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HOW DO CHILD WELFARE WORKERS ATTITUDES AFFECT
UTILIZATION OF GAYS AND LESBIANS AS
ADOPTIVE PARENTS

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
Constance Cameron Clifford
Victoria Ann Kohfeld

June 2004

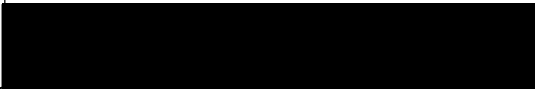
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ABSTRACT

In the United States, there are roughly half a million children in foster care. While there has been progress made, over a hundred thousand foster children are waiting to be adopted (Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], 1999).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are not enough adoptive homes (to include minority homes) for these waiting children. In addition, when considering individual social worker biases in using certain types of homes, i.e., gay and lesbian homes, the resource pool dwindles even more. As a result, this exploratory study looked at how social worker attitudes affect the utilization of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents.

The finding of this study revealed that social worker attitude does not affect the utilization of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents. However, there were responses that showed that social workers express many of the same contradictory views as the population at large. Recommendations include increased sensitivity to gay and lesbian issues, professional training and the need for further study of this issue.

The completed study is one that provides Riverside County staff some insight into potential bias in choosing

adoptive parents for foster children. This finding calls for new collaborative measures in developing and recruiting adoptive families from all communities. Lastly, the authors hope that these findings will foster the development of departmental policies as well as relevant training for all social workers, who have the difficult task of finding quality adoptive homes.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

In the United States, there are roughly half a million children in foster care. Of that number, over a hundred thousand are waiting to be adopted (Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], 1999). In the year 2000, approximately 46,000 waiting children in foster care were successfully adopted by a combination of relatives, foster parents and non-relative adoptive placements (United States Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2002). However that still leaves significant numbers of children who could benefit from the permanency that adoption generally provides.

In 1997, the federal government passed The Adoption and Safe Families Act. This act mandates specific timelines for facilitating permanency among children in foster care. Additionally, individual states are now required to document the efforts they have taken to provide permanency for the children in their care. There are some exceptions to this, i.e., children residing with relatives, however it is clear that the intent of this act was to promote adoption as the most desired option.

While it appears that some progress has been made in finding permanent homes for some foster children, it is obvious that the numbers of waiting children have not decreased dramatically. When you add to that amount the population of children who enter the child welfare system within a given year and proceed to the plan of adoption, it becomes apparent that the recruitment and utilization of adoptive homes should be a top priority.

For the purpose of this study, this issue is examined within Child Protective Services of Riverside County, California. Currently this agency has it's own licensed adoption agency that facilitates adoptions of foster children by relatives, the child(ren)'s current foster parent(s) and non-relative adoptive placements. Currently, children that are not being adopted by their current placement are put into adoptive homes by a screening process called matching. Riverside County Adoption policy is to explore interagency cooperative adoptive placements when no Riverside County adoptive homes are available.

Under the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, permanency must be considered for all children in foster care. As a result, Riverside County policy now requires that cases of children in foster care be reviewed biannually in a Joint Permanency Review Committee. Once a

child has been identified as being adoptable, several things need to occur. First the child's current placement needs to be evaluated for permanency. Additionally relatives and sibling placements are also considered. If none of the above options are viable, then the child needs to be referred to adoptions via a form called "Child Available." Once that form has been received by the adoption unit, the adoption workers, as well as the child's caseworker, can staff the situation and choose a placement based on the needs of the child. Currently, the child's caseworker has the authority to approve or deny a proposed adoptive placement. However, they also may choose to not participate in the matching process and allow the adoption agency staff to locate an appropriate home. Currently there is a match meeting held every Tuesday (Riverside County Children's Services Handbook, 2003).

In this system, the selection process can be a time when individual worker biases or lack of education in a particular area may cause the worker to actively ignore an appropriate adoptive placement. A clear example of this would be a highly suitable gay or lesbian adoptive home that is passed over to look for a traditional heterosexual one. While this may be an unconscious act, it appears to be in direct conflict with existing state laws and the

National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics.

While it may be countered that social workers can consult existing agency policy, the reality is that the individual workers may not be aware that there is even an issue.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the level of awareness of how lesbian and gay adoptive homes are utilized within this agency and make recommendations for program development, staff training and enhanced services in Riverside County Child Protective Services. The authors hope to increase appropriate utilization of the gay and lesbian population as potential adoptive parents.

Within child welfare organizations, there are many children in need of nurturing adoptive parents. In this population, there are not only newborn infants, there are large sibling sets, gay and lesbian children, children of many ethnicities as well as children with various medical and psychological diagnoses and disorders. Another factor is that the average waiting foster child is older; approximately eight years of age (USDHHS, 2002).

As a result of these factors and many others, children are not being formally placed for adoption because there is an inadequate resource pool of adoptive

homes. In addition, when considering individual social worker biases in using certain types of homes, i.e., gay and lesbian homes, the resource pool dwindles even more. Moreover, although sexual orientation of parents has not been shown empirically to affect their parenting skills, there is still legal discrimination against gays and lesbians based on invalid stereotypes or myths (Tye, 2003).

