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WHICH INTERVENTIONS DO SOCIAL WORKERS BELIEVE ARE MOST  
EFFECTIVE WHEN WORKING WITH CHILD ABUSE VICTIMS?

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

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

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by  
Ellen L. Davis

May 2021

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EFFECTIVE WHEN WORKING WITH CHILD ABUSE VICTIMS?

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May 2021

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## ABSTRACT

Child abuse is often a very traumatic experience that can create long-lasting psychological and emotional effects for some individuals. Social workers often provide treatment services, such as therapy and/or case management services, with the goal of assisting child abuse victims in coping with and overcoming the negative impact of the trauma they've experienced. This study evaluates the types of interventions social workers utilize when working with child abuse victims, how the interventions address the resulting trauma of child abuse, which interventions social workers believe are most effective when working with this population, and why those interventions are believed to be most effective. Data was collected for this study using qualitative means via use of interviews conducted via Zoom. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for data analysis. The findings of the study highlight the use of art therapy, journaling, active listening, and talk therapy as the most preferred and effective interventions to utilize when working with child abuse victims. These interventions were noted to be most effective as they are grounded on the principles of safety, trust, client choice, empowerment, and they promote resiliency and use of positive coping mechanisms.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ASSESSMENT

#### Introduction

Chapter one provides an overview of the focus of this research study. The post-positivist perspective and its' incorporation into the research study is then discussed. Next a literature review is provided to help one understand trauma, its' effects, and the importance of social workers utilizing trauma-informed care within their practice when working with child abuse victims. The theoretical orientation that frames the focus of the research study is then discussed. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the study's implications for micro and macro social work practice.

#### Research Focus

Child abuse is often a very traumatic experience that can create long-lasting psychological and emotional effects for some individuals. Social workers often provide treatment services, such as therapy and/or case management services, with the goal of assisting child abuse victims in coping with and overcoming the negative psychological and emotional impact of the trauma they have experienced. This research study is an exploratory qualitative study that evaluates the types of interventions social workers utilize when working with child abuse victims, how the interventions address the resulting trauma of child abuse,

which interventions social workers believe are most effective when working with this population, and why those interventions are believed to be most effective.

### Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

A post-positivist paradigm was applied throughout the research study. The post-positivist paradigm employs an inductive approach to research, which allowed the researcher to initiate the research process by focusing on one area and then exploring patterns and additional aspects that began to emerge within the data obtained. The post-positivist paradigm asserts that research is best conducted in naturalistic settings, allowing researchers to obtain qualitative data that best portrays how things occur in relation to the focus of one's research focus (Morris, 2013). Incorporation of this paradigm within the research study helped the researcher identify key patterns related to focus of the study such as common interventions utilized amongst social workers, how the interventions are used, why specific interventions are selected to use over others, and clients' responses and/or reactions to chosen interventions.

### Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to help formulate a comprehensive and thorough understanding of child abuse, trauma and its' effects, and the importance of social workers utilizing trauma-informed care within their practice when working with vulnerable populations such as child abuse victims. The

following is a discussion of key information the researcher found when conducting the literature review.

### Child Abuse

Child abuse occurs when a caregiver's actions and/or inactions result in a child being seriously harmed or placed at substantial risk for imminent harm or death (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020). The four common types of child abuse are physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and emotional abuse.

Freer, Sprang, Katz, Belle, and Sprang (2017) report 13.8% of children are abused each year and that 25.6% of children experience at least one type of abuse throughout their childhood. At least one in seven children have experienced abuse in the past year, 84.5% of victims experienced one type of abuse, and 15.5% are victims of two or more types of abuse (The Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020).

Trauma and its' Effects. Trauma occurs when an individual is exposed to an intense and unexpected experience that creates strong psychological and physiological feelings of helplessness and fear (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Trauma experiences can vary, but they commonly involve experiencing a sudden event outside of one's control (Levenson, 2017). Natural disasters, community violence, intimate partner violence, and child abuse are some examples of traumatic events.

