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REUNIFICATION OUTCOMES FOR HISPANICS
IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

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
Lucia Aguirre Coronel

June 2011


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Approved by:



Pa Der Vang, Faculty Supervisor
Social Work

6/9/11

Date



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

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify any contributing factors to the overrepresentation of Hispanic children in the child welfare system. This study used an exploratory design and quantitative methods to examine reunification outcomes of 100 case files in a county in Southern California. It was anticipated that there is a significant difference in the length of time for reunification and parent's ethnicity.

Results of this study found no significant finding between ethnicity and the delivery of services in reunification outcomes in a county in Southern California.

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I would like to acknowledge and thank all the professors at CSUSB for their guidance, support, and help through the completion of my study. I would also like to thank the Riverside County Department of Public Social Services for their support throughout the project.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my husband, Cesar, and my daughter, Amaiya, for their unconditional love and encouragement during this journey. Thank you for all of the sacrifices you made for me during this program, as well as, for your support during my late nights of typing. I would have not made it through this program without you. I love you!

To my mother, Maria, and siblings, Teresa, Frank, Lupe, and Jesse for always being there for me and never forgetting about me. I love you guys!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Chapter One presents an overview of the project. The problem statement, purpose of study, and the significance of the project for social work practice were discussed.

Problem Statement

There are numerous reasons why Hispanic families enter the child welfare system. These reasons may include substance abuse, domestic violence, physical abuse, and neglect. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the Hispanic population entering the child welfare system. Across the United States, there has been a disproportional number of Hispanic children entering the child welfare system (Church, Gross, & Baldwin, 2005, p. 1281).

In 2006 in California, Hispanic children made up approximately 44 percent of the State's population under the age of 18, however, only 42 percent of Hispanic children were accounted for in foster care, (CWLA, 2010). In 2007 in California, it was reported that approximately 51.3 percent Hispanic children entered the foster care system compared to Blacks (17.4%) and Whites (23.2%),

(AFCARS, 2011). In a one year period from 2006 to 2007, Hispanic children in California's foster care increased their entry by 9.3 percent. A possible explanation for the increase of Hispanic children in the child welfare system can be due to the many obstacles that Hispanic families may encounter during their reunification process. For example, shorter reunification timelines and the delivery of inadequate services on behalf of the case worker can have an impact on reunification. It is not a new phenomenon having Hispanics in the child welfare system; however, the increase of this problem has brought great concern to this nation.

The child welfare systems throughout the United States have been responsible in assisting families with services, to those who have had their children removed from their care and placed in out-of-home placements. The services offered by the child welfare agencies were designed to meet the needs of its clients. However, over the last few years, it has been observed that Hispanic families are often receiving inadequate services during their reunification process. A reason for this problem may be that the child welfare agencies are not responding

adequately in meeting the unique needs of the growing Hispanic population (CHCF, 2004, p. 3).

A goal of the child welfare system is to safely reunify children with their biological parents. In order for reunification to be successful, child welfare agencies need to provide Hispanic families with ongoing support and services during their reunification process. These services may range from housing referrals, anger management, mental health services, substance abuse services, to parent education. Reunification takes place when both the child welfare worker and the Court have determined that the child(ren) may safely return back to the care of their biological parents. However, if reunification is unsuccessful, the children will continue to remain in the foster care system until a more permanent plan can be established. This may include adoption, legal guardianship, or planned permanent living arrangement. Therefore, it is the child welfare agencies' primary objective to safely reunify all children placed in out-of-home placement, with their biological parents as quickly as possible (Miller et al., 2006, p. 261).

The child welfare policies in the United States have been designed to protect vulnerable children from abuse

and neglect. In 1997, the United States passed the Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) that ensured the safety of all children. The ASFA also intended to shorten the reunification timelines for parents from 18 months to 12 months (CHCF, 2004, p. 5). These shorter reunification timelines were also intended to increase the number of adoptions of children in out-of-home placement in the United States. However, the ASFA left many Hispanic families at a disadvantage due to the limited availability and accessibility of bilingual services offered by the child welfare agencies (CHCF, 2004, p. 5). The increase in unsuccessful reunification outcomes among the Hispanic families may in part be due to the ASFA changes in reunification timelines. Therefore, this act may be causing more harm than good to the Hispanic population. It could be said that, Hispanic families have been unable to comply with their case plan and reunify with their children due to the limited bilingual services available in the child welfare system.

Though the primary purpose of the ASFA was to protect vulnerable children, the ASFA has failed to protect Hispanic families and their children. The ASFA was not designed to meet the special needs of the

Hispanic parents, therefore, leaving Hispanic children placed in out-of-home placement for longer periods compared to Caucasian children (CHCF, 2004, p. 5).

This study focused on the micro level because of the direct services provided to the Hispanic population by child welfare workers. The services provided are essential when assisting Hispanic families to overcome their initial problems that brought them to the attention of the child welfare system.

The roles of child welfare workers within an agency setting are to assist all families, as well as their children during the reunification process. They are responsible for providing families with adequate services in order for reunification to take place. Child welfare workers are also responsible for establishing a permanent plan for children that have been placed in out-of-home placement within the 12 month timeframe, even if a permanent plan does not exist. This may include reunification, adoption, legal guardianship, or planned permanent living arrangement.

