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THE EFFECTS OF LANGUAGE ON THE REUNIFICATION
OF MEXICAN FAMILIES

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
Luisana Sanchez-Ramirez

June 2010

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the effects of language commonalities between Riverside County Children Services Division (CSD) social workers and parents in their reunification process. The study focused on gathering data to depict whether or not having a social worker that speaks the same language as the parents speak influences reunification success.

This study strived to gather data from Mexican parents, as this seems to be a fast growing population that CSD serves. Data were extracted from 93 cases that opened in the year 2008 to determine the impact of having a common language between the parents and the family reunification worker had on reunification success.

The study found that there is no significance in language commonality between the social worker and parents and reunification success. Further, the study found that the more contact between the social worker and the mother the quicker reunification process. In contrast, the study found that the more contact there was between the father and the worker the longer it took for the father to reunify. Additionally, the study found that the more time the worker was employed with the county the

faster the mother's reunified. There was no significance pertaining to the fathers and the length of time the worker had been employed with the county in regards to the father's reunification outcomes.

The study suggests that contact between the worker and mother is critical to reunification. This study also recommends that further trainings may be needed, in addition to the ones already offered by the county, to consider including more in-depth insight to workers on the importance that exist in the database collection. Another implication that this study yields is for the county to consider having trainings or meetings where Mexican parents are asked to be part of and speak about their opinion regarding the reunification process and how they perceive workers to be of assistance or not. The study purports for the county to consider including more detailed connotations of cultural compilations that can impact the parents on their reunification process.

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DEDICATION

Primeramente este libro es dedicado a Dios, pues es el ser supremo que me da la vida y bendice con mi familia. Es Dios quien me a dado la fortaleza, inteligencia, y dedicación para poder sobre salir estos tres años de carrera. Me siento dichosa de ser hija de Dios.

"Si Dios Esta Contigo Quien Podra Contra Ti," "Echale ganas tu puedes," "Te apoyamos en todo lo que tu quieras hacer," estas son frases que mis padres siempre me decian cuando sentia flaquear y volteava a ellos para que me motivaran a seguir. Nunce é olvidado esas frases y las é recordado constantemente en el transcurso de mi estudio para obtener mi maestria de trabajo social.

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me dijiera que yo podría nacer otra vez y escoger otro padre, no te cambiaría por nadie.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will establish the foundation of the research study. Throughout this chapter the problem statement will be outlined. In addition to the problem description there will be information pertaining to the specific specialization of this author found throughout the content of this chapter. In summation, this chapter encloses the purpose of the study including the specific agency problem and how this will be researched.

Problem Statement

There is so much that involves the care and protection of children. Children Service Division, CSD, focuses on the safety of the children yet in order for this to be attained the entire family component is taken into consideration. Once the family is taken into consideration there are many other elements that must be taken into account to ensure they receive the assistance they require to be able to benefit and ensure the child is safe. For example, Mexican families should be assisted with services in their native tongue or in the language from which they will benefit the most.

There are 22.4 million Latinos in the United States making them 9% of the population (Jimenez, 2002). Further, Jimenez (2002) explains that of this population percentage, 60 % are Mexicans who mainly reside in California, Texas, Arizona and New Mexico. UC Davis highlights "Mexican Americans will soon be the largest ethnic group in California and children of Mexican-origin families will play an important role in the future of California." Since the Mexican population is increasing at a fast pace it is essential to consider what exactly that is lacking and most needed to ensure reunification with their children.

Maluccio, Fein, and Davis (1994) relate, Reuniting children in out-of-home care with their families has long been a primary goal of public and private child welfare services, and more recently a fundamental component of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272), as well as subsequent federal legislation to preserve families. (p. 489)

Family reunification refers to the "physical reunion of children, who are placed in family foster care or group

care settings with their biological families" (Maluccio, Fein & Davis, 1994, p. 490).

In order for parents to reunify with their child they need to complete a case plan and demonstrate their capability of providing appropriate care to their child. The services that can or will be offered depend on the parent's needs or the reason for CSD involvement. For example if the child was removed due to their parent(s) using drugs and being involved in domestic violence they may be offered substance abuse and domestic violence services.

The biological parents have legal timelines to reunify with their child(ren). The length of their allotted time depends on the age of the child and parents' progress in their case plan. For example, if a child is younger than three years of age, the parents have six months to show significant progress in the completion of their case plan. No matter the age of the child(ren) parents still have to show progress in their case plan to continue receiving reunification services. Hines, Lee, Osterling, and Drabble (2007) explain

Under current policy, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, families generally receive up to 15-18

months of family reunification services, at which point they are either reunified or parental rights are terminated and the child enters post permanency planning services. (p. 275)

Despite the services offered to the parents and explanation of these timelines, there are many times when parents fail to reunify with their children. What is the reason for this happening? This research study will focus on answering the following question: Does language compatibility among social worker and client impact reunification rates?