Individuals exposed to a traumatic event often suffer from emotional and psychological distress after the event. Gipple, Lee, & Puig (2006) note anxiety,

confusion, agitation, flashbacks of the event, fatigue, dissociation, fear, a heightened sense of arousal, and blunt affect as some of the emotional and psychological distress symptoms individuals exposed to trauma may experience. For those who are resilient and are able to identify effective coping strategies, these symptoms may be mild and have a subtle impact. Others may experience more severe and prominent symptoms that are difficult to cope with. Mirabito (2017) notes three factors that predict the intensity of trauma reactions: one's level of available social support, the meaning of the trauma event to the individual, and the amount of past trauma one has been exposed to.

There are three types of trauma: acute, complex, and chronic. Acute trauma is when an individual experiences a single trauma incident in their life, such as experiencing a natural disaster or being a victim of a crime. Complex trauma is when an individual is exposed to multiple traumatic events. Individuals who have experienced chronic trauma have experienced repeated and prolonged abuse. Child abuse can fall into any of these three categories, as individuals may experience abuse once, on multiple occasions, and/or continuously over long periods of time.

The impact and intensity of the effects of trauma can vary depending on various circumstances such as: the developmental status and age of the child when the abuse occurred, the type of abuse experienced, the duration, frequency, and severity of the abuse, as well as the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Those who experience trauma have a higher risk of

developing various behavioral health and physical issues, such as depression, diabetes, and obesity (Forkey, Morgan, Sagor, & Schwartz, 2016). Children who experience abuse, may experience various developmental delays, such as: social-emotional, speech, cognitive, and physical development delays (Culp, Richardson, & Heide, 1987). The behavioral, emotional, and physiological effects of trauma on children who have been abuse can extend into adulthood (Lee, 2017).

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente conducted the Adverse Childhood Experience study (ACEs study) which evaluated the long-term impact on individuals who experienced childhood adversities. The study found that individuals who experience one or more adverse experience as a child are at greater risk of experiencing long-term health, social, and emotional issues later in life compared to those who don't experience childhood adversities (Ford, Klevens, Merrick, Metzler, & Ports, 2017). Of the ten types of adverse childhood traumas that the CDC categorizes as adverse childhood experiences within the study, child abuse makes up five of the categories: emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect (Ford et al., 2017).

### Trauma-Informed Care with Child Abuse Victims. Social workers

frequently work with child abuse victims as they provide crisis intervention, advocacy, and support services in various settings such as medical facilities, child welfare agencies, community crisis centers, foster care agencies, mental health departments, and counseling agencies. It is vital for social workers who provide treatment services to child abuse victims to have a working knowledge of trauma, its' effects, and to incorporate trauma-informed care within their practice in order to efficiently aid clients in overcoming the effects of trauma.

Providing trauma-informed care involves understanding that clients' presenting issues are often directly correlated to their prior trauma experiences. Levenson (2017) asserts that when social workers apply their working knowledge of the effects of trauma and interact with clients in a compassionate and empathetic manner, social workers in turn encourage clients' self-determination and their ability to develop positive coping strategies. Utilizing empathetic and strengths-based interventions with child abuse victims, promotes trust within the client-worker relationship and cultivates a strong safety and support network for clients to work towards overcoming the effects of their trauma, feel empowered, and to create the positive changes they desire (Wolf, Green, Nochajski, Mendel, & Kusmaul, 2013).

The prevalence of trauma within the child welfare system emphasizes the importance of social workers integrating trauma-informed care within their practice. Ake et al. (2011) conducted a study that examined the complex trauma

histories and emotional and behavioral problems of youth involved in the foster care system. Their findings note that conducting thorough assessments and fully understanding foster youth's trauma experiences can help social workers better identify and address the various needs of foster youth.

The information found during the literature review highlights the necessity for social workers to understand the effects of trauma in order to provide appropriate treatment services to child abuse victims. The data obtained in this research study can be utilized as an educational tool for social workers to understand which interventions have been found by other social workers to be effective when working with child abuse victims and may encourage social workers to utilize new interventions and/or tailor current interventions they already use within their own practice to better aid their clients in being resilient and addressing and overcoming their trauma.

### Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical orientation behind this study is trauma theory. Trauma theory describes the correlation between traumatic experiences and the emotional distress one experiences after experiencing a traumatic event. This theory asserts that one must clearly understand the correlation between the two in order to effectively address trauma symptoms. As such, having a clear understanding of what trauma is will allow one better understand the impact and effects trauma has on individuals.

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

The data obtained from this study can potentially contribute to the field of social work at both the macro and micro levels. On the micro level, the data produced from this study can increase social workers' use of empathy and engagement with their clients and encourage social workers to employ trauma-informed care within their practice when working with individuals whom have experienced trauma. On the macro levels, this study can help contribute to the understanding of the need for social service agencies to employ trauma-informed services and policies.

## Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the focus of this research study. An explanation of the post-positivist perspective and its' incorporation within the research study was discussed. A literature review was provided, followed by an explanation of the theoretical orientation that frames the focus of the study. The chapter concluded with a brief discussion regarding the ways in which the research study can contribute to micro and macro social work practice.



## CHAPTER TWO

### ENGAGEMENT

#### Introduction

Chapter two explores how engagement was performed throughout the research study. Details regarding the research site and the researcher's interactions with site's gatekeepers are discussed. A discussion regarding how the researcher prepared for the study is then provided. Ethical, diversity, and political issues of the study are then addressed. The chapter concludes detailing how technology was utilized throughout the study.

#### Study Site

The research was focused on individuals located in a county in Southern California. The study site was a non-profit organization that provides crisis intervention services, counseling services, referrals and linkage to community resources, and support and advocacy services and/or groups, to individuals who have experienced child abuse. The primary goal of the study site is to aid clients in addressing and overcoming the trauma associated with the abuse they have experienced. The agency employs paid staff and also has volunteers whom work directly with agency clientele. The agency provides services to clients on-site within their various office locations, and also off site at locations within the local community such as prisons, hospitals, and school settings. The agency services

a diverse clientele population that includes adults and children, various gender identities, and various races and ethnicities.

#### Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site

The gatekeeper for the study site was the agency's director. The director is responsible for ensuring all program services are ran effectively and in compliance with the agency's goal and mission. The director oversees all staff members within the agency, secures program funding, collects and organizes data pertaining to agency statistics, and gives final approval of selection and hiring of staff at the agency.

The researcher initiated engagement with the gatekeeper by placing a telephone call to the agency and obtaining the gatekeeper's contact information (email address). An email was then sent to the gatekeeper in which the researcher introduced them self and discussed the researcher's desire to conduct an exploratory qualitative research study at the agency site, with the agency's staff members acting as study participants. The researcher provided an overview of the study, its' purpose and focus, and detailed the role of study participants partaking in interviews with the researcher. The researcher received an email response from the gatekeeper noting the gatekeeper's excitement and interest in allowing the researcher to utilize the agency as the study site. During this email exchange, an in-person meeting was scheduled with the gatekeeper to discuss the study in further detail.

During the in-person meeting, the researcher and gatekeeper thoroughly discussed all aspects of the study which included: how the researcher planned to recruit and select study participants, how the research interviews would be conducted, the interview questions, the researcher's plan to provide informed consent to study participants, how confidentiality would be maintained throughout the study, and what assistance would be needed from the gatekeeper in linking the researcher to the agency staff.

The researcher further explained to the gatekeeper how the study would benefit the agency as the study's findings would note which interventions their employees used with agency clients, how successful the interventions were in addressing clients' trauma and aligned with the agency's mission and goals, provide insight into additional interventions staff members could incorporate within their practice in the future, and stimulate discussion and brainstorming on how certain practices and interventions could be expanded throughout the agency to further aid and support the agency clientele. The gatekeeper gave approval and provided written consent for the researcher to use the agency as the research study site and to recruit study participants from the agency's staff members.