This study is important for social work practice because of the possibility of providing child welfare agencies with new insights on how to better serve the

Hispanic population. This study attempts to provide child welfare agencies with new knowledge as to the recent increase of Hispanic children entering the child welfare system. This new knowledge may assist agencies in developing new tools to reduce the number of Hispanics entering the child welfare system.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine if services provided to Hispanic families had an impact in their reunification process in the child welfare system. Although, the overrepresentation of Hispanic children should be a concern to all child welfare agencies, this study was primarily concentrated in a county in Southern California. This study contributes to social work practice because it attempts to provide agencies with an understanding as to the rapid increase of Hispanic children entering the child welfare system.

According to the Child Welfare Dynamic Report System, 1,970 children entered the foster care system in a county in Southern California from April 1, 2008 to March 31, 2009. Of the 1,970 children who entered the foster care system, 966 of the children were of Hispanic

decent (CWDRS, 2004). Therefore, this study examined the possible factors contributing to the overrepresentation of Hispanic children in the child welfare system, for example, the inadequate delivery of services that are unable to meet the unique needs of Hispanics and/or the limited availability of Spanish speaking child welfare workers.

The overrepresentation of Hispanic children in the child welfare system raises many questions as to why this problem currently exists and what agencies are currently doing to address this recent increase. Research on the overrepresentation of specific groups of children in the child welfare system has been primarily focused on African Americans. Due to the limited research on the overrepresentation of Hispanic children in the child welfare system, this study addressed the many factors leading to the increase of Hispanic children in the child welfare system.

This study used exploratory research method. A data extraction instrument was used to examine reunification outcomes of CWS cases by using secondary data from case files in a county in Southern California. This study

examined if ethnicity and the delivery of services had an impact in reunification outcome cases.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

This study examined if adequate services were provided to Hispanic families in a county in Southern California. In addition, this study was designed to uncover if the delivery of services impacted reunification outcomes for Hispanic families. The results of this study attempts to provide a better understanding of the overrepresentation of Hispanic children in a county in Southern California.

This study was also intended to encourage child welfare agency administrators to re-evaluate the services they currently provide to the Hispanic population. In addition, this study attempts to assist child welfare agencies in developing new tools that will contribute to decreasing the number of Hispanic families entering the child welfare system. This study examined and addressed the question: "Does ethnicity predict reunification outcomes of mothers and children in child welfare?"

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter Two presents a review of literature relevant to the overrepresentation of Hispanic children in the child welfare system. This chapter discussed Cultural competence in the child welfare system and the possible factors for the overrepresentation of Hispanics in child welfare system. This chapter concludes with the theories guiding the conceptualization of this study.

Cultural Competence in the Child Welfare System

In 2009, Ayón conducted a study using grounded theory to determine if undocumented and non-English speaking families encounter a large variety of obstacles when accessing services for reunification with their children. The study focused on the perceptions of child welfare workers, as well as the role of the social worker when exploring the needs of the non-English speaking families (Ayón, 2009, p. 609). The literature identified that there are barriers in accessing services to only-Spanish speaking families that can impact their ability to reunify with their children, regardless of

their documentation status (Ayón, 2009, p. 612). In addition, Ayón (2009) found that social workers' knowledge and willingness to assist families played an important role when accessing services (Ayón, 2009, p. 612).

Rajendran and Chemtob (2009) stated that "child welfare workers may be less active in enabling permanency on behalf of minority children than doing so for White children" (Rajendran & Chemtob, 2009, p. 318). They indicated that the increase of cultural competence in the child welfare agencies increases the client's chances of being successful in treatment. Rajendran and Chemtob (2009) suggested that "caseworkers who are most active in referring families to support services may be those who are most aware of the need to overcome bureaucratic problems" (Rajendran & Chemtob, 2009, p. 322). According to the authors, the term cultural competence refers to social workers' ability to work with diverse clients and systems (Rajendran & Chemtob, 2009, p. 318). Cultural competence will enhance case workers abilities to understand the different dynamics in diversity, as well as to help empower the clients we serve. In addition, cultural competence will allow case workers the ability

of providing adequate services that are designed to meet the client's unique needs. Also, lack of cultural competence may affect client's case outcomes. This article explained the importance of cultural competence among child welfare worker agencies. Child welfare workers need to be more aware of their biases, as well as have some knowledge of their client's culture.

Church (2006) suggested that the overrepresentation of ethnically diverse children in the child welfare system is due to many implications found in the delivery of services. He stated that "this institutionalization of discrimination is a driving force behind the underproductive delivery of services by the child welfare workers" (Church, 2006, p. 1009). The underproductive delivery of services consists of case workers inability to provide services that are not culturally sensitive to meet the unique needs of the clients. Child welfare workers need to have an adequate level of understanding in order to provide appropriate services to their clients. The delivery of appropriate services will allow the clients to benefit from the services, which will result in better case outcomes. Church (2006) found that children of color are being brought to the child welfare

system much faster and are remaining longer in foster care compared to Caucasians (Church, 2006, p. 1010). He indicated that the distribution of services to the Hispanic population may result in negative outcomes due to the differential services they receive from the child welfare worker (Church, 2006, p. 1020). The literature indicated that "social workers should be able to examine all filial situations with more discerning eye... rather than merely based on the generalization of their cultural norms" (Church, 2006, p. 1022).