As the statistics show, there are not enough adoptive homes available and continuous recruitment is always necessary. Within child welfare agencies, there appears to be an under utilized pool of potential adoptive parent(s) who are either single gays or lesbians, or gays and lesbians in a committed partnership. As an example, within Riverside County, there are large communities of gays and lesbians and to the authors' knowledge there has been no active outreach to these communities. With increasing numbers of people interested in both foreign and domestic adoptions, it would appear that the foster care system would have little to no problem in the area of recruitment. However, based on the author's fieldwork experience they believe this is not the case. While relatives make themselves available for placement and concurrent planning in greater numbers, other community

members do not have the awareness that they can adopt through the foster care system. In addition, many hopeful adoptive parents see foster children as "damaged goods" due to pre-natal drug exposure, family history of mental illness, exposure to domestic violence and other problems exacerbated by the spectrum of child abuse. They may also decide that they do not want to work with a bureaucratic agency.

Through quantitative and qualitative research methods the authors have determined that there is a need to increase awareness and education in this area of utilization of gay and lesbian adoptive homes for the waiting children in foster care. The research method employed included a survey with both open and closed ended questions to both adoption workers and child protective service workers.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The completed study is one that provides Riverside County staff some insight into potential bias in choosing adoptive parents for the foster children. This finding calls for new collaborative measures in developing and recruiting adoptive families from all communities. Lastly, the authors hope that these findings will foster the

development of departmental policies as well as relevant training for all social workers, who have the difficult task of finding quality adoptive homes.

This project is highly significant for the profession of social work and its practice. The issues of discrimination and child advocacy are ones that are at the core of both ethics and practice. The NASW Code of Ethics Preamble (1997) clearly says that the values of social justice, competence and the importance of human relationships are fundamental elements of the social work profession. By highlighting this issue, the ultimate goal is to assist the professional social worker with decision-making skills in this area. Additionally, the completed study is useful because it highlights a viable resource of adoptive homes by including the underutilized gay and lesbian population as adoptive parents for foster children within Riverside County.

The results of this study may open up new options for both individual workers and child welfare agencies. This would include rectifying worker biases through heightened awareness and education. More importantly, placement matches may occur that would not have before this study. This would of course benefit the many children who have languished in the foster care system for lack of a

suitable home. Continuing active research and recruitment from the large gay and lesbian communities could facilitate a larger pool of adoptive homes within Riverside County.

In using the generalist intervention model, the assessment phase is the portion that was addressed by this study. There is anecdotal evidence to support the necessity of this research, however it appears that there has not been much empirical data gathered in this area. For example Brooks and Goldberg (2001), were one of the only sources that explored the issue of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents in the foster care system. Ryan (2000), also explored adoption issues with gays and lesbians, however his focus was on placement recommendations. This issue needs to be clearly identified and assessed in order to move forward with planning and implementing appropriate measures to improve any currently occurring negative actions. Therefore, the research question that was asked was, how do child welfare workers' attitudes affect the utilization of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents for children in the child welfare system?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In preparing for this literature review, it was found that there were few empirically based studies that looked at child welfare worker attitudes toward gays and lesbians as adoptive parent(s). However there was a rich source of studies that not only looked at parenting abilities of gays and lesbians, but also the comparisons of the homosexual parent to the heterosexual parent. This literature review will summarize and review existing information as well as discuss limitations of the available research. Additionally supporting theories for the current research will be covered as well as substantiation why this research is needed.

Summary and Review of the Literature

Statistics taken from the 1990 census estimate that 28% of partnered lesbians and 14 % of partnered gay men reported children in their households (Tye, 2003). Additionally, later information estimated between 1.2 and 3 million people are living together in same gender relationships (Condon, Simmons, & O'Neill as cited in Tye, 2003). However, society continues to marginalize or be in

denial of these facts. Tye (2003) theorized that because lesbians and gays go through so many evaluations and screenings to adopt or conceive children, that the child(ren) in these households are truly wanted and that issues of abuse and neglect are less likely to be encountered.

These authors note from work experience that there are institutional hurdles for gays and lesbians face trying to adopt. Gays and lesbians often run into significant roadblocks when attempting to adopt children. Ricketts and Achtenberg (1987) found that "applicants who are lesbian or gay can expect to have their sexuality examined in an assessment...and are held to a higher standard than their heterosexual counterparts" (as cited in Hicks, 2000, p. 159).

Within the United States, gays and lesbians are actively denied the right to adopt. They are also discriminated against by local courts and the very adoption agencies that they hope will help them. Ricketts and Achtenburg (2000), state their belief that gays and lesbians often have "...the task of educating family court personnel, social workers...that gay and lesbian people are able to be fit, loving and generous parents as anyone else." When a related study investigated the attitudes of

future professionals, i.e., undergraduate students toward gays as parents, the results were not surprisingly negative. The findings were that while gays and lesbians are becoming more accepted in society, old prejudices and biases remained intact within this population. The students indicated that "gay couples were less emotionally stable, had poor potential to be parents and would not be able to provide a loving home for the child" (Crawford & Solliday, 1996). In the limited literature available that dealt specifically with social worker attitude in utilizing lesbians and gays as adoptive parents (in the child welfare system), some significant factors were noted. Ryan (2000), found that ethnicity, gender and religious affiliation had an impact on social worker attitudes towards gays and lesbians. However, the impact of those factors on the utilization of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents was found to be lessened when specialized departmental training occurred (Ryan, 2000).