### Self-Preparation

A literature review was conducted and provided the researcher with a detailed understanding of the key elements pertaining to the research topic. The literature review highlighted the importance of the researcher understanding child

abuse as a traumatic event, trauma symptoms, the impact of trauma, and the importance of social workers employing trauma-informed care within their practice when working with child abuse victims. The literature review further provided an understanding that utilizing trauma-centered and empathetic interventions can effectively aid child abuse victims in overcoming their trauma.

With the knowledge obtained from the literature review, the researcher created a list of pre-determined questions to ask study participants in the research interviews.

It was important for the researcher to remain cognizant and aware of personal biases and values to ensure that they did not influence the researcher's data gathering process. As such, the researcher kept two journals throughout the research study to aid the researcher in managing any biases. The researcher utilized the journals to reflect on the research process, document the researcher's thoughts and feelings regarding the research process, and to document the actual data obtained from study participants during the study.

### Diversity Issues

A key diversity issue pertaining to this study was the minimal inclusion of males in the research process. In general, there is a higher ratio of females employed in the social work field compared to males; this was also the case within the study site. To address this issue, the researcher constructed eligibility requirements that included participants of all gender identities and the researcher ensured recruitment efforts remained inclusive to all gender identities.

## Ethical Issues

A proposal of the study was presented to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to obtain approval to conduct the study and for review in order to avoid any possible ethical issues. To avoid ethical issues, informed consent was provided to study participants to ensure they had a full understanding of the scope of the research study, the type of information that would be obtained from them, the steps that would be taken to ensure their confidentiality, and how their responses would be used within the study. Due to the inability to conduct interviews in person with study participants due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, each participant verbally stated their consent to participate in the study, acknowledged that they received proper informed consent regarding the parameters of study, and stated their willingness to act as a study participant.

Another ethical issue that was taken into consideration was confidentiality. In order to ensure the confidentiality of the study participants, the researcher did not collect personal identifying information from study participants. Furthermore, after each interview was completed with the study participants, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents using Trint transcription software, and then the audio recordings were deleted.

## Political Issues

A key political issue pertaining to this study was society's current focus on human and social service workers' in compliance with legal and ethical standards, which has led to various lawsuits against child welfare agencies and social

workers. There may have been fear that the study could indicate that the agency that acted as the study site wasn't doing enough to assist clients or wasn't doing things in an appropriate ethical and legal manner. The researcher addressed this issue during the engagement process with gatekeeper, as the researcher explained the goal, intent, and potential for the study's findings to highlight the positive things the agency is doing when working with clients and to enlighten the agency on practices they may want to expand on and improve in order to increase client and agency outcomes.

### The Role of Technology

Technology was used in the engagement process through telephone calls and emails with the study site's gatekeeper. Email exchanges also occurred between the researcher and study participants to identify and select study participants and to schedule the research interviews with the study participants. The video conferencing application "Zoom" was also utilized to conduct the research interviews with study participants, as COVID-19 restrictions prohibited the researcher's ability to conduct in-person interviews. The interviews were recorded with a digital audio recording device.

### Summary

This chapter explored how the researcher initiated engagement with the gatekeeper of the study site and obtained approval to use the gatekeeper's agency as the study site for this research study. Details regarding the study site

and how the researcher prepared for the study were also discussed, followed by potential issues the researcher needed to remain aware of and address throughout the research process. The chapter concluded detailing how technology was utilized in the study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IMPLEMENTATION

#### Introduction

Chapter three discusses how the research study was conducted. First, study participants are identified and an explanation of how study participants were selected is noted. Next, the methods for data gathering, the phases in which data was gathered, and how data was recorded are discussed. Then an explanation was provided as to how the research data was analyzed. The chapter concludes with a description of how termination and follow-up took place and how the study's research findings were distributed and communicated.

#### Study Participants

As the study sought to determine which interventions social workers believe are most effective when working with child abuse victims, social workers experienced in working with individuals who have experienced child abuse were selected as study participants. The sample size for the study was six. Participants were employees employed at the study site, as the study site provides services to victims of child abuse. The study participants were comprised of mixed genders and ages, and possessed at minimum a Bachelor's degree to ensure the participants had a thorough understanding of the key topics pertaining to the research study (child abuse and trauma).