Church, Gross, and Baldwin (2005) conducted a study to explore the practices applied to Hispanic children versus those practices applied to White non-Hispanic children in the child welfare system (Church, Gross, & Baldwin, 2005, p. 1279). The study focused primarily on the previous studies that demonstrated a need to increase cultural awareness among social workers in the child welfare system. Data was collected in 2000, from 26,070 child abuse cases reported to the Utah Department of Children and Family Services. From the data obtained, the researchers attempted to identify the relationship between children's ethnic characteristics and time to enter state custody (Church, Gross, & Baldwin, 2005). The

study found that there is a disproportional number of Hispanic children in the Utah Department of Children and Family Services, when compared to White non-Hispanic children. In addition, it found that there were contributing factors that influence the substantiation of child protective services allegations and the length of time a Hispanic child spends in out-of-home placements (Church, Gross, & Baldwin, 2005, p. 1291).

Possible Factors to the Overrepresentation of Hispanics in the Child Welfare System

Tilbury and Thoburn (2009) examined disproportionality and disparity data to measure the performance and outcomes in the child welfare system. They indicated that oppression has existed throughout history among people of color and that the child welfare system has been part of this institutional framework that has been managing the social inequalities (Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009, p. 1102). They found that "racial disproportionality and disparity is a feature of the child welfare system in many countries" (Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009, p. 1103). The literature suggested that causes of disproportionality and disparity cannot be assumed to be the same for all culturally diverse groups.

Child welfare agencies have to be more aware of the impact they have on culturally diverse communities (Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009, p. 1105).

Earner (2009) examined the experiences of Mexican immigrant mothers living in New York City, who had become involved with the child welfare system. She stated that "immigrant families experience significant problems in their encounter with child welfare services" (Earner, 2009, p. 2). She indicated that immigrant families encounter many challenges during their reunification process, as well as, many barriers that many include, lack of translators, availability of bilingual services, issues related to immigrant status, and culturally insensitivity by the child welfare workers (Earner, 2009, p. 3). One limitation to this study was that it was only focused on a number of Mexican immigrants in New York City; therefore, the results of this study could not represent the experiences of all Mexican immigrants across the United States.

Becker, Jordan, and Larson (2007) found that despite changes in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA), there has been an increase of children entering the foster care system than in previous years. They also

Johnson (2007) found that child welfare agencies across the United States have been responding to the unique needs of the immigrant population. However, due to the families' unique problems, the child welfare agencies continue to encounter several challenges (Johnson, 2007, p. 1427). This article used the social ecological perspective framework to explain the ways in which public policy shapes the context of parenting within immigrant families.

Lu and colleagues (2004) stated that "race and ethnicity is but only one factor when determining positive outcomes, indicating that language and culture may be more significant" (Lu et al., 2004, p. 450). They indicated that most of the research relating to the experiences of minority children in the child welfare system found that ethnicity contributed to the differential access, assessments, and outcomes. The limitation of this study was that they only assessed whether there were any differences in outcome decision based on racial and ethnic background. Lu and colleagues (2004) stated "there are clear and consistent differences in decision outcomes based on a child's racial and ethnic background" (Lu et al., 2004, p. 457). Lu and colleagues

(2004) found that African-American children were over-represented in the child welfare system and Hispanic children were under-represented possibly due to immigration background (Lu et al, 2004, p. 457).

Hines and colleagues (2004) examined the factors related to disproportionate involvement of children of color in the child welfare system. Hines and colleagues (2004) indicated that although there is limited research on children of color in the child welfare system, people of color have continued to receive differential attention during the various phases within the child welfare system (Hines et al., 2004, p. 509). The article focused on four areas: (1) parent-related risk factors and child welfare system involvement, (2) social factors related to poverty, neighborhood effects, (3) ethnicity and class bias in initial reporting, and (4) the impact of recent child welfare policy initiatives on children of color. Hines and colleagues (2004) found that

there are several factors contributing to disproportionality of children of color including the lack of services for reunification, the enormous workloads of individual child welfare workers, and shortened time frames may be overwhelming barriers

to successful reunification for children of color in the child welfare system. (Hines et. al, 2004, p. 518)

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

One theory used to guide this study is the Culturally-Sensitive Theory. This theory is used to examine the current affects of culture within the child welfare system. Church (2004) stated that cultural sensitive theory practice looks at the institutional history of oppression and acknowledges institutional racism for the development of culturally competent services (Church, 2005, p. 1008). This theory helps to seek if the inability to provide adequate service to Hispanic families is within the child welfare workers or child welfare agencies. In addition, this theory helps to provide child welfare workers with the tools necessary to deliver adequate services, which have been tailored to fit the unique cultural needs and characteristics of the Hispanic families. Also, the delivery of adequate services will result in the development to increase the number of Hispanic families successfully reunifying with their children.

