personal disclosures regarding their job as a child welfare social worker. This chapter discussed the issues of diversity, ethical, and political implications of the study as well as the role technology played in the engagement process.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

Chapter three will review the implementation of the study to better understand the research focus. This chapter discusses in detail the demographics and selection of study participants, the data gathering methods, phases, recording, and data analysis procedures.

Study Site

The research for this study was gathered within Riverside County, California. The researchers incorporated snowball sampling in selecting participants who met the criteria of being employed for five years or more within a child welfare government agency in Southern California. Snowball sampling was used due to the difficulty in finding eligible participants who met the criteria. As a result, a specific study site was not selected for this study.

Study Participants

The study participants selected for this study were 20 child welfare social workers employed by a government agency within Southern California. To be considered a “seasoned” child welfare social worker, the participants identified as

having five years or more of work experience within a child welfare agency. The participants were interviewed by the researchers as to their demographic information in the form of six questions (see Appendix A).

The demographic information of the individual participants is as follows: Of the 20 participants interviewed, 16 participants were female, and 4 were male. As to the study participant's age, 45% of participants were between the ages of 31-40, 45% were between the ages of 41-50, and 10% were between the ages of 51-60 years.

Out of the 20 study participants, 6 identified themselves as African American, 6 participants identified themselves as Hispanic, 5 participants identified themselves as Caucasian, 2 participants identified themselves as 1 or more ethnicities, and 1 participant declined a response.

Regarding educational background; all 20 participants have college degrees that specialize in social and behavioral sciences including social work, sociology, psychology, child development, and human services in which 9 have a bachelor's level degree and 11 have a graduate degree, and three are currently in a graduate program.

As to the number of years working in the child welfare field, 15% of participants reported having at least five years of experience, 55% of participants reported having between 9-12 years of experience, and 25% of participants reported having between 14-18 years of experience.

Selection of Participants

The non-probability sampling technique, Snowball Sampling, was utilized to obtain participants for this study. The participants consisted of 20 social workers who held positions as case carrying social workers, supervisors, and managers. All participants were employed for five years or more within a child welfare government agency in Southern California. The chosen method of Snowball Sampling was implemented because participants met the criteria as rare and difficult to find. The researchers obtained referrals from participants that were known that complied with the criteria for the study. The researchers then requested the eligible study participants to identify additional participants they know who meet the criteria of the study. The recruitment of the participants was initiated in-person, via telephone, and on the social networking website, Facebook.

Data Gathering

The data gathering process for this study began with obtaining related research as to the issue of high turnover rates of child welfare social workers. The researchers then participated in self-reflection as to their experiences in the child welfare field and explored the question of what factors promote job longevity. The next step of data gathering was the development of the theoretical orientation that derived the two theories of the multi-dimensional theory of burnout and organizational support theory.

Upon the completion of these steps, the researchers then created an open-ended questionnaire with the purpose of gathering qualitative data of participants in a naturalistic setting. The researchers incorporated the solution focused approach in the development of the questionnaire to focus on the strengths and previous successes of participants rather than the past problems and failures (Trepper, McCollum, De Jong, Korman, Gingerich, & Franklin, 2008). Upon the development of the questionnaire, additional documents were created such as a demographic form on behalf of the individual participants, an informed consent form, and a debriefing statement.

Phases of Data Collection

The researchers began the snowball sampling process with seasoned child welfare social workers they knew, who in turn, provided referrals of recommendation for other eligible participants of the study. 20 seasoned child welfare social workers were selected, consented, and participated in the interviewing process in interactions that were face-to-face and by telephone. During the initial interviewing process, the researchers explained in detail about the focus of the study, the interview process, and the implementation of confidentiality between the researchers with all individual participants. The participants received a debriefing statement (see Appendix B) and an informed consent form (see Appendix C), which was signed with an "X" manually or electronically via e-mail.

The researchers interviewed every participant with a questionnaire of eleven open-ended questions (see Appendix A). This questionnaire explored the participants' strengths, effective solutions of coping with on the job stressors, their current job satisfaction rating, what they feel needs to change to increase overall job satisfaction and advice for new child welfare social workers. The objective of this study is to develop an insight as to the factors that promote job longevity of social workers in the child welfare field. Upon the discovery of the factors, they can be linked to promote potential ideas for job retention for less seasoned and new social workers within the child welfare field.