## Selection of Participants

This study used homogeneous sampling to select study participants. This sampling strategy is a purposive sampling technique that aims to acquire a sample that has the same and/or similar characteristics (Morris, 2013). This sampling strategy was utilized in order to allow data to be collected from a sample of social workers that share the characteristics of having experience working with child abuse victims and having a working knowledge of trauma.

The researcher created a recruitment flyer that detailed the study, its' focus, the researcher's desire to seek volunteer participants, the role of participants in the study, listed the criteria participants needed to meet in order to be selected as a participant (have at minimum a Bachelor's degree and provide direct treatment services to the study sites' clients), and noted how those interested in participating in the study could contact the researcher.

The gatekeeper distributed the researcher's recruitment flyer to the study site's staff members prior to some of the study site's staff meetings.

With the consent of the gatekeeper of the study site, the researcher attended two of the study site's staff meetings, met with the study site's staff members, discussed the research study (its' objectives, purpose, how data would be obtained and analyzed, and the benefits the study would have for the study site and how the data could improve staff's practices with the study site's clientele), explained the researcher's goal of recruiting staff members from the study site to act as study participants, explained the criteria to be considered and

selected as a study participant, and thoroughly explained what the study participants' role would be in the study (participating in an interview with the researcher and answering a series of questions pertaining to the services they provide and the interventions they utilize with their clients). The researcher explained how those interested in participating in the study could contact the researcher via email to inform the researcher of their interest, that they meet the study's criteria, and to schedule a date and time to complete the research interview.

The researcher further explained that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the study by not obtaining and/or including any personal identifying information obtained from study participants throughout the research process.

### Data Gathering

Semi-structured interviews were utilized as the data collection method during this research study in order to obtain qualitative data. The interviews were conducted via the video conferencing application "Zoom" in compliance with COVID-19 protocols. Utilizing semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask study participants a series of predetermined questions that were created prior to the interviews, as well as additional and/or follow up questions to seek clarity of and explore participants' responses. The researcher remained open and flexible throughout the interview process and allowed participant responses to guide the research and highlight additional aspects related to the research topic

that the researcher may not have originally considered or been previously aware of.

The interview questions consisted of open-ended questions that encouraged participants to openly communicate and express their thoughts within their responses. Several descriptive questions were asked, such as: What is your understanding of trauma and its' effects? How have you seen trauma effect child abuse victims? When working with child abuse victims, what interventions do you use and why? Structural questions were also asked. For example: "What are the interventions intended to target, address, or treat?" Contrast questions were also utilized during the interviews, such as: Are there certain interventions you believe are more effective to utilize when working with child abuse victims? If so, why? A complete list of the predetermined questions that were asked in the interviews is attached and referenced herein (see Appendix A).

### Phases of Data Collection

When conducting the interviews with study participants, the researcher structured the interviews into three phases that began with asking questions that built engagement and rapport with participants. The researcher chose to start the interviews with general questions to help participants become comfortable with the researcher and the interview process. As the researcher transitioned into the second phase, the developing portion of the interviews, the researcher transitioned into asking essential questions focused on the research topic. The

final stage of the interviews was the termination stage in which generic and minimal follow up questions were asked to help lower the intensity of the interviews and conclude the interviews. At the end of the interviews, participants were provided the opportunity to add information to any of their responses.

### Data Recording

With the verbal consent of the study participants obtained prior to each interview, an audio digital recorder was utilized to record interviews. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and reviewed after each interview. Transcribing the interviews allowed the researcher to accurately note and refer back to participants' responses as needed when analyzing the data.

Two separate journals were also utilized to record data. The researcher used one journal to take detailed notes regarding all aspects of the research process such as: the researcher's preparation and planning for the study, interactions with the gatekeeper, study participants, and all of the data collected during the study. This journal documented the research study from start to finish. The second journal held more of a reflective purpose for the researcher, as it included the researcher's reflections pertaining to the research process and decisions made throughout the study.

### Data Analysis

A qualitative analysis of the data obtained during the study was conducted. The units of analysis were social work practitioners who have

experience working with victims of child abuse and utilized interventions, as the purpose of the study was to evaluate which interventions are believed to be most effective in addressing trauma when working with child abuse victims.