Oppression Theory is another theory used to guide this study. In the child welfare system, this theory examines the leading factors contributing to the overrepresentation of Hispanic children in child welfare. According to Van Worner (2006), oppression can take any form and can occur at any time when race or group of people exploits and suppresses another group (Van Worner, 2006, p. 131). In child welfare, within the last years, there has been an increase of Hispanic children entering the foster care.

Oppression theory explains the experience of cultural minorities when they are subjected to oppression by a dominant group. Oppression theory suggests that placing Hispanic children in the child welfare system with low reunification rates is a form of oppression. This oppression results in the breaking up of Hispanic families and thus weakening the Hispanic family and societal structure making them more reliant on dominant culture and more vulnerable to the increase of Hispanic children in the County.

This recent increase of Hispanic children may be due to the parent's inability to meet their unique needs. Research shows that "case workers should recognize the

lenses that impact community organizations and community members" (Becker, 2007, p. 686)). Oppression theory will help guide this study to identify any risk factors contributing to the recent increase of Hispanic children entering the child welfare system.

Summary

The overrepresentation of Hispanics in the child welfare system has been a continuous problem in the United States. Research on the overrepresentation of children in child welfare system has been primarily focused on African Americans. Therefore, there is limited research available to help reduce the rapid increase of Hispanic children in the child welfare system. Increased knowledge about this problem is necessary in all child welfare agencies in order to help eliminate the overrepresentation of Hispanics in the child welfare system. In addition, it provides child welfare workers with a better understanding in servicing the Hispanic population.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

Chapter Three presents the methodology used in the study. It focused on the study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human services, and data analysis.

Study Design

The primary purpose of this study was to examine if services provided to Hispanic families had an impact in their reunification process. This study aims to explore the relationship between ethnicity and the delivery of services as a means to see if there is a correlation in reunification outcomes for Hispanics.

This research used a quantitative and exploratory study design based on secondary data from a county in Southern California to examine the reunification outcomes of case files open from January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2008. This design assisted the researcher to determine the number of families who successfully reunified in a county in Southern California. All necessary data for

this study was obtained through secondary data. No surveys or interviews were used.

One limitation to this study was that the information gathered was only obtained through case files open from January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2008, in the in county in Southern California. Therefore, this data cannot be used to generalize this problem with other child welfare agencies due to the small sample size.

Another limitation for this study was that it was unable to retrieve the client's perception of their reunification experience. In addition, it is unable to determine if all of the client's needs were addressed during their reunification process. This study attempts to address if services provided to Hispanic families had an impact in their reunification outcome.

Sampling

Relying on secondary data, the researcher obtained the sample for this study from case files in the California Child Welfare System database. The sample consisted of 100 case files. The researcher randomized the sample by selecting every fifth case file from the 644 children removed in a county in Southern California.

The sample size was obtained from all case files open in a county in Southern California from January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2008. The sample included the following ethnic groups: White, Hispanics, African American, and Other. This study examined mother's length of time before reunification and the mother's reunification outcomes in a county in Southern California.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data for this study was collected using an extraction tool created by the researcher. The extraction tool was used to collect secondary data from CWS (Child Welfare System) cases opened from January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2008, in a county in Southern California. Refer to the data extraction instrument in Appendix A.

The Independent Variables (IV) for this study were the age, ethnicity, length to reunify, and case outcomes of mother's who entered the child welfare system in a county in Southern California from January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2008. The Dependent Variables (DV) for this study was the number of children removed, the number of previous allegations, and previous CPS involvement. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of the

independent and dependent variables through bivariate analysis. Bivariate analyses examine any significant associations between the independent and dependent variables.

One limitation to the tool utilized is that it has not been tested for reliability and validity. The extraction tool was only created for the purpose of this study by the researcher and was used as data recording device only.

One strength of the instrument being used is that it was purposely created to gather data related to reunification outcomes in a county in Southern California. Therefore, this instrument can be utilized by other child welfare agencies in the future to conduct further research on this growing problem.

Procedures

The data for this study was gathered from 100 case files opened in a county in Southern California from January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2008. In order to maintain client confidentiality and comply with federal and state regulation, no names, phone numbers, or

additional case identification was obtained in the process of this study.

In addition, prior to collecting all necessary data for this study, a clearance was obtained from the research supervisor in a county in Southern California. A list of names was provided and was collected from a county in Southern California.

Protection of Human Subjects

In order to maintain confidentiality of all personal files, the names of the participants were not included in this study. The researcher removed any additional case identification from this study. The research supervisor in a county in Southern California provided the researcher with the individuals' demographic characteristics, which include age, ethnicity, and gender, therefore, keeping the individuals' name confidential at all times. In addition, all collected data was kept onsite in a county building. The collected data was stored in a locked filing cabinet that could only be accessed by the researcher throughout the process of this study to ensure the participants' confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The study for this research was an exploratory study. The research utilized an extraction tool to gather data from the 100 case files in a county in Southern California to examine the reunification outcomes of African American, Hispanic, White, and Other families in a county in Southern California. Therefore, the results of this study attempted to identify the possible factors contributing to the overrepresentation of Hispanic children in a county in Southern California.