Data Recording

Upon obtaining verbal and written consent from study participants as to being interviewed and recorded, the researchers used an audio recording device to record the interviews of individual participants. These interviews were later transcribed by the researchers in a Word document and saved in a folder dedicated to research on a personal computer database. Along with these transcripts, the researchers placed the informed consent forms and audio recordings in the research folder and identified individual participants' recordings as "A-1, A-2, A-3," etc.in order as interviewed. The researchers ensured that the computer database was password protected in where the researchers were the only ones aware of the password to ensure confidentiality of the study

participants. Upon the completion of this study, the researchers destroyed the data artifacts.

During the interviewing process, the researchers demonstrated a variety of engagement skills. These skills included active listening, eye contact (during face to face interactions), incorporating non-verbal and minimal encouragement, did not interrupt the responses of participants, showed appreciation for the time and effort the participant put in the interview, and displayed a non-judgmental demeanor during the interviewing process. Throughout the interviews, the researchers reminded the participants of the expected timeframe of interviews along with how many questions were on the questionnaire, and what question number they were on in the interview. After feedback was provided of the last question, the researchers initiated the termination process with the participants and thanked them for participating in the interviewing process. All study participants engaged and responded to all eleven questions until completion.

In addition to the documentation of the individual responses of study participants, the researchers maintained a research journal. Within the journal, the researchers discussed observations that they may have seen and heard from individual interviews, discussed similarities and differences, keywords that were said, along with the reflection and assessment as to the researchers on the information provided.

Data Analysis Procedures

Upon the completion of transcribing the interviews, the researchers analyzed the data using open, axial, and selective coding to identify several themes. The researchers also examined the demographic background of participants and derived trends of the results.

Summary

This chapter focused on the implementation process of the research study to determine what factors promote job longevity for child welfare social workers. The chapter discussed who the study participants were and how they were selected, the use of questionnaires and technological devices to conduct data collection and recording, and the data analysis process of individualized interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION

Introduction

Chapter four describes the methodology used by the researchers to engage in the data analysis of this study. This method helped guide the researchers in developing and recording common themes among participants. This chapter also discusses the researchers' data interpretation as well as the implications of the findings for micro and macro practice.

Data Analysis

An approach used in this study for qualitative data analysis was the “bottom up” approach. According to Glasser and Strauss (1967), the “bottom up” approach uncovers theories from the findings of the data analysis (Morris, 2006). The data analysis involved an open coding process where the researchers broke down the interviews into categories based on keywords (Morris, 2006). As a result, the researchers identified recurring themes and classified the relationships between them by using axial coding. The researchers then filtered the major themes down into sub-themes by using selective coding and identified related theories. Study participants were asked to provide demographic information, then were interviewed and asked 11 open-ended questions.

The findings of the interviews are as follows:

Regarding question #1, when participants were asked what they feel is going well with their job; the major responses consisted of receiving support from co-workers, client engagement, communication with supervisors, and personal relationships. For example, a participant stated, "I like the co-workers in my unit, we get along well, and help each other out" (Participant A9, Personal Interview, April 2017). A second participant stated, "My interactions with clients; I feel that my engagement with clients and working with them goes well" (Participant A10, Personal Interview, April 2017). Furthermore, a third participant reported,

I think currently I have good communication with my supervisor. I have an awesome supervisor, she is very supportive, we have a good unit to work with, I have one good manager, the management team is improving, my caseload has been really good so far, and it has been a long time since I removed a child. (Participant A8, Personal Interview, April 2017)

Regarding question #2, when participants were asked to describe a day when they go into work and everything was going right and there were no issues, the major response reported it to be a day in which there is no crisis on their caseload. For example, a participant stated,

No issues would be maybe one or two voice mails, e-mails, you'll always have a million of emails, but nothing blowing up, no problems with kids in placements, the two voice mails on my phone would be from service

providers returning my calls saying how amazing my clients are doing (Participant A1, Personal Interview, March 2017).

A second participant stated the following, “It is quiet, there are no detentions, I’d be working with families, giving them what they need instead of detaining kids... giving them whatever they need and it’s a quiet day. No crises” (Participant A4, Personal Interview, March 2017).