Within the available literature, more studies researched lesbian parenting issues than those of gay male parents. According to Armesto (2002), most research has focused on gay men who have become parents through having a previous heterosexual relationship. He further states "factors that determine competent fathering in other

constellations of gay families may be quite different from those gay fathers who were previously married" (p. 17). Still when a small study compared homosexual fathers to heterosexual fathers, it was concluded that their skills and abilities were comparable (Bigner & Jacobsen as cited in Brooks & Goldberg, 2001). This may also be applicable to lesbian families, however they are more often seen as the "norm" when empirical research is gathered.

All of the studies reviewed had positive outcomes concerning the parenting skills of lesbians and gays. No measurable differences were found in the adjustment, abilities, sexual orientation and mental health of children raised within these relationships. Most notable was that the children raised within gay and lesbian households experienced the same level of social adjustment that their peers raised in heterosexual households had (Sullivan, as cited in Brooks & Goldberg, 2001). This would then appear to refute a common myth that the children of lesbian and gay parents experience maladaptation because of their family makeup. Also data gathered over time by multiple researchers suggest that lesbian mothers were just as warm and as responsive to their children as heterosexual mothers (Kweskin & Cook, 1982; Mucklow & Phelan, 1979; Thompson, McCandless & Strickland, 1971 as

cited in Patterson, 2002). The research reviewed on gay fathers was also positive. For example, Bigner and Bozett (1990), found that while homosexual fathers were more likely to be non-traditional in their style of parenting they were also very committed to their role as a parent (as cited in Brooks & Goldberg, 2001).

In the literature related to this study, several themes appeared. At the agency level negative perceptions were not always acknowledged by social service agencies. Brooks and Goldberg (2001) state that "the controversy surrounding placements with gay men and lesbians...stems from the homophobia of social work professionals and the general public" (p. 148). The pervasive belief within our society is that heterosexuality is the norm and that anything outside of that construct simply does not exist or is abhorrent. This belief system often leads to the gay or lesbian adoptive parent being the one to educate the various systems as to their "fitness" to adopt, "they must often be the guinea pigs" (Ricketts & Achtenberg, 1990).

The second theme was that gays and lesbians were seen as viable untapped resources for children in foster care. Brooks and Goldberg's (2001) article clearly stated that child welfare agencies were failing large numbers of children by not expanding the pool of prospective adoptive

parents. In order to be inclusive of gay and lesbian adoptive parents, agencies and individual social workers appear to be operating on an informal "don't ask, don't tell policy." Examples of this include single parent adoptions, not elaborating on family makeup or referring to partners as only roommates. The goal should be, as Benkov (1995) states, "...the more the category of family expands...it also becomes more centered on relational issues such as love and commitment" (p. 63).

Last, myths and negative stereotypes were directly addressed and refuted by a review of the literature. An example of this is the common misperception that gay parents are more likely to molest their children. Empirical research clearly shows that this is not the case. In fact, it shows that ninety percent of all pedophiles are heterosexual males (Sullivan as cited in Devon & Goldberg, 2001).

Gaps and Methodological Limitations

In taking on this research, it was clear that there were many gaps in the research literature. What first became apparent to the authors was that there is an absence of reliable current statistics in this area. With varying state laws, as well as both legal and societal

discrimination, it is difficult if not impossible to ascertain how many gay and lesbian adoptions occurred in a given year. Examples given in the literature state that the adopting party either had to lie about their sexual orientation or had to hide the fact that they were in a committed relationship before they could finalize an adoption.

Additionally, in other studies that have been completed, there was more information about lesbians and adoption than about gay men and adoption. It has become apparent that gay men are marginalized in this area and that they have not been studied extensively, resulting in a disadvantage to that population. What little information was found seemed to "lump" them anecdotally in with lesbian adoptions.

Another significant gap found was that there was little or no information found on gays and lesbians as foster parents. Rather, there was globalized information about the characteristics of foster parents. Not surprisingly, sexual orientation was not addressed. As alluded to in the literature review, both gay and lesbian parents may have quite different characteristics than that of the normalized heterosexual population.

Last, only a few studies were found that dealt specifically with the measurement of child welfare workers attitudes towards gays and lesbians. However there were other studies in which attitudes towards gays and lesbians were measured (Crawford & Soliday, 1996; LaMar & Kite, 1998). While gay parenting is an issue that has come to the forefront of the media in recent times, it is their parenting skills that continue to be measured rather than the attitudes of the professionals who either continue to covertly or overtly discriminate against them.

As to methodological limitations, there appear to be gaps in the area of assessment tools. There are measurement tools that cover a large part of the human experience; however gay and lesbian adoption does not appear to be one of them. As there are no known reliable assessment tools, research in this area may be subjectively interpreted with biases incorporated into the findings. Last, what was noted as a significant methodological limitation was that the sample sizes of the studies that measured attitudes were quite small. Additionally they were limited to case carrying social workers rather than including supervisors or other professionals that are involved in the process of adoption, e.g., judges, lawyers and child advocates. It is

important to remember that while adoption social workers may have the initial authority to place a foster child in an adoptive home, they do not have the ultimate authority when it comes to finalizing an adoption.

Support for the Study

In becoming a professional social worker, the words "best practice" are often cited as the way for a social worker to conduct themselves. Too often, no one knows what that really means. In this instance the authors think that "best practice," as well as adherence to the NASW Code of Ethics, means advocating for disadvantaged populations, namely children in foster care and gays/lesbians.