This study utilized quantitative methods to assess the various statistical measurements to analyze the data collected. Data obtained from a county in Southern California was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Services version 16 in a two-step program. First, the frequency analyses were compiled to gain knowledge of the demographic characteristics of the 100 case file samples. This was followed by a series of bivariate analysis and Pearson's Correlation to help the researcher interpret the correlation that exists between the independent and dependent variables.

Quantitative analysis allowed researcher to compare reunification outcomes of African American, Hispanic,

White, and Other families within a one year timeframe.
The results of the study hoped to provide the researcher
with all the necessary tools to explain what was
observed.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter Four presents an overview of the research methods performed in this study. This chapter reviews the demographic characteristics, frequency analysis, and results of the bivariate analysis. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Presentation of the Findings

Table 1. shows that the mothers' age ranged from 15 to 61 years old, with a mean age of 31.4 years. Fifty percent of the mothers were Hispanic, followed by Caucasian (38%), African American (9%), and Other ethnicity/ethnicity (3%). The mothers' primary language was English (84%), followed by Spanish (14%), and Other language (2%). Seventy-two percent of the mothers' immigration status was U.S. Citizen, followed by permanent resident (2%), undocumented (5%), and unknown (21%) (See Table 1).

Of the 100 case files, twenty-seven percent reported having some schooling, followed by High school diploma/or GED (31%), some college (10%), associates degree (1%),

and thirty-one percent of the mothers' education level was unknown (See Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Mothers

| Variable | Frequency (N) | Valid Percentage % |
|----------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| <i>Mothers Age</i> (Mean = 31.4) | | |
| 15-25 | 23 | 23 |
| 26-35 | 49 | 49 |
| 36-45 | 26 | 26 |
| 46+ | 2 | 2 |
| <i>Ethnicity</i> | | |
| White | 38 | 38 |
| Hispanic | 50 | 50 |
| African American | 9 | 9 |
| Other | 30 | 30 |
| <i>Primary Language</i> | | |
| English | 84 | 84 |
| Spanish | 14 | 14 |
| Other | 2 | 2 |
| <i>Immigration Status</i> | | |
| U.S. Citizen | 72 | 72 |
| Permanent Resident | 2 | 2 |
| Undocumented | 5 | 5 |
| Unknown | 21 | 21 |
| <i>Education</i> | | |
| Some School | 27 | 27 |
| High School Diploma/GED | 31 | 31 |
| Some College | 10 | 10 |
| Associates Degree | 1 | 1 |
| Unknown | 31 | 31 |
| <i>Two-Parent Household</i> | | |
| Yes | 29 | 29 |
| No | 54 | 54 |
| Unknown | 17 | 17 |

Table 2. shows the demographic characteristics of the children removed in 2008. From the 100 case files analyzed, there were a total of 242 children accounted for in the sample. The average mean was 2.42 children removed per mother. The frequency analysis showed that 44.2 percent (n = 107) of the children removed were male compared to 55.8 percent (n = 135) females. The children's age ranged from 0 to 17 years old, with the mean age of 6.62 years at entry into the child welfare system (See Table. 2)

Of the 242 children analyzed, approximately 59.1 percent (n = 143) were Hispanics, followed by White (25%, n = 61), African American (12.4%, n = 30), and other ethnicity/ethnicity were (3.3%, n = 8). Sixty-nine percent of the children were placed in foster care at removal, followed by relative placement (19%), non-relative extended family member (5%), out-of-custody (3%), and other placement (4%) (See Table 2).

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Children

| Variable | Frequency (N) | Valid Percentage % |
|--|------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Child Gender</i> | | |
| Male | 107 | 44.2 |
| Female | 135 | 55.8 |
| <i>Age at Detention (Mean = 6.62)</i> | | |
| 0-5 | 122 | 50.4 |
| 6-10 | 56 | 23.2 |
| 11-15 | 54 | 22.3 |
| 16+ | 10 | 4.1 |
| <i>Ethnicity</i> | | |
| White | 61 | 25.2 |
| Hispanic | 143 | 59.1 |
| African American | 30 | 12.4 |
| Other | 8 | 3.3 |
| <i># of Children Removed (Mean = 2.42)</i> | | |
| 1-2 | 57 | 57 |
| 3-4 | 37 | 37 |
| 5+ | 6 | 6 |
| <i>Child Placement (N = 100)</i> | | |
| Foster care | 69 | 69 |
| Relative | 19 | 19 |
| NREFM | 5 | 5 |
| Out of Custody | 3 | 3 |
| Other | 4 | 4 |

Case Characteristics

Table 3. shows that 76 percent of the mothers' had previous child welfare history compared to 24 percent that had no history at time of entry. The number of previous allegations range from 0-29, with a mean of 4.62. Seventeen percent of the mother's were assigned a

bilingual social worker. Followed by non-bilingual social worker (65%), and unknown bilingual status (18%) (See Table 3).