A bottom-up approach was utilized to analyze the qualitative data obtained. This was completed in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During the open coding stage, the transcriptions of the interviews were reviewed and broken down into smaller sections that allowed the researcher to analyze the data more easily and in more detail. In doing so, the researcher separated pertinent information found within the data into prevalent categories and concepts related to the research focus. In the axial coding stage, the researcher identified relationships and themes that existed between the previously identified categories and concepts that emerged in the open coding stage. The researcher explored and tested these relationships as data continued to be collected in subsequent interviews with study participants. In the selective coding stage, the researcher identified a main theme that was present within the study's data and formulated a theory that focused on why social workers believe certain interventions are most effective when working with child abuse victims. The researcher then developed an overall statement regarding how the theory identified during the selective coding stage applies to human interaction.

### Summary

This chapter discussed how the research study was conducted. An explanation of how study participants were identified and selected was noted.

The chapter then concluded by discussing the data methods that were used, as well as how data was gathered, recorded, and analyzed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EVALUATION

#### Introduction

Chapter four begins with a description of the study participants' demographics. The categories and concepts discovered during the open coding stage of the data analysis are noted. The themes developed during the axial coding stage are then provided. The data interpretations are discussed next. The chapter concludes discussing the impact of study's findings on social work practice.

#### Data Analysis

##### Participant Demographics

The study included six participants that ranged in age from 23 to 53 years old; the average participant age was 32. All participants with the exception of one were female. 50% of the participants self-identified as Latino, 33% self-identified as African American, and 17% self-identified as Native American. The participants' time frame of working in the social services field ranges from 3 years to 10 years. The participants time frame of working at the study site ranged from half a year to five years. Participants reported working with child abuse victims at the study site that range in age from 10 to 81 years old.

Open Coding. The following concepts were identified during the first stage of analysis: assessment tools, engagement, and common interventions.

Common interventions noted to be used by participants with their clients were art therapy, journaling, talk therapy, and active listening. All study participants reported using art therapy with their clients as a way to help their clients communicate and express their thoughts and feelings. Participant 1 reported the following:

One of the best ways that I've seen in terms of dealing with children and getting them to express their feelings is through art. So usually during the first couple of sessions with clients, I'll do an art project that helps them metaphorically express their feelings via the art. So I'll tell them, draw for me what your world looks like, or what today looks and feels like for you. I had one child who drew lightning bolts and raindrops on one side of the paper and then on the other side they drew the beach. We then compared the sides, and she explained that the side with raindrops is often how she feels (sad and frightened) and the side with the beach is how she wishes she felt more often (calm). I've noticed that's it's easier for my clients to communicate their feelings when it's done in that aspect; through art (Personal Communication, November 2020).

Participant 3 reported the following:

I often have my clients draw a pair of eyes. One eye represents how they see themselves now and where they currently are in life. The other eye



represents how and where they would like to see themselves. Sometimes there's a lot of split things going on...it'll be dark and gloomy on one side and then more hopeful on the other side. From there we talk about things they feel they can do to reach the happy and hopeful side or where they would like to be (Personal Communication, January 2021).

Five of the participants identified journaling as a main intervention they utilize with their clients. Participant 1 described how they use journaling at times with their teenage clients:

Dump journaling is another thing that I've recently started doing with the teenagers and they really like it, especially right now with the situation we're in with COVID. A lot of them are getting very stressed with just being at home...There's a lot of distractions and often prioritizing stuff causes anxiety for them. So the journaling is a way for them to kind of doodle their feelings and get all their thoughts out, and it also helps them organize their thoughts. So it can be used like an organizational type of coping technique. It helps them eliminate those anxieties and feelings of being overwhelmed (Personal Communication, November 2020).