Subjective evidence indicates that some people in the social work profession allow themselves to become distant from the traditions of their practice. They may be suffering from burnout, lack of knowledge in a particular area or even just ambivalence. This then allows the individual worker's or even an agency's biases to sneak into their practice or policy. The guiding principles of this study are not only to focus on a resource for the many children in foster care, but also to tackle and confront the all too human biases that social workers have. By confronting the profession's biases in this area,

social workers would be more able to advocate for both of these populations in the multi-faceted adoption arena, e.g., courtrooms and legislative bodies.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The prevailing view among most social work professionals is that children and adults are products of their environments. Child welfare workers' internalized beliefs and biases are a prime example of this idea. For the purposes of conceptualization, Bowen's family systems therapy model explains how certain attitudes or beliefs are learned from the family of origin. Due to an individual's inability to differentiate from their family of origin, they can only echo the sentiments that they have heard. As cited in Nichols and Schwartz (2001), change is possible only when the level of awareness is raised and the area of concern acknowledged. Additionally, when working with this construct, the desired change does not require that all persons (or child welfare workers) change. This perspective says that one person can make a change without the entire system also needing to change. By conducting the research needed, the goal is that the highly motivated social workers can change the current

attitudes and dynamics within their agency (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001).

Other theories that have value in this research project include: systems theory and the ecological perspective. These viewpoints have overlapping ideas in that they both think that people are affected by their interactions with the environment. For example, the individual is affected by his or her family system. The larger community, religious organizations or work environments can also affect people. The research question asked in this paper is another example of how various systems interplay with each other: potential adoptive parents, children in the foster care system and child welfare workers. A better understanding of this interaction will potentially produce positive outcomes for everyone involved (Zastrow & Ashman, 2001).

Summary

In summary, the topic of gay and lesbian adoption of foster children is a new area for the field of social work. So is the measurement of child welfare workers' attitudes within it. Empirical research is limited in both the amount that is available, as well as the size of the samples studied. That being said, there is clearly a much

larger and valid pool of research to pull from in the area of gay parenting. Findings suggest that while coping skills may be different between heterosexuals and homosexuals, there is little or no difference in the outcomes for the children in these households. That alone should make this a topic for further research and advocacy. However, when factoring in the thousands of children in the foster care system who would benefit from a permanent home the research topic not only becomes very timely, the necessity of undertaking this research becomes overwhelmingly apparent.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

In this chapter, the outline of this study will be discussed. Topics to be covered will be the design of the study, sampling, data collection and methods, protection of human subjects and data analysis. Due to the fact that this research area is one that has not been extensively studied, much of the work undertaken was exploratory in nature.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to explore whether there was an effect of child welfare workers' attitudes on the potential use of gays and lesbians as adoptive parent(s). It was thought that this population was being underutilized when it may be a viable resource for the ever-growing numbers of children in foster care.

This study was quantitative in design. However there were also qualitative elements. The reasons for the quantitative approach are varied: the sensitive nature of measuring attitudes about homosexuality and the time constraints of Child Protective Services staff in the sample. The structure of this research method also lent

itself well to this particular study because the topic may be seen as controversial by both the agency and agency staff. It was thought that the often times face-to-face interview style of a qualitative approach might have been too inhibiting.

With the above in mind, a confidential standardized measurement tool appeared to be the best option for the study. However when utilizing existing tools, it is always prudent to carefully scrutinize the tool as it may or may not meet all of the needs of a particular study.

Sampling

Currently, Riverside County employs fourteen full time adoption social workers. There are also two supervisors and a regional manager overseeing this program. The intent of this study was to survey this entire sample of social workers. Additionally, since non-adoption social workers also participate in the adoptive process, at some junction, they needed to be included. Since this targeted population pool included approximately three hundred and twenty nine social workers, the authors conducted random sampling to identify one fourth of the total group. Ninety-seven surveys were sent out: fourteen of these were for assigned adoption

workers. A total of thirty were received back after approximately two-weeks.

Preliminary approval for the participation of Desert Region staff was given by their former regional manager, Ms. Jennie Williams. Additionally, after submitting a short proposal and a complete draft of this paper, full Departmental approval was given by Deputy Director Mrs. Sylvia DePorto.

Data Collection and Instruments

In this study, the attitudes of social workers towards homosexuals as well as the utilization of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents were measured. The independent variable, attitudes of social workers, was measured using a five point Likert scales from one pre-existing attitude instrument (Lamar & Kite, 1998). The dependent variables included the following: 1) Have ever utilized a gay or lesbian as an adoptive parent(s)?, 2) Would use a gay or lesbian as an adoptive parent(s)?, 3) The sexual orientation of the child make a difference in the selection of the adoptive home? Variables were measured using both nominal and scale levels of measurement. Since a measurement tool needed to be generated that would accurately capture social workers'

experiences in this area, eleven additional questions were added to the pre-existing tool. Five were demographic in nature and six were open ended (see survey Appendix A).