The researchers found that a minor response amongst the participants was that it was impossible to have a day without issues. For example, a participant stated,

I would say that would be a fairy tale because there is never a day where there are no issues. I would say it depends on what someone defines as an issue. In this job, issues are the job and handling issues, so having no issues is like having no job, because that is the job, handling issues. (Participant A3, Personal Interview, March 2017)

In regard to question #3, when participants were asked what keeps them motivated to go to work, the major response was that they are making a difference in the lives they serve. For example, one participant stated, “Knowing that I will make a difference for the positive and that my interaction with someone will be beneficial to a child” (Participant A5, Personal Interview, April 2017). Another participant stated, “I am passionate about wanting to make a difference in the lives of children, so even when things are tough I try to focus on that and it usually gets me through any rough spots” (Participant A12, Personal Interview,

April 2017). In addition, another participant responded by saying, “Knowing that the work we do is important and can change lives” (Participant A13, Personal Interview, April 2017).

The minor response found amongst the participants that kept them motivated to go to work was found to be due to financial purposes. One participant stated, “A paycheck” (Participant A20, Personal Interview, April 2017). Another participant relayed, “A paycheck is definitely a motivator; having fun at work, enjoying who you’re working with, enjoying what you’re doing, and learning new things” (Participant A3, Personal Interview, March 2017).

Regarding question #4, when participants were asked how they practice self-care in dealing with stressful issues at work, the major response was that they talk with someone at work. For example, one participant stated,

The number one thing I personally do is go to my supervisor because she has the ability to de-escalate my feelings of anxiety or stress when a situation is blowing up or when I am feeling overwhelmed. Also talking to some of my favorite coworkers, those are the things I do for self-care. (Participant A1, Personal Interview, March 2017)

Another participant stated, “I go for a walk, process it with my peers, organize, and leave it at work at the end of day” (Participant A11, Personal Interview, April 2017). Furthermore, another participant responded by relaying, “I have a friend at work that I can talk to when I feel stressed out; I also take breaks

when I feel overwhelmed and listen to music throughout the day that calms and relaxes me” (Participant A15, Personal Interview, April 2017).

Regarding question #5, when asked what self-care practices were used outside of the workplace, the major responses were a physical activity and spending time with family. For example, one participant stated,

Sometimes doing things that are active, like running, is therapeutic for me. Also doing something active like playing on the softball team. It's nice to be outside doing something active. Playing with my kids, whether it is a board game or outside in the backyard. (Participant A4, Personal Interview, April 2017)

Another participant stated, “I go to Zumba three times a week” (Participant A1, Personal Interview, April 2017). Furthermore, another participant responded, “Spend time with my daughter, go for walks, and just relax” (Participant A13, Personal Interview, April 2017).

The minor responses that emerged from this question regarding self-care practices outside of work were faith-based activities and consumption of alcohol. For example, one participant stated, “Spending quality time with family and good friends, regularly attending church, mission trips, prayer, and winery trips” (Participant A13, Personal Interview, April 2017). In addition, another participant said, “Alcohol helps too, after the job is done” (Participant A3, Personal Interview, March 2017).

Regarding question #6, when asked what type of support at work or outside of work is needed to do their job effectively, the major response was having a sense of support from others. For example, one participant stated,

Support from our managers, supervisors, colleagues, also from coworkers that have some professional conversations that we can come within a group. Outside of my job, it's always my brother who is the psychologist, my friends that are medical doctors and lawyers where we sit down and they advise me and help me. Those are my support systems that are professional support, people that I look up to and a positive influence in my life. I always want people around me to reach for the sky and go higher. Society is very competitive, stay in the race. (Participant A18, Personal Interview, April 2017)

Another participant stated,

I need management/leadership to take the time to understand the work I do so they can make informed decisions when necessary. Outside of work, I truly believe people that are working in child welfare social work need to have some connection to a spiritual power. I believe that my faith is really what made it possible for me to work as a social worker. It is the number one thing I feel is needed to survive child welfare social work” (Participant A12, Personal Interview, April 2017).

Furthermore, a participant reported,

I think you need both types of support to do the job effectively. In the office, you need the support of your supervisor and managers when you make decisions. We have very difficult decisions to make sometimes and if you don't have the support from the supervisor and manager it can be very stressful. You also need support from your co-workers because you need to staff cases with them or just vent about a case. Outside of work, you need the support of friends and family. There have been many times where I need to stay late and not able to attend to my family, if there was no support from them, the stress of the job would become unbearable" (Participant A9, Personal Interview, April 2017).