Knowing what affects reunification rates among parents and their children, after CSD has been involved, is crucial. If there is clear knowledge pertaining to what can be done to assist families to be together, much can be done to ensure this happens sooner. There are many children that are in foster care or adopted because their parents did not comply with their court ordered case plan or appeared to not be interested in reunifying with their child. Having an answer as to how CSD can assist families in reunifying will not only be beneficial for the family but also to society in general. Therein resolving the problem of quick and effective reunification is relevant

to social work practice at a micro, mezzo and macro level.

One can observe the impact of reunification rates at a micro level in children. Children are distraught when they are removed from their parents, the only thing they know, their only support system. To a child it does not matter how "badly" their parents may be treating or neglecting them. The child wants to be with their parents no matter what the situation. In addition not only does the child desire to be with their parents but they do not know how to communicate this. Therefore, children may become aggressive once in foster care due to their frustration of not being with their parents.

Once the child becomes aggressive, not listening to their caregiver or teacher at school, they may be sent to another foster home because the current caregivers may not want to care for that child any longer. This type of situation creates a cycle because the child will continue this behavior and be sent to another foster home until they reach a group home. Social work practice longs to assist individuals in need. Therefore, in CSD the main goal is to maintain families together. Therefore if reunification rates improve not only will the social work

profession meet its goal but families will also rejoice because they will be together.

Reunification rates impact the social work profession at a mezzo level in many ways. For example if reunification is not likely between families the child's educational success may not happen. A child out of the home is preoccupied as to what will happen next in their life. They are not sure if they will remain in the same foster home tomorrow or be moved to another home. The child is also worried about their parents and may ask themselves where are my parents at? What are they doing? Since, the child has many questions in their mind, their primary focus is not excelling academically. This impacts the school's success rates in their standardized tests as well as other aspects. Children may also be more prone to become involved in criminal activities, if they do not have a sense of belonging. Therefore, this type of behavior and mindset affect society in general.

Currently there is not much research geared specifically to the impact that having a common or different language between parents and social worker affect reunification outcomes. There are several articles that commented on this idea but not many specifically

pertaining to Mexican families who speak Spanish and have a non-Spanish speaking social worker. There is research suggesting other elements that have an impact on reunification such as the availability of services.

There might not be many studies focusing on this specific topic because of the fact that reunification involves several components aside from language commonality. For example, if there are none or scarce resources available then the parent will be less likely to comply with their case plan and reunify with their child. Further, if services are available but there is a transportation problem, that is there is public transportation but the parent lives in a location where they have no access to public transportation and they do not have personal means to get to the classes, it serves them no good.

Aside from other factors impacting parents and their reunification success, it is of great importance to rule out or find specific elements that assist or serve as an obstacle in this process. The more knowledge the social work profession has about elements that influence reunification success the better equipped they are to persevere for policies to include equal opportunities for

Mexican parents to reunify with their child. After all the primary mission of the social work profession is to improve individual's welfare and assist in meeting the essential human needs of all people, especially empowering those who are vulnerable.

Purpose of the Study

There are many functions the results of this study will encompass. The purpose of this study is to gain insight pertaining to what other elements impact the reunification process between parents and their child after CSD has been involved. One of the main goals of CSD is to reunite and maintain families together without the need of their involvement.

When CSD is involved in the life of a family it is because there is a child at risk. The child is either neglected, physically, sexually or emotionally abused or at risk of mistreated because their siblings are being abused. CSD becomes involved with the child's parents and offers them as well as the child services to assist them with the factors that brought them to their attention. Therefore, CSD intends to provide these parents with the

tools they need to be able to establish or nourish positive and healthier relationships with their child.

There are an increasing number of Mexican residents that are establishing their life in the United States. Therefore, if there is an increase in this specific population, it is of utmost interest that more knowledge be gained pertaining to these residents. The more knowledge found, the more assistance this minority population will have.

Therefore, this study examined closed cases from Child Services Division (CSD). A thorough inspection was conducted of these cases to determine possible factors contributing to the impact that same speaking language between social workers and parents have on the reunification of Mexican families.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

This study is essential for social work practice, policy and research because it brings greater knowledge in the CSD area to assist families. Knowing if indeed parents reunify with their children sooner when they have a social worker who speaks the same language they do is vital. The social work profession has more definite

answers and can act upon the knowledge found in this research study.