The tool to measure attitude, "Components of Attitudes Toward Homosexuality," was created by Lamar and Kite in 1998 and can be located on Ms. Kite's website through Ball State University (Lamar & Kite, 1998). Additionally this information can be located in their 1998 article in the Journal of Sex Research (Lamar and Kite, 1998). After starting with a one hundred and seventy four item questionnaire, the authors narrowed their focus down to ninety two items that they felt addressed attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (forty two items toward gay men and forty parallel items toward lesbians). The authors then submitted the data to reverse scoring and varimax factor analysis. Based on their analyses, the authors developed subscales in four identified areas (condemnation/tolerance, morality, contact, and stereotypes). Each area has three statements that survey respondents are asked to consider and respond to. Kite suggested that their separate categories can be utilized alone or together as needed. Additionally since Lamar and Kite were interested in comparing attitudes towards lesbians and also gay men, they had separate subscales for

responses to lesbian worded statements and gay male statements. However when these items were scored, some subscales were combined. Not surprisingly, they found that men were less open-minded about homosexuality than women. However they also found that men were less intolerant of lesbians. They felt that may be related to how men potentially view lesbianism (as an erotic fantasy). For women, it appeared that almost the reverse was true. They reported more negativity about contact with lesbians than with gay men. This was a different response than what the researchers expected. Lamar and Kite attribute their results to the complexity of these issues (societal norms etc...) as well as the possibility of psychodynamic issues (i.e. defense mechanisms).

For the purposes of this study, it was not deemed necessary to have separately worded questions. Rather the authors were interested in attitudes toward the gay population as a whole. Additionally, the eleven questions that were asked were added to this survey to cover basic demographics, i.e., age, education, gender and years on the job. Also, the questions ask for information about the respondent's experiences with utilizing gays and lesbians as adoptive placements. These additional questions were at a nominal level of measurement.

Last, Lamar and Kite's tool appeared to have thought provoking or even disconcerting questions in it. The argument could be made that heterosexuals or even homosexuals may find these tools disturbing. A debriefing statement was provided with the survey. Additionally written permission was not needed to use this scale. Instead, the researchers asked that they be cited in any published document and that they receive basic data generated from their tool (Lamar & Kite, 1998).

Procedures

For this study, data was gathered using a written format. Anonymous surveys were sent to individual social workers via an interdepartmental courier. The respondents were instructed to return their completed surveys to the researchers utilizing the same method. There was a thirty-day turnaround time.

Protection of Human Subjects

Since this study involved the examination of individual perspectives, it was important that the participants' rights were protected. The participants were fully informed of the purpose of this study as well as their right to not participate. Additional resources were offered in the event that the participants wanted more

information about gay parenting or were distressed over the content of this study. The informed consent and debriefing statements are attached as Appendices B and C.

Data Analysis

In this study, the main variables are social worker's attitudes about gays and lesbians and the utilization of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents. The hypotheses include: 1) That there is a relationship between an attitude about gays and lesbians and past utilization of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents, 2) That there is a relationship between an attitude about gays and lesbians and potential utilization of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents, 3) That there is a relationship between attitude about gays and lesbians and the worker's perception that sexual orientation of the child makes a difference in the selection of the adoptive home. Since the sample size was small and at a nominal level, non-parametric tests were utilized. The Mann-Whitney Rank-Sum Test is an appropriate statistical test to compare the mean scores of the worker attitude among different groups (Mallory, 2001).

In this study, the association between the independent and dependent variables was examined. To what extent does the attitude of social workers relate to the

use of gay and lesbian adoptive homes. There was no testing of causality, only a test of relationship. This information may also be generalized to the larger population in order to see whether the findings also exist within them (Weinbach & Grinnell, 2001).

Summary

In summary, this study was primarily quantitative in nature. A survey consisting of a Likert scale and open ended questions was used to collect data. Data was then analyzed using non parametric statistical analyses. The correlation between the two variables were then used to numerically evaluate the proposed research question.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter will present the findings of this research. The demographics of the participants as well as the results of the Mann-Whitney Rank-Sum tests will be presented (Mallory, 2001). In addition, pertinent information gathered from the qualitative portion of the survey will be shown and discussed.

Presentation of the Findings

As previously described, ninety-seven surveys were sent out and thirty were returned. The majority of the respondents were female, with half the sample having a Masters in Social Work. Of the thirty respondents, their years on the job ranged from six months to twenty-six years, with about half of the sample falling between four and ten years of employment. The age of the respondents varied too; there was a wide age range from twenty-six to fifty-seven. The largest cluster of respondents appeared to be social workers in their late twenties and thirties.

For each question from the Lamar & Kite tool, a variable was generated. Fifteen of those variables were reverse scored due to how the questions were worded. The

data gathered showed not only how many participants answered a particular question but also their responses to specific items on the instrument. In reviewing this data, some interesting information emerged.

In the first section, Condemnation/Tolerance, question number four, "Job discrimination against lesbians (gay men) is wrong" showed the following responses. Twenty six percent strongly disagreed and sixty three percent strongly agreed. This implies that more than half of the sample believes that it is acceptable to discriminate based on a person's sexuality. Under the same section, question number eight "Finding out an artist was a gay man (lesbian) would have no affect on my appreciation for his (her) work" revealed some interesting numbers. Thirty percent of the respondent's strongly disagreed with that statement. Fifty three percent strongly agreed.

Additionally question number ten, "Lesbians (gay men) should not be discriminated against because of their sexual preference," also showed an interesting trend. Approximately thirteen percent strongly disagreed with that statement while eighty percent strongly agreed.

Under the section titled "Neutral Morality," question number one "Homosexuality as far as I am concerned is not sinful" showed some interesting results. A combined score

of approximately twenty three percent disagreed/strongly disagreed with that statement. However a combined score of fifty three percent agree/strongly agree with that statement. Question number three of that same section, "I find the thought of homosexual acts disgusting" provoked responses in either the neutral or disagree/strongly disagree category. Specifically thirty percent responded neutral and a combined score of fifty three percent disagreed with that statement.