Table 3. Characteristics of Cases (N = 100)

| Variable | Frequency (N) | Valid Percentage % |
|--|---------------|--------------------|
| <i>Previous Child Welfare</i> | | |
| Yes | 76 | 76 |
| No | 24 | 24 |
| <i># of Previous Allegations (Mean = 4.62)</i> | | |
| 0-4 | 55 | 55 |
| 5-8 | 27 | 27 |
| 9-12 | 12 | 12 |
| 13+ | 6 | 6 |
| <i>Bilingual Social Worker</i> | | |
| Yes | 17 | 17 |
| No | 65 | 65 |
| Unknown | 18 | 18 |

Case Outcomes

Table 4. shows the mothers' length of time for reunification was the following: 6 months (11.6%, n = 10), 12 months (27.9%, n = 24), 18 months (26.7%, n = 23), Services terminated (32%, n = 28), and other (1.2%, n = 1). Data showed that in the "other" reunification outcome, the mother abducted her children. Fifty-seven percent of the children reunified with their

mother, followed by Adoption (21%), Legal Guardianship (16%), Permanent Plan Living Arrangement (16%), and Other (1%) (See Table 4).

Table 4. Characteristics of Case Outcomes

| Variable | Frequency (N) | Validity Percentage % |
|----------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Reunification Length | | |
| 6 Months | 10 | 10 |
| 12 Months | 24 | 24 |
| 18 Months | 23 | 23 |
| Services Terminated | 28 | 28 |
| Other | 1 | 1 |
| Case Outcome | | |
| Reunification | 57 | 57 |
| Adoption | 21 | 21 |
| LG | 5 | 5 |
| PPLA | 16 | 16 |
| Other | 1 | 1 |

Ethnicity and Case Outcomes

Table 5 shows the frequency analysis between the mothers' ethnicity and case outcomes of the 100 case files open in 2008. The study found that 27 percent of Hispanic mother's successfully reunified with their children compared to Whites (24%) and African American (3%). From the 100 case files, 11 percent of Hispanic mother's did not reunify with their children and the

children were adopted out compared to (7%) White and (3%) African American (See Table 5).

Table 5. Ethnicity and Case Outcome Variables

| | Valid Percentage % | Valid Percentage % | Valid Percentage % | Valid Percentage % |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <u>Variable</u> | <u>White</u> | <u>Hispanic</u> | <u>A.A.</u> | <u>Other</u> |
| Reunification | 24 (24%) | 27 (27%) | 4 (4%) | 2 (2%) |
| Adoption | 7 (7%) | 11 (11%) | 3 (3%) | 0 |
| LG | 0 | 3 (3%) | 1 (1%) | 1 (1%) |
| PPLA | 7 (7%) | 8 (8%) | 1 (1%) | 0 |
| Other | 0 | 1 (1%) | 0 | 0 |

The researcher used Cross-Tabulation, Pearson's Correlation, and One-way ANOVA in this study to examine if Hispanic mother's experience poorer outcomes in a county in Southern California.

Primary Language and Case Outcomes

Table 6. shows that a Pearson-product moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between case outcomes and mother's primary language. According to Pearson's correlation for case outcomes and mother's primary language showed that there was no significance

between the variables ($r(100) = .102, p = .314$) (See Table 6).

Table 6. Primarily Language and Case Outcomes

| | | Primarily Language | Case Outcomes |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Primarily Language | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .102 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .314 |
| | N | 100 | 100 |
| Case Outcomes | Pearson Correlation | .102 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .314 | . |
| | N | 100 | 100 |

Age and Ethnicity

Table 7. shows that Pearson-product moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between the mother's age and mother's ethnicity. According to Pearson's correlation for mother's age and ethnicity showed that there was no significance between the two variables ($r(100) = .015, p = .884$) (See Table 7).

Table 7. Age and Ethnicity

| | | Mother's Age | Ethnicity |
|--------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Mother's Age | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .015 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .884 |
| | N | 100 | 100 |
| Ethnicity | Pearson Correlation | .015 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .884 | . |
| | N | 100 | 100 |

Education and Case Outcomes

Table 8. shows that Pearson-product moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between the mother's education and case outcome. According to Pearson's correlation for mother's education and case outcomes showed that there was no significance between the two variables ($r = .104$, $p = .301$) (See Table 8).

Table 8. Education and Case Outcomes

| | | Mother's education | Case Outcome |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Mother's Education | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .014 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .301 |
| | N | 100 | 100 |
| Case Outcome | Pearson Correlation | .104 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .301 | . |
| | N | 100 | 100 |

Ethnicity and Case Outcomes

Table 9. shows that Pearson-product moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between mother's ethnicity and case outcomes. According to Pearson's correlation for mother's ethnicity and case outcomes, the results were significant ($r = .218$, $p = .030$) (See Table 9).

Regression analysis using One-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the mother's ethnicity and case outcomes. The mother's ethnicity was significant = $(1, 98) = .132$, $p > .05$.

Table 9. Ethnicity and Case Outcomes

| | | Mother's Ethnicity | Case Outcome |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Mother's Ethnicity | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .037 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .717 |
| | N | 100 | 100 |
| Case Outcomes | Pearson Correlation | .037 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .717 | . |
| | N | 100 | 100 |

Case Outcomes and Public Assistance

Table 10. shows that Pearson-product moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between public assistance and case outcomes. According to Pearson's correlation for public assistance and case outcome, the results were significant ($r = .216$, $p = .030$) (See Table 10).