Regarding question #7, when participants were asked how they dealt with the ongoing changes in child welfare practices and laws, the major responses consisted of having a sense of acceptance as to the changes, the desire to be informed and develop an understanding as to the changes, and adapting in making these changes. For example, a participant stated, "I try to gain an understanding as to why practices changes and why laws were put into effect; once I have an understanding, it is easier to apply it into my practice" (Participant A15, Personal Interview, April 2017). Another participant stated the following, "Try to roll with the changes, keep yourself informed, and embrace what is being brought out" (Participant A2, Personal Interview, March 2017).

The minor response that emerged from this question as to how the participants dealt with the changes that occur at work was responded with the response of getting stressed. One participant stated the following, “I get stressed because I am never sure if the work I am doing is following the correct policies or best practice methods” (Participant A10, Personal Interview, April 2017).

Regarding question #8, when participants were asked how they would rate their job satisfaction on a scale from 1-10, 1 being not at all and 10 being absolutely love it, all responses were reported with an above average rating in job satisfaction. Out of the 20 study participants, 70% rated their job satisfaction between a 7-8 rating. When asked what would need to happen to move their rating closer to a 10, a major response was to have a more supportive management team. For example, one study participant stated the following, “Having management that genuinely cares about their workers and who also care about the families and can demonstrate that in their behavior not just their words” (Participant A5, Personal Interview, April 2017).

A minor response that emerged amongst the participants was the need for higher compensation. One study participant responded, “If there was a yearly raise or pay increase to look forward to...” (Participant A14, Personal Interview, April 2017).

Further, this question prompted a response indicating that the rating could never be a 10. One study participant stated,

Even though I do like doing my job, I don't think I could fully be a 10 because of the added stress that comes with the job. I didn't start getting gray hairs until I started working here, but that might be because of my age. The job has a lot to do with the added stress and decline in physical health because you're out in the field, you bring your lunch, but you have nowhere to warm it up, or it's stuck in the fridge and you're out on a call, and you have to figure things out while you're out there. It does take a toll on you personally, but that's just the job. (Participant A2, Personal Interview, March 2017)

Regarding question #9, when participants were asked what personal attributes/strengths they felt have helped them maintain their job position, the major responses included having effective interpersonal skills when interacting with clients, being able to collaborate, maintaining a positive outlook, being able to stay calm in stressful situations, ability to adapt to changes, feeling driven to do the work, and being open to professional development. For example, a study participant stated the following,

Me being a kind person, loving, nurturing, and understanding. I am an individual that can accept constructive criticism, the good, bad, ugly, and indifferent. I am able to converse back and forth with co-workers and supervisors, seeing that supervisors are not God, I look at them as equals. Being respectful, respect the individual, everyone, no matter who you are,

what you do, what position you hold. I am an understanding individual that is always willing to help. (Participant A7, Personal Interview, April 2017)

Another participant responded with the following, “Positive outlook, flexibility, personable with others, strong writing skills, and learning to work well under pressure” (Participant A10, Personal Interview, April 2017).

Regarding question #10, there were two parts to the question. As to the first part, when participants were asked how they have changed the way they do social work now as compared to their first year on the job, two major responses emerged indicating that their decision-making process had evolved and their methods of client engagement improved. As to the decision-making process, a study participant responded with the following,

I’m definitely thinking longer term. You think your decisions and long-term effects have on people, not just the short-term effects. Being able to better gauge where you’re going to go with a decision based on your experience. Having had similar experiences in the past and what those outcomes were of those experiences you have a better gauge as to pros and cons of your decisions. (Participant A3, Personal Interview, March 2017)

As to improvement in client engagement, a study participant reported, “I proceed a little more with caution now than I did then. I had very little conflict resolution skills then” (Participant A20, Personal Interview, March 2017).