In the section Gay Male/Lesbian contact, question number nine, "If a gay man (lesbian) approached me in a public restroom I would be disgusted," the responses ranged from a combined score of sixteen percent stating they agree/strongly agree to a combined score of sixty percent stating they disagree/strongly disagree.

The Mann Whitney Rank Sum Test was used to analyze the relationship between attitudes about gays and lesbians and the three variables: "utilization," would use as adoptive parents, and homosexuality makes a difference in placement. For further analysis, these authors then ran the four sub-sections of the original survey tool also utilizing the Mann-Whitney Rank Sum test. The statistical results show that there was no significance on any of the attitude scores and the dependent variables.

Analysis of the qualitative portion of the survey yielded information that was of interest to this study. Question one, "Have you ever utilized gay or lesbian foster parents as an adoptive placement?" indicated that only ten participants had utilized a gay and lesbian adoptive home. The remaining twenty respondents (67%) indicated that they had never used an identified gay or lesbian placement.

In the responses to question two, "Do you think you would use gay/lesbian foster parents as an adoptive placement?" twenty-eight responded that they would. The responses to "why?" varied from "no different than heterosexuals" to "able to handle harder to place kid" to "orientation is not a deciding factor." What was interesting was that six of the twenty-eight (21%) respondents based their utilization of gay and lesbian adoptive homes on a legal/ethical basis. Those responses included "can't exclude due to law" and "unethical to exclude." The two that responded that they wouldn't use gay or lesbian adoptive homes cited the following reasons; "child subject to ridicule and sex role identification" and "this would perpetuate violence on these children; not conducive to full human development."

Question three, "What would be some concerns/issues that you have when placing children in a gay/lesbian home?" yielded diverse responses. These author's categorized the responses into seven themes: sexual orientation of the child, concerns about the foster parents, no concerns, fit of the family and child, lifestyle choices, pedophile concerns and heterosexual role models. Comments such as "level of disclosure with the child," "concerns about promiscuity (of the foster parent(s))" and "stability" were noted. The next categories that had the highest response dealt with the sexual identity of the child and heterosexual role models. The one respondent that cited concerns about pedophilia stated that they would want to know if the foster parents were "sexually attracted to children." This concern, coupled with sexual identity and role model issues, will be discussed in later sections.

Question number four had a large number of respondents that cited it was not applicable (18). Ten respondents said that placing children in a gay/lesbian adoptive home was "no different than a heterosexual placement." However, two respondents expressed difficulty in placing children in a gay or lesbian home. One person in particular expressed that the child's "other placement

tried to sabotage the new (gay) placement" once the orientation was known.

Question number five dealt with supportive services offered to children in gay/lesbian homes. Five themes emerged: no difference in services, counseling/therapy, services specific to the population, appropriate role models for children and not applicable. The majority of respondents appeared to be evenly split in their responses. They either stated that the services offered would be "nothing special" or that they needed to be "...with a person who has specialized expertise in the area of gay/lesbian relationships/parenting."

Question number six states, "Does the sexual orientation of the child to be adopted make a difference in choosing the adoptive home?" Thirteen respondents said yes, twelve stated no and five said not applicable. Of the "yes" responses, some comments noted were "If a child knows they are gay/lesbian and communicates a preference" to "a child who disagrees with a lifestyle they shouldn't be forced." "No" responses included "All adoptive families should be compassionate, understanding and supportive of all children" "children's sexuality is not an issue." What was also noted in this section was that even for those five respondents who said this question was not

applicable, they still left comments. This could indicate that this question is of a sensitive nature, but important to the respondents and provokes self-reflection for social workers who are involved in choosing appropriate placements.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this research. The demographics of the participants as well as the results of the Mann-Whitney Rank-Sum test were presented (Mallory, 2001). In addition, pertinent information gathered from the qualitative portion of the survey was discussed in detail.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the significance of this research in relation to the utilization of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents. In addition, the relevance of this research to the social work profession based on the NASW Code of Ethics will be explored. Suggestions for future study and practice will be given.

Discussion

Since this study addressed an area of research that is not well studied, the literature review yielded few studies that dealt specifically with this research question. Of the studies found that dealt with the specific components of our research question (adoption, attitudes and gays and lesbians as parents), this study's findings concur with the literature in that there was a common theme. The theme appears to be that societal beliefs about gays and lesbians are deeply entrenched and that these beliefs affect people's behaviors on many different levels. Additionally as noted in the literature review, many gays and lesbians are not comfortable in

being forthcoming about their sexual identity and may not disclose such information to a social worker.

Many of the responses on the qualitative section of this survey led the researchers to believe that current utilization of gays and lesbians as adoptive parent(s) had more to do with adherence to organizational policy rather than personal beliefs. Approximately 21% of respondents indicated that they would utilize gays and lesbians as adoptive parents based on legal/ethical issues. This could indicate practice based motivation to comply with policy and law, not based on their attitudes toward such placement. Respondents may have personal beliefs that differ from agency policy or law, however they are able to make placement decisions in a professional manner. Additionally, some of the responses to questions were focused toward the "fitness" of gays and lesbians as parents and appeared to be more intrusive about personal matters than if the parent(s) were heterosexual e.g. promiscuity. For example, almost half of the respondents expressed concerns related to the gay or lesbian placements based on their ability to parent. Comments in this vein were often cited in the available literature as reasons for the population at large to oppose lesbians and gays adopting children. Such opposing responses would seem

to indicate either the belief that such families are no different from any other adoptive family or that they are so different that they need specialized intervention.