Table 10. Case Outcomes and Public Assistance

| | | Case Outcomes | Public Assistance |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Case Outcomes | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .216 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .030 |
| | N | 100 | 100 |
| Public Assistance | Pearson Correlation | .216 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .30 | . |
| | N | 100 | 100 |

Mother's Ethnicity and Reunification Length

Table 11. shows that Pearson-product moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between the mother's ethnicity and reunification length. According to Pearson's correlation for mother's ethnicity and Reunification length, the results were significant ($r = .104$, $p = .263$) (See Table 11).

Table 11. Mother's Ethnicity and Reunification Length

| | Mother's Ethnicity | Reunification Time |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Mother's Ethnicity | | |
| Pearson Correlation | 1 | .263 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .140 |
| N | 100 | 86 |
| Reunification Time | | |
| Pearson Correlation | .263 | 1 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .014 | . |
| N | 86 | 100 |

Summary

Chapter Four presented an overview of the results in this research project. It appeared that Hispanic mother's were more likely to be reunified compared to Whites or African American in 2008. Even though Hispanic mother's had a higher rate of reunification, Hispanic children had a higher rate of Adoption and PPLA compared to Whites or African American. Therefore, the researcher was unable to determine if there was a significant difference between the variables due to the small sample size.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter Five presents an overview of the findings, in this project, discussion of the limitations of the project, and recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine case characteristics to determine if Hispanic mother's experienced poorer case outcomes in a county in Southern California. The results in this study did not support the information found in previous studies on the overrepresentation of Hispanic children. The researcher assumed that Hispanic children were more likely to remain in foster care longer compared to Whites and African American. However, this study found that ethnicity and language barrier did not affect reunification outcomes in a county in Southern California.

This study found that Hispanics mother's were more likely to reunify with their children compared to Whites

and African American mothers. It is possible that the lack of data and small sample size may have impacted this study. In a county in Southern California, there is a much larger population of Hispanic families compared to White and African American families.

This study found that Hispanic mother's represented 50 percent of demographic characteristics compared to Whites (30%) and African Americans (9%). Research suggests that Hispanic families become "impoverished and the characteristics of their respective communities may differentially impact their entrance into and experiences with the child welfare system" (Hines et al., 2004, p. 515). Therefore, the results of this study may not be generalized with other Counties due to the relatively small sample. In addition, this small sample makes it difficult to generalize to all clients in the child welfare system.

This study also found that 27 percent of Hispanic mother's successfully reunified with their children compared to Whites (24%) and African American (4%). Although, this study found that a larger percentage of Hispanic mothers reunified with their children compared to Whites, this large percentage of reunification could

be due to the increase of Hispanics living in a county in Southern California. Research suggests that once in the system, "families of color receive fewer services and have poorer outcomes than their White counterparts" (Hines et al., 2004, p. 515). The study also found that 11 percent of Hispanic children were more likely to be adopted when compared to Whites (7%) and African Americans (3%). Therefore, research suggests that children of "diverse ethnic backgrounds experience parental termination of rights more often than their White counterparts" (Church, 2005, p. 1281).

Results in this study found insufficient information from the 100 case files examined in a county in Southern California. For example, there was insufficient information to gather data on Hispanic fathers, mother's legal status, employment status, education level, and two-parent household. The lack of data led to the reporting of several zeros. The insufficient data may have impacted the results in this study.

Limitations

One Limitation in the project was that the study was only conducted in one County. Therefore, the results of

this study may not be generalized with other Counties. The sample size (n = 100) was relatively small; therefore, making it difficult to generalize to all clients in the child welfare system. The original sample size consisted of 645 children removed from January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2008, in a county in Southern California. However, 204 cases needed to be excluded due to factors such as wrong entry date and cases being sensitive and therefore not accessible to the researcher.

The researcher randomly selected from the accurate 441 cases with an entry date from January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2008. The final sample size for this project was 100 case files from a county in Southern California. Additionally, the small sample size could have attributed to low external validity and non-significance; therefore, resulting in the null research question. In addition, the researcher had to exclude all information pertaining to the father due to missing demographic information of father's in this study. Therefore, the data extracted primarily focused on the reunification between the mother and child.

Another significant limitation in this project was that the researcher only had access to case files in a

county in Southern California. There are a total of six regions in a county in Southern California. Therefore, the findings of this project may have been altered if all six regions in the county in Southern California were included in the secondary data extraction. Additionally, the short time frame of the sample may be a possible factor resulting in the null research question. A span from January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2008, may not be enough time to get an accurate depiction if ethnicity and the delivery of services had an impact in reunification outcomes.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

In this study, the research question was not supported by statistical analysis. The results found that Hispanic mother's had a higher percentage of successful reunification compared to Whites and African Americans. However, the results found that 59.1 percent of the children removed in 2008 were Hispanic. Therefore, this study found an overrepresentation of Hispanic children in a county in Southern California. The overrepresentation of Hispanic children in the child welfare system should be a great concern to clients, professionals, policy

makers, and research. Therefore, implications are made based on the findings from this study.

Social work professionals should strive to be culturally competent, culturally sensitive, and incorporate an ecological perspective when working with Hispanic families. There are a large population of Hispanic families and children within the child welfare system and a county in Southern California; therefore, it is the ethical responsibility of social work professionals to provide best practice and adequate services.