As to the second part of the question, which asked what practices they still use from when they first started the job, the two major responses were the

collaboration with co-workers and the implementation of social work values and ethics. As to collaboration, a study participant stated the following,

Staffing with co-workers, because you can't come into this job thinking you're going to save the world by yourself. Practices with peer relationships and utilizing of networking. When you first come into this field, you are hearing all the different acronyms and programs where programs come and go and people move somewhere else. But you still have contacts in different programs that can be utilized and used to stabilize a family to not remove kids and knowing service providers is good to know. (Participant A2, Personal Interview, April 2017)

As to implementation of social work values and ethics, a study participant shared the following,

The only thing I still do is try to be honest with my clients, never try to manipulate them, push them any one way or the other. From the beginning, always being respectful, treat my clients like they are human beings, and take my job seriously, it is not a game. (Participant A8, Personal Interview, April 2017)

Regarding question #11, when participants were asked what advice they would give to a new child welfare social worker, the major responses that emerged included; seeking out support systems within the workplace, remain open-minded to learning new things, find a way to separate work and home, maintain standards of respect and integrity when engaging with families, and

participate in regular practices of self-care. An example of a response that incorporated all four of these factors is as follows,

They are not in this alone. Utilize their support systems as far as their supervisors, co-workers, and don't be afraid to ask questions because that is how you're going to learn. You're not always going to have the answers and that is ok. Treat your clients with respect and that will get you a long way. Finding a style that works for you and also maintaining a balance in your lifestyle. This job is easy to get sucked into, you can easily get burned out, so I do think self-care is important and finding a balance to your life in how you're going to maintain a stressful job but also not putting yourself in all of that. (Participant A4, Personal Interview, April 2017)

Another suggestion that was shared by a study participant was, "Be flexible, be open, remain humble, be strong, don't be afraid of confrontation, be powerful, be transparent, and don't be afraid to ask questions or make a mistake" (Participant A19, Personal Interview, April 2017).

A minor response that emerged suggested that as a new child welfare social worker, they find a spiritual connection to the job. One study participant stated the following,

This job is a calling. It's not any job; you have to be called to do this type of work, a ministry. You can't come in here for the money; you have to be called to do this type of work. You can't be messing around. If you do the

job, you do it to the best of your ability. (Participant A7, Personal Interview, April 2017)

Data Interpretation

Despite the commonly recognized high turnover rates of child welfare social workers, the findings presented in the data analysis demonstrate an overall insight as to what factors have kept seasoned child welfare social workers at their jobs. The interviews showed that most of the study participants remain in their jobs because of the support they receive inside and outside of their work environment. Also, the participants acknowledged their self-awareness and utilization of their internal traits which contributed to their length of employment. Many of the study participants could identify potential barriers in the workplace and the skills needed for professional development to do their job effectively. They were able to reflect upon their work experiences and gather helpful tips to promote ideas for job longevity for new social workers in the field of child welfare.

Assessment of the data analysis revealed major responses into six themes; Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation, Social Skills, Empathy, and Support. The themes were compared and interpreted with the literature findings and are as follows:

Self-Awareness

This study discovered that job longevity in seasoned child welfare social workers was in part due to their heightened self-awareness which allowed them

to identify with their internal state and assisted them in effectively coping with on the job stressors. This finding is consistent with the study of Dowden, Warren, and Kambui (2014) that work productivity and well-being can enhance the participation in self-care and self-awareness. In addition, the participants were able to identify effective interpersonal skills when engaging with others, such as effective communication and teamwork skills that contributed to their ability in forming collaborative relationships with their co-workers and supervisors. Further, having to balance work responsibilities with personal life expectations required that the participants have a good understanding of their emotions and how they can either positively or negatively affect their lives and those around them. Regarding balancing work and personal life, a major response of the participants that supports self-awareness is participating in self-care practices outside of work, which included spending time with family and participating in various activities.

All of the participants that interviewed rated their overall job satisfaction with above average ratings. The researchers discovered that the common reason why participants continued in their job position is due to their perceived ability and skill level that they possess which positively impacts the lives of the families that they serve. Also, the acceptance of departmental and policy changes by the participants displayed their willingness and ability to continually assess their strengths and weaknesses and improve their skill level within the child welfare field by making the required changes and improvements to enhance

their social work practice. Further, all the study participants had advanced level job classifications which supported their inner drive to continue their professional development and advancement.

Self-Regulation

This study discovered that job longevity in seasoned child welfare social workers was in part due to their ability to self-regulate emotions in crisis and stressful situations. This finding is inconsistent with the study of Pines (1988) finding that “the work demands and high responsibility of child welfare social workers can induce physical and psychological symptoms of burnout.” The findings of the literature and the study are inconsistent because the perception of work demands and high responsibility is different. In contrast, the participants of this study have found effective ways of coping with work requirements and have changed their way of social work practices in efforts to improve their role of high responsibility.