All participants described the need to find the right way to engage with each of their clients in order to establish and build rapport with them. Participant 6 described how the process of establishing and building rapport with their clients often takes time:

During my first few sessions with them I really try to work to build rapport and common ground with them so that they become comfortable working with me and opening up to me. This can take a while some times, and other times I get some clients who are completely okay with just talking about things and jumping right into the reason of why they're there to see me. I really take it at their pace and let them choose what it is they want to talk about (Personal Communication, January 2021).

Axial Coding. During the axial coding stage of analysis, the concepts and categories identified in the open coding stage were further analyzed and the researcher discovered that the concepts related to an overarching theme of using interventions with child abuse victims that: promote empathy and empowerment, enable one to confront their trauma, and help one find their power and voice to create their own narratives. While analyzing the concepts discovered in the open coding stage, the researcher found that the concepts provided a way for the participants to show empathy to and empower their clients and provided an outlet for participants to allow their clients to acknowledge the trauma they've experienced and to develop the strength and ability to tell their trauma stories. Participant 1 reported their goal of seeking to empower their clients:

More than anything it's empowerment. I want them to feel like they're in this place where it's safe and they feel good and they feel some sort of relief. The other important thing is being able to validate their feelings. Like, for instance, when we have talk therapy, a lot of clients seem to think

crying is a negative thing and something that just shows weakness. I want them to understand that crying however can be a good thing and act as a sense of release. So we have to kind of re-work their views so that they don't just see expressing their emotions as a vulnerability, but rather as a powerful tool that they could use...Validating their feelings is also important for me, but also allowing them to validate themselves is key (Personal Communication, November 2020).

### Data Interpretation

This study found that use of assessment tools, proper engagement strategies, and interventions such as journaling and art therapy were primary methods for participants to identify their clients' needs, understand the intensity and impact the trauma of abuse has on their client, and to address their clients' trauma.

The main overarching theme discovered in the study was the use of interventions that promote empathy and empowerment, aiding clients in confronting their trauma, exploring and listening to victim narratives, and helping clients find their power and voice. The data supports the assertion that use of interventions based on the principles of safety, trust, choice, and empowerment are effective in addressing child abuse victims' trauma and helps aid in their journey towards resiliency.

### Implication of Findings for Micro and Macro Practice

The findings from this study can potentially contribute to the field of social work at both the macro and micro levels. On the micro level, the data produced from this study can encourage and increase social workers' use of empathy and engagement with clients and further encourage social workers to employ trauma-informed care within their practice when working with individuals whom have experienced trauma. On the macro levels, this study highlights the importance and need for local and state governments to not only fund community programs that provide assistance to trauma victims, but also to provide ongoing appropriate training regarding trauma-informed care to employees within such community programs.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

#### Introduction

This study evaluated interventions social workers believe are most effective when working with child abuse victims. This final chapter begins with a description of how the termination process of the study occurred. Next, how the study findings were communicated to the participants and study site is discussed. This is followed by a description of the researcher's ongoing relationships with study participants. The chapter concludes with discussing how the study findings were disseminated.

#### Termination of Study

Each participant was thanked for their time and participation after each respective interview. Termination of the study at the study side was conducted by presenting the study's findings to the study site. The final termination of the study as whole occurred upon submitting the study's findings for open access in the University's ScholarWorks depository and presenting the findings at the University's Research Symposium Event.

### Communication of Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

The researcher met with the study site's gatekeeper via Zoom once the study concluded and discussed the findings of the study. The researcher then once again attended one of the study site's staff meetings virtually, and communicated the study findings via a PowerPoint presentation to the study site and study participants.

### Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

Termination with study participants began at the end of each respective interview and then concluded when the researcher communicated the study findings to all staff at the study site.

### Dissemination Plan

The findings of the study were submitted for open access in the University's ScholarWorks depository and were presented at the University's Research Symposium Event.

### Summary

This chapter began by describing how the termination process of the study occurred. The way in which the study findings are communicated to the participants and study site was then discussed. Next, a description of the researcher's ongoing relationships with study participants was provided. The

chapter concluded with a discussion of how the study findings were disseminated.