In an effort to improve social work practice, it is recommended that a bilingual unit be established. The Spanish-Speaking unit will carry a Spanish caseload. This specialized unit will be able to provide better services that are able to meet the unique needs to their Spanish-speaking families, which may increase their probability of reunification (Ayón, 2009, p. 615). Additionally, bilingual social workers should have the opportunity to decide if they wish to carry a Spanish caseload or retrieve at any times. In the child welfare system, there is high demand for bilingual social workers due to the increase of Hispanic families entering the

child welfare system. Although, there is a high demand for bilingual workers, there are if any, compensations from child welfare agencies. Therefore, child welfare agencies should provide more compensation to its bilingual workers to avoid burnouts. Finally, information retrieved from this project will help the social worker to better plan to meet the needs of the family.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine if the mother's ethnicity had an impact on reunification outcomes. In addition, this study attempted to reveal any contributing possible factors associated to the overrepresentation of Hispanic children in the child welfare system.

This study used a quasi-experimental design to confirm that an overrepresentation of Hispanic children exists in a county in Southern California. In this study, the demographic characteristics found that approximately 59 percent of the children are Hispanic when compared to Whites (25.2%) and African American (12.4%). Although, the results show that Hispanic mother's have a higher rate of reunification compared to White and African

American mothers, Hispanic children have the highest percentage of Adoption.

Child welfare agencies need to have a better understanding that the failure of providing culturally sensitive services, increase in caseloads, and shorter reunification timelines are possible risk factors to successful reunification outcomes for children of color in the child welfare system (Hines et al., 2004, 518). The study findings are of great importance to social work practitioners, policy makers. Social work professionals need to be aware of all factors associated with the overrepresentation of Hispanic children in the child welfare system. Their knowledge and understanding of this social problem will help to enhance the services they provide to the Hispanic population.

APPENDIX A
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Data Collection Instrument

CASE # _____

Mother(s) Age: ()

Mother(s) Ethnicity:

(1) Caucasian (2) Hispanic (3) African American (4) Other

Mother(s) Primary Language:

(1) English (2) Spanish (3) Other

Mother(s) Immigration Status:

(1) U.S. Citizen (3) Undocumented
(2) Permanent Resident (4) Don't Know

Two-Person Household:

(1) Yes (2) No (3) Don't Know

Mother(s) Education Level:

(1) Some School
(2) High school Diploma or GED completed
(3) Some College
(4) Associate degree
(5) Bachelor's Degree or Higher
(6) Don's Know

Mother(s) Receiving Public Assistance:

(1) Yes (2) No (3) Don't Know

Mother(s) Currently Employed:

(1) Yes (2) No (3) Don't Know

Total Number of Children Detained: _____

Child(ren) Age: _____

Child(ren) Ethnicity:

(1) Caucasian (2) Hispanic (3) African American (4) Other

Child(ren) Gender:

(1) Male (2) Female

Previous Child Welfare History:

(1) Yes (2) No (3) Don't Know

Total Number of Previous Allegations _____

Current Reason for Referral:

1. a) Physical abuse
2. b) Neglect
3. c) Serious emotional abuse
4. d) Sexual abuse
5. e) Child under 5 has suffered physical abuse
6. f) Death of another child
7. g) Child left without provision/parent incarcerated
8. i) Cruelty
9. j) Sibling abuse

Child(ren) Out-of-Home placement:

- (1) Foster Care
- (2) Relative
- (3) Non-Related Extended Family Member (NREFM)
- (4) Run away
- (5) Out-of-custody
- (6) Other

Court Ordered Services:

- (1) Mental health services: Counseling
- (2) Parent Education
- (3) Substance abuse services
- (4) Domestic violence/ Anger Management
- (5) Family Reunification Services Denied

Services Provided in Native Language:

- (1) Yes (2) No (3) Don't Know

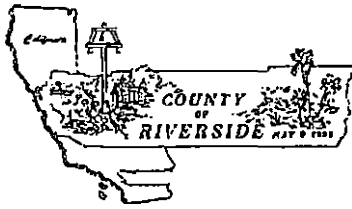
Length of time for Reunification:

- (1) 6 months
- (2) 12 months
- (3) 18 months
- (4) Family Reunification Services Terminated

Child Welfare Case Outcome:

- (1) Reunification (2) Adoption
- (3) Legal Guardianship (4) PPLA (5) Other

APPENDIX B
APPROVAL LETTER



Department of Public Social Services

Administrative Office: 4060 County Circle Drive, Riverside, CA. 92503
(951) 358-3000 FAX: (951) 358-3036

Susan Loew, Director

May 25, 2011

California State University, San Bernardino
Department of Social Work
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, CA 92407-2318
909-537-5000

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to indicate the support of the Department of Public Social Services, Children's Services Division, for Lucia Coronel to pursue her graduate research project titled, "**Reunification Outcomes for Hispanics in the Child Welfare System.**"

Sincerely,

Guillermo Henry
Interim Deputy Director
Riverside County DPSS,
Children's Services Division
10281 Kidd Street
Riverside, CA 92509
(951) 358-7782

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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