What was note worthy was that approximately 43% of the respondents felt that the sexual orientation of the child to be adopted was an issue in choosing an adoptive home. The responses seem to indicate a double standard; chiefly that adoptive parents should accept all children regardless of their sexual orientation yet children should feel free to choose their adoptive parent(s) based on their adoptive parent's sexual orientation. This further highlights societal biases and points to a view of the gay or lesbian parent as "less than."

Overall our survey respondents did appear to be positive and open to utilizing gays and lesbians as adoptive parents. A negative or poor attitude toward gays and lesbians does not seem to preclude them from being used as adoptive parent(s). This dichotomy highlights that accurately capturing someone's attitude about gays and lesbians may be fraught with difficulty. This may have accounted for some of the insignificant results from the bivariate analysis.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, this is a new area where much of the research being undertaken is exploratory in nature. There are studies focusing on attitude about gays and lesbians and parenting abilities. There are also studies about effects of gay and lesbian households on children's development. However, existing literature does not focus specifically on gays and lesbians as adoptive parents. This study addresses this gap in the literature, even though it is limited in its sample size (N = 30) and scope of examination. This study only surveys workers in the child welfare setting in one county. Therefore, generalizations from this study are limited to demographics that are similar to Riverside County. While this study provides some interesting findings and highlights areas for further study, it is exploratory in nature and is not designed to be definitive in the discussion of correlation between attitude and utilization of gay and lesbian adoptive families.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

The findings highlight the need to increase awareness and sensitivity to gay and lesbian adoptive parent issues. This could be incorporated into existing sensitivity or

diversity training. In addition an identified "expert" could be identified as an agency resource for this population. Policy could then reinforce this awareness by dictating uniformity in terms of questions asked of potential adoptive parents in their home studies. This would then leave less room for overly intrusive lines of questioning that can screen out potential adoptive parents based on sexual orientation.

In addition, a professional social worker should be aware of their personal biases so as not to be out of compliance with existing policy, law and codes of professional conduct. This awareness of the professional use of self should not only be self initiated, but enforced at an agency level.

Recruitment of under utilized populations (i.e. gays and lesbians), as adoptive parents should also be encouraged. They have the potential to help bridge the gap between the numbers of children in foster care and the scarcity of available foster parents.

Since this area of research has not been explored in great detail, it would make sense that with the recent changes to child welfare policy that all options for permanency in foster care would be investigated. More research done on this specialized population within the

child welfare system would only benefit the system as a whole. This type of research would lead to more focused and appropriate interventions and services. In addition, the recent and ongoing societal controversy of same sex couples attempting to acknowledge the legitimacy of their relationships (to include raising and adopting children) should be examined at this level.

Areas that these researchers did not address, but need to be explored are the effect of religion and ethnic origin (if any) upon this issue. For example, some of the responses to the qualitative section implied underlying beliefs that could potentially undermine or delay an adoptive placement into a gay or lesbian adoptive home. Again this highlights how attitude and policy interact the need for understanding how this could affect the utilization of gay and lesbian homes.

Conclusions

This research has broader implications for generalist social work practice. It appears that society's values and uneasiness about this particular topic is also reflected within the population of social workers. The awareness of personal biases and the ability to proceed in an ethical manner ultimately leads to servicing those in need; the

thousands of waiting children in foster care. Attitude may not affect the utilization of gay and lesbian adoptive homes, however it may unknowingly jeopardize a placement i.e. intense scrutiny of parent(s) and undermining of the adoptive placement. Knowledge of adoption issues not only specific to gays and lesbians as parents is necessary to be an effective and competent social worker. The results of this study may open up new options for both individual workers and child welfare agencies. Placement matches may occur that would not have before this study, benefiting the many children who are languishing in foster care.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

Section I: Basic Demographics

1. Gender:
 Male
 Female
2. Education:
 BSW
 MSW
 Other _____
3. Years on the job _____
4. Age _____
5. Have you ever worked in any adoption capacity?
_____ Yes
_____ No

Section II: Measurement Tool

¹Components of Attitudes Toward Homosexuality

Please answer using the five point Likert scale below. Answers range from 1 strongly disagree, to 5 strongly agree.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree

Condemnation/Tolerance

1. Apartment complexes should not accept lesbians (gay men) as renters.
2. Lesbians (gay men) should be required to register with the police department where they live.
3. Lesbians (gay men) should not be allowed to hold responsible position.

¹ LaMar, L.A., & Kite, M.E. (1998). Sex differences in attitudes toward gay men and lesbians: A multi-dimensional perspective. The Journal of Sex Research, 35, 189-196.

4. Job discrimination against lesbians (gay men) is wrong.
5. Lesbians (gay men) are a danger to young people.
6. Lesbians (gay men) are more likely to commit deviant acts such as child molestation, rape, voyeurism (peeping toms) than are heterosexuals.
7. Lesbians (gay men) dislike members of the opposite sex.
8. Finding out an artist was a gay man (lesbian) would have no affect on my appreciation for his (her) work.
9. Lesbians (gay men) should be allowed to serve in the military.
10. Lesbians (gay men) should not be discriminated against because of their sexual preference.
11. Lesbians (gay men) should not be allowed to work with children.