A common theme that emerged was the ability of seasoned child welfare social workers to cope with the demands of work by consistently self-regulating their emotions and their ability to focus on the value of the work with children and families. The participants described their traits and skills which aligned with self-regulation. Such skills were their ability to be calm and level headed when faced with a crisis, having conflict resolution techniques, the capacity to work well under pressure, not taking things personally, and abiding by social work values and ethics always.

Study participants identified their decision-making process as one of the major changes that they made since becoming a child welfare social worker and their first year on the job. Many of the participants were conscientiousness of their decision-making processes and considered the impact of the decisions they made regarding the families. Participants had described traits of innovation and adaptability in improving their decision-making and ability to prevent emotions and biases from influencing their decisions.

Motivation

Another factor that has promoted job longevity is the participant's motivation to make a positive difference in the lives of the families that they serve within the child welfare system. This finding is consistent with Lee, Weaver, and Hrostowski's study (2011) indicating that,

Child welfare social workers that have an understanding as to the complexities of their role with serving the at-risk families they encounter can promote a sense of psychological empowerment and are more likely to have a sense of control and competence, report a sense of ownership when answering questions about their tasks, and experience higher levels of job satisfaction and/or commitment to their organization.

This is consistent with the current study because it correlates with the participants' motivational goals in relation to professional development and making changes to their social work practice for improved client engagement skills. The study participant's motivation supports the finding that there is a

linkage between competency and job satisfaction. According to Trotter (2002) a child welfare social workers' use of incorporating effective skills when working with families is likely to be related to positive client outcomes. In addition, participants have demonstrated a level of commitment with their child welfare agencies because the shared goals of impacting families are positively aligned.

Empathy

The study identified that a factor that has promoted job longevity in seasoned child welfare social workers is the ability to have empathy by recognizing and understand the feelings of others.

This finding is consistent with the study of King and Holosko (2012) finding that “empathy is a key skill that is highlighted in most human behavior and development theories geared to educate social workers as to how a productive relationship between the worker and client is developed.”

The findings of the literature are consistent with the study because it correlates with the personal attributes of empathy that participants identified with have helped them in the engagement process with families. Such attributes consist of the following: understanding, nurturing, and caring. Also, being aware of another person's feelings, concerns, perspectives, and knowing how to appropriately respond, helps social workers recognize the needs of families and develop a change within families in efforts to make a positive difference in their lives.

Social Skills

The final factor that has emerged from the study that contributes to promoting longevity in child welfare social workers is social skills to communicate effectively with families.

The finding is consistent with Furnham's (2012) study which found that "social skills cover an array of different faucets and is summarized as the adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others." As to the worker-client relationship, the participants reported they possess traits and skills to effectively engage with families through building rapport, demonstrating transparency and honesty, and influencing families to initiate and maintain a change for the better.

Support

The final finding that has emerged from the study that contributes to promoting longevity in child welfare social workers is building bonds with co-workers and supervisors within the workplace, and having a support system with others outside of the workplace. This finding is consistent with Anderson's (2000) finding that the use of social support within the workplace prevents burnout and contributes to the well-being of child welfare social workers. Also, this finding is consistent with Mor Barak, Nissly, and Levin's study (2001) that "social support outside of the work environment can serve as a buffer against the harmful effects of job stress and can reduce turnover rates."

As to on the job support, the findings of the literature and the study are consistent because the participants reported the importance of developing a

support system within the workplace. Common responses were that they are being able to receive ideas support from their supervisor as the reason they feel their job is going well and what is needed to do their job effectively within the workplace. The study participants revealed that by having an individual whom they consider supportive, either professionally or personally, were a key factor to job longevity.

As to support outside of the office, the findings of the literature and study are also consistent because most the study participants reported having a healthy support network that consisted of family members, friends or a higher power that contributed to their job longevity. The participants reported engaging in various extracurricular practices such as spending free time with their families, participating in physical activities, going to Church, and simply relaxing.