APPENDIX A  
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT



### Interview Questions

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. Participants can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue their participation at any time without any consequences. Participants can skip and/or not answer any questions they may feel uncomfortable with. The interview will be semi-structured, with the researcher asking study participants the pre-determined questions noted below. Additional follow up questions may be asked for the researcher to clarify and explore responses in more detail as needed. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

- 1) For the purpose of collecting demographic information, can you state your age, as well as the ethnicity and gender you identify with?
- 2) Can you tell me about your educational background (degree and area of study)?
- 3) How long have you been working in the social services field?
- 4) Can you tell me about your position, role, and duties within the agency?
- 5) How long have you been working at this agency?
- 6) What services and/or treatment do you provide to child abuse victims?
- 7) Can you describe to me the type of clients you work with (such as age, gender, ethnicity, etc.)?
- 8) What is your understanding of trauma and its' effects?
- 9) What is your understanding of child abuse?
- 10) What is your understanding of how trauma and child abuse are related?
- 11) How have you seen trauma effect child abuse victims?
- 12) What is your definition of an intervention?
- 13) When working with child abuse victims, what interventions do you use and why?
- 14) What are the interventions intended to target/address/treat?
- 15) Can you describe how you use those interventions?
- 16) What are the benefits of utilizing your chosen interventions?
- 17) How do your clients respond/react to your use of those interventions?
- 18) Do you utilize some interventions more than others? If so, why?
- 19) Do your interventions vary among the different client demographics you work with (ex: vary across age and/or gender)? If so, how and why?
- 20) How are the interventions effective in addressing your clients' needs and/or presenting issues?
- 21) Are there certain interventions you believe are more effective to utilize when working with child abuse victims? If so, why?
- 22) Can you describe your clients' progression towards achieving identified goals within their treatment plan?
- 23) Are there any drawbacks and/or negative outcomes you have observed when utilizing the interventions?
- 24) Is there anything else you would like to add to any of your response?

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT

### Informed Consent

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to evaluate which interventions social work practitioners feel are most effective when working with child abuse victims. The study is being conducted by Ellen Davis, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Armando Barragan, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to examine interventions utilized by social workers with victims of child abuse.

**Description:** Participants will be asked a few questions on their educational background and understanding of trauma and the effects of trauma, interventions they utilize when working with victims of child abuse, to detail how they use the interventions, how clients respond to the interventions, and which interventions the participants believe are most effective when working with victims of child abuse.

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

**Confidentiality:** Your responses will remain confidential and data will be reported in group form only.

**Duration:** It will take approximately 45 minutes to complete the interview

**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 Dr. Barragan at (909) 537-3501.

**Results:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2021.

\*\*\*\*\*  
I agree to have this interview be audio recorded: \_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_ NO

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Place an X mark here

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX C  
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLYER

## Seeking Participants for a Research Study About Working with Child Abuse Victims



If you meet the requirements and are interested in being a part of the study, or have any questions, please email:

Ellen Davis

[005562371@coyote.csusb.edu](mailto:005562371@coyote.csusb.edu)

### A study examining interventions utilized by social workers when working with child abuse victims

- Seeking social workers to act as study participants
- Participants will be asked to participate in an interview via phone or Zoom, describe the interventions they use with victims of child abuse, and provide their perspective on which interventions are effective when working with this population
- Participants' participation in the study is completely voluntary and confidential

Eligibility Requirements:

Must provide direct services to child abuse victims and at minimum possess a Bachelor's degree

**This study has been approved by the California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board**

APPENDIX D  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD





July 13, 2020

**CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination  
Status: Determined Exempt  
IRB-FY2020-273

Ellen Davis Armando Barragan Jr.  
CSBS - Social Work  
California State University, San Bernardino  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Ellen Davis Armando Barragan Jr.

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Which Interventions Do Social Work Practitioners Believe Are Most Effective When Working with Individuals Who Have Experienced Child Abuse?" has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino has determined your application meets the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants. The exempt determination does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action.

- Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.
- Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.
- Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.
- Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at [mgillesp@csusb.edu](mailto:mgillesp@csusb.edu). Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2020-273 in all

correspondence. Any complaints you receive from participants and/or others related to your research may be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

*Nicole Dabbs*

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

ND/MG



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