Gay male/Lesbian social norms/Morality

1. The increasing acceptance of gay men (lesbians) in our society is aiding in the deterioration of morals.
2. Gay men (lesbians) endanger the institution of family.
3. Many gay men (lesbians) are very moral and ethical people.
4. State laws regulating private, consenting behavior between gay men (lesbians) should be loosened.
5. Gay men (lesbians) just can't fit into our society.
6. Gay men (lesbians) do need psychological treatment.
7. Gay men (lesbians) are a viable part of our society.
8. Homosexual behavior between two men (women) is just plain wrong.

Neutral Morality

1. Homosexuality as far as I am concerned is not sinful.
2. Homosexuality is a perversion.
3. I find the thought of homosexual acts disgusting.

Gay male/Lesbian contact

1. I enjoy the company of gay men (lesbians).
2. It would be upsetting to me to find out I was alone with a gay man (lesbian).
3. I avoid gay men (lesbians) whenever possible.
4. I would feel nervous being in a group of gay men (lesbians).
5. I think gay men (lesbians) are disgusting.
6. I would enjoy attending social functions at which gay men (lesbians) were present.
7. Bars that cater solely to gay men (lesbians) should be placed in a specific and known part of town.
8. I would feel comfortable working closely with a gay man (lesbian).
9. If a gay man (lesbian) approached me in a public restroom I would be disgusted.
10. I would not want a gay man (lesbian) to live in the house next to mine.
11. Two gay men (lesbians) holding hands or displaying affection in public is revolting.
12. I would be nervous if a gay man (lesbian) sat next to me on a bus.
13. I would decline membership in an organization if I found out it had gay male (lesbians) members.
14. If I knew someone was a gay male (lesbian), I would go ahead and form a friendship with that individual.

Neutral Contact

1. If a member of my sex made advances toward me, I would feel angry.
2. I would feel comfortable knowing I was attractive to members of my sex.
3. I would be comfortable if I found myself attracted to a member of my sex.
4. I would feel comfortable if a member of my sex made an advance toward me.

Gay male/Lesbian stereotypes

1. Lesbians (gay men) prefer to take roles (passive or aggressive) in their sexual behavior.
2. The love between two lesbians (gay men) is quite different from the love between two persons of the opposite sex.
3. Lesbians (gay men) have weaker sex drives than heterosexuals.
4. A lesbian's (gay man's) mother is probably very domineering.
5. Most lesbians (gay men) have a life of one-night stands.
6. Most lesbians (gay men) like to dress in opposite sex clothing.
7. Most lesbians (gay men) have identifiable masculine (feminine) characteristics.

Additional Questions

1. Have you ever utilized gay or lesbian foster parents as an adoptive placement?
If yes __, why?

If no __, why not?

2. Do you think you would use gay/lesbian foster parent(s) as an adoptive placement? If yes __, why?

If no __, why not?

3. What would be some concerns/issues that you have when placing children in a gay/lesbian home?

4. Have you had any problems when placing children in a gay/lesbian home?

5. What support services/programs would be helpful if children are placed with gay/lesbian parents?

6. Does the sexual orientation of the child to be adopted make a difference in choosing the adoptive home?

If yes __, why?

If no __, why not?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

C. Cameron Clifford and Victoria A. Kohfeld are students in the Masters of Social Work Program located at California State University, San Bernardino. We are conducting a study regarding social workers' attitudes towards utilizing gays and lesbians as adoptive parent(s). Participation in this study is voluntary and should you choose to participate, you will remain completely anonymous, as no identifying information will be obtained. The results of this study will be presented as a final research project for the Masters of Social Work program at California State University, San Bernardino. The results will be available at the university in the Pfau Library after June 2004.

The Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the CSUSB Institutional Review Board has approved this project. In completing this project, we are being supervised by Dr. Hoang. Dr. Hoang may be reached at California State University, San Bernardino, Department of Social Work, (909) 880-5501.

This survey will take approximately 10-20 minutes to complete. Upon completion, please place your survey in the envelope provided and seal the envelope. Please return the completed survey to C. Cameron Clifford via the inter departmental courier. Thank you for your participation in this study.

My mark below indicates that I have been informed about the nature of the project and voluntarily agree to participate.

Mark _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

You have participated in a study of social workers' attitudes towards utilizing gay and lesbian persons as adoptive parents. C. Cameron Clifford and Victoria A. Kohfeld conducted this study under the supervision of Dr. Hoang. This study asked questions regarding your attitude toward gays and lesbians. If you would like more information about gay and lesbian families please contact the desert chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) at (760) 321-0135. Additionally you may visit the national website at <http://www.pflag.org>. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact Dr. T. Hoang at (909)-880-5501.

The results of this study will be available at the university in the Pfau Library after June 2004.

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

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

1. Data Collection:
Team Effort: Constance Clifford & Victoria Kohfeld
2. Data Entry and Analysis:
Team Effort: Constance Clifford & Victoria Kohfeld
3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
 - a. Introduction and Literature
Team Effort: Constance Clifford & Victoria Kohfeld
 - b. Methods
Team Effort: Constance Clifford & Victoria Kohfeld
 - c. Results
Team Effort: Constance Clifford & Victoria Kohfeld
 - d. Discussion
Team Effort: Constance Clifford & Victoria Kohfeld