Emotional Intelligence

A new theory derived from the data analysis and interpretation suggests that the longevity of an individual's career as a child welfare social worker is contributed, in part, to their emotional intelligence (EI) (Morrison, 2006). According to Oginska-Bulik (2005) EI refers to one's ability to be aware of one's own feelings, to be aware of other feelings, to differentiate among them, and to use the information to guide one's own thinking and behavior (Oginska-Bulik, 2005, p. 176). This theory was developed from the responses which were identified and categorized as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Upon the classification of the participants' responses,

the researchers' discovered the similarities they had with traits and skills of emotional intelligence. According to the Bar-On model, emotional intelligence involves emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that are the result of what is understood and expressed, the understanding of others and relating to them, and the coping with daily demands, challenges, and pressures (Furnham, 2012). EI supports that social work practice is a multidisciplinary framework, which requires the knowledge and use of both intra-personal and interpersonal skills. This perspective supports the idea that EI is a potential factor to job longevity for child welfare social workers.

Implications of Findings for Micro and Macro Practice

Based on the findings presented in the Data Analysis, the researchers have developed recommendations promoting job longevity in the child welfare social work field on a micro and a macro level. At the micro level, the research findings can provide insight to the seasoned child welfare social workers as to the traits they possess linked to emotional intelligence. The study's findings revealed that the factors that have kept seasoned child welfare social workers in their job positions are having strong support systems of supervisors and co-workers within the workplace can help provide a sense of emotional support, offer different styles and perspective of social work practice, and collaboration.

The researchers would recommend the implementation of a mutual aid group incorporating the strength based approach and providing a safe

environment for workers to exchange their experiences, knowledge, and ideas. The purpose of this group would be to provide information and knowledge regarding child welfare practices that work well with peers. A mutual aid group and can also benefit the health of social workers by including discussions of self-care techniques as well as maintaining emotional boundaries to prevent others' crises to overshadow their individual needs (Hughes, 1995). Further, this group would be designed to motivate child welfare social workers in an exploration to expand their personal and professional growth. Research has shown that mutual aid groups can offer the social support of colleagues is a coping strategy that is known to prevent burnout in child welfare social workers and is known to increase individual social worker's well-being in the workplace (Anderson, 2000).

An idea to promote job longevity of child welfare social workers at the macro level is to develop a collaborative relationship between management, supervisors, and workers. According to Smith (2005), child welfare studies have identified poor supervision as a major contributing factor in decisions to leave and supportive supervision as a factor in intentions to stay. The study revealed that the greatest contributing factor which increases job satisfaction was a supportive management team that provides guidance, those who are open to communication, understanding, and have a genuine care and concern on behalf of the child welfare social workers.

A plan to implement professional development and a supportive work environment for child welfare agencies would be for the executive team to

participate in training that identifies and teaches strength based leadership skills to promote team-oriented and effective collaboration amongst the management team, supervisors, and workers in the field of child welfare.

According to Northouse (2016),

the behavioral approach style of leadership has been known to be effective in building a supportive work environment for workers because it involves the dedication of the leader in ensuring that tasks are being achieved to fulfill the goals of the agency along with attending to the workers who are trying to achieve the same goals. (Northouse, 2016)

The participants in the study have demonstrated a level of commitment to their respective child welfare agencies as evidenced by the amount of years they have served in their job positions as a child welfare social worker. In addition, they share a common goal with their respective agencies to ensure the health, safety and well-being of children and families. In all, the responses of the study participants indicate that support systems and emotional intelligence are the greatest attributes to promote job longevity.

Summary

This chapter analyzed the 20 questionnaires that were completed by child welfare social workers. Each questionnaire had 11 questions which extracted information that provided insight as to how each study participant viewed their job as a child welfare social worker. Each question was categorized and through this

process, six themes emerged; support, at home and at work, being the most common amongst the study participants. The other themes that emerged were self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Further, this chapter linked the findings to literature, and the interpretation of those findings revealed the theory of emotional intelligence and provided suggestions to improve micro and macro social work practice within the field of child welfare.

CHAPTER FIVE

TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

Introduction

Chapter five explains the termination phase of the study and the way in which the researchers presented the findings and the dissemination plan to the participants.

Termination of Study

The termination phase of this study included reviewing the purpose of this study with the study participants and how their feedback was examined to determine the factors of job longevity in the child welfare field. The researchers provided the study participants with the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the study, provide feedback about their experience, and most importantly the researchers thanked them for their time and contribution to the study.

Communicating Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

The researchers contacted the participants who inquired to receiving the results of the study and provided them with a one-page summary as to the findings. The summary included information regarding the presented theory derived from the interviews and an explanation of why the theory was chosen

and best fits this research study. The summary also included the shared factors of job longevity of seasoned child welfare social workers, the expressed needs for change, and ideas as to how the study findings can contribute to improving the child welfare social work practice on a micro and a macro level. The participants were informed that the Institutional Review Board Committee with the Social Work Program with California State University of San Bernardino approved this study. This research study did not have a participating study site to share the information with due to the incorporation of snowball sampling.

Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

The participants received a one-page debriefing statement via email upon completion of this study. The researchers also made themselves available to the participants via email for any additional follow-up

Dissemination Plan

This study's goal was to promote the insight and factors that promoted job longevity for child welfare social workers. The findings of this study transferred to a one-page informational sheet with clearly defined factors that were found to promote job longevity for child welfare social workers. The researchers of this study are current employees of a child welfare agency in Southern California and permission to send the informational sheet to social workers within their agency was requested. The researchers requested that the one-page fact sheet be sent

out electronically to child welfare social workers within the agency to be environmentally friendly.

Summary

This summary concludes the research study on factors that promote job longevity for child welfare workers. The participants have received their debriefing statement and the study results. The researchers provided their child welfare agency with a one-page electronic informational sheet for dissemination if they so choose. The study and findings will be available for additional parties who are interested in learning about the factors that promote job longevity for child welfare social workers.

APPENDIX A
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS



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Questionnaire for Child Welfare Social Workers

1. What do you feel is going well with your job?
2. Imagine a day that you come into work and everything seems to be going right and there are no issues. What does that look like for you?
3. What keeps you motivated to go to work?
4. How do you practice self-care in dealing with stressful issues at work?
5. What are your self-care practices outside of work?
6. What type of support at work or outside of work is needed for you to do your job effectively?
7. Child welfare practices and laws are always changing. How do you deal with these changes?
8. On a scale from 1-10, what would you rate your job satisfaction? 1 being not at all and 10 being absolutely love it. If less than a 10, what would need to happen to move your rating closer to a 10?
9. What personal attributes/strengths do you feel like have helped you maintain your job position?
10. How have you changed the way you do social work now as compared to your first year on the job? What practices do you still use from when you first started?
11. What advice would you give to a new child welfare social worker?

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APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

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INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to explore the factors that are perceived by child welfare social workers that promote job longevity within their field of practice. The study is being conducted by Masters of Social Work (MSW) Students, Dakota Meza and Loretta Broadnax, under the supervision of Dr. Janet Chang, Professor in the School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to explore the factors that are perceived by seasoned child welfare social workers that promote job longevity within their field of practice.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked several open-ended questions as to their perception of what factors work well for them to manage their on the job and/or life stressors that help them sustain their job position and some demographics.

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

CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY: Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be recorded, documented, and reported in group form only.

DURATION: It will take 20 to 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

RISKS: This study may cause emotional responses.

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

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dakota Meza at [Redacted] Loretta Broadnax at [Redacted], or Dr. Janet Chang at [Redacted].

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APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT



College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
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DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

This study you have just completed was designed to explore the factors that are perceived by seasoned child welfare social workers that keep them in their job position. We are interested in individual perception of child welfare social workers as to what factors work well to manage on the job and/or life stressors that help sustain their job position. We are also interested in how the gathered data could promote potential ideas of job retention for less seasoned and new child welfare social workers. This is to inform you that no deception is involved in this study.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact MSW students, Dakota Meza, at [REDACTED], Loretta Broadnax at [REDACTED], or Dr. Janet Chang at [REDACTED]. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact Dr. Janet Chang (email: jchang@csusb.edu) after September 2017.

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

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

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Dakota Meza and Loretta Broadnax

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Dakota Meza and Loretta Broadnax

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

a. Introduction and Literature:

Team Effort: Dakota Meza and Loretta Broadnax

b. Methods:

Team Effort: Dakota Meza and Loretta Broadnax

c. Results:

Team Effort: Dakota Meza and Loretta Broadnax

d. Discussion:

Team Effort: Dakota Meza and Loretta Broadnax