As previously mentioned, there are not many studies that focus specifically on reunification rates based on the language of the social worker and their clients. Therein, this study is a concrete addition to current research findings because it focuses on this subject alone, taking into consideration other elements that can also impact reunification rates among families involved with CSD.

Therefore, the significant data found in this study can assist in shaping the social work profession's policy. Since the social work profession seeks to support those who do not have a voice, it is possible that the results of this study depict the need to have a social worker assigned to clients with a common language and that policy can be developed to reflect the findings. Policies should be tailored to meet the needs reflected in society. Having the results of this study is a stepping stone to mounting policies that enforce a need to have equal languages spoken between the client and the social worker to increase reunification rates or ensure they happen in a timelier manner.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will cover a critical review of articles which are relevant to the topic being discussed. Further, this chapter includes a theoretical framework that guides the study being conducted. Additionally, previous findings will be analyzed to highlight any contradictory information found.

Historical Overview of Mexican
Individual Knowledge

There is a wide variety of information pertaining to minority populations such as Hispanics. Much can be found on Hispanic's experience with Child Services Division (CSD). Many generalizations are concluded throughout prior research studies. Although there is much information pertaining to Hispanics or Latinos and CSD, this study will focus on Mexican families. There is a lack of knowledge tailored specifically to Mexican families.

Hispanics, Latinos, people of color, there are many words used to encompass a wide variety of minority

populations who speak the Spanish tongue. These terms can include individuals from El Salvador, Mexico, Ecuador, Puerto Rico, Panama, Guatemala, and other countries. It should be noted that although individuals from these places speak a somewhat common language, their beliefs, cultures, and other components of who they are can be extremely different. Therefore, specific data is needed geared towards each population to determine the best possible outcomes to possibly ensure reunification with their children in a quicker and more effective manner.

Hines, Lee, Osterling, and Drabble (2007) state Latino children make up the second largest population in the child welfare system and concluded that since they are the majority, they "exhibit placement characteristics that mirror those of African American children" (p. 276). Further, Hines, Lee, Osterling, and Drabble (2007) explain that "While less research has focused on Latino children, results suggest that Latino children are reunified at a lower rate than White children" (p. 276). Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn that it is known that half of the children in out-of-home care are minorities but few studies have focused specifically on

race and family reunification (Maluccio, Fein, & Davis, 1994).

There is also limited knowledge pertaining to the effects of racial or language differences between social worker and parents (Davis & Gelsomino, 1994). Although research has not been specifically tailored to various races there has been significant knowledge found to plan the grounds for further research on this topic. In fact, Davis and Gelsomino (1994) relate, "Research has shown that most minority clients who seek help expect to be met by a white helping professional" (p. 116). Davis and Gelsomino further suggest that a vital concern continues to be that "Client-practitioner rapport may be difficult to establish because of racial in-group out-group mistrust" (p. 117). This implies that if minority or Mexican parents do not feel comfortable with individuals of a different race, they will have a more difficult time succeeding in reunifying with their children with social workers who speak a different language than they do.

Research also poses ideas where the conclusion that having a different race or language social worker than the parents might have different thoughts pertaining to the capability of their clients. The social worker might

be have various perceptions regarding the minority population that can affect the client's progress. For example the social worker might believe that because the individual is a minority that they are less capable of benefiting from services, therein impacting the amount of assistance they provide the parents to reunify, a term coined as "status expectations effects" (Davis & Gelsomino, 1994, p. 118). Hogan and Siu (1988) reported that historically, "parents of color have been viewed as less able to profit from support services" (p. 493). Davis and Gelsomino (1994) also reported finding that White professionals such as social workers or counselors reported that "their different-race clients perceived them to have insufficient understanding of what it meant to be a member of the client's racial group" (p. 121). Additionally, Courtney, Barth, Berrick, Brooks, Needell, and Park (n.d. March-April) note that matching ethnicities between worker and parent is a necessity for effective service delivery. In conclusion, there are various findings pertaining to Mexican families and what impacts their reunification rates. Lu, Landsverk, Ellis-Macleod, Newton, Ganger, and Johnson (2004) sum up this knowledge by relating,

Early research indicates that when the worker and the client speak the same native language, racial match has no effect on treatment outcome. However, more recent research has shown that better treatment outcome for Asians and Hispanics is directly related to an increase in culturally competent services (p. 449)

such as from bilingual or bicultural social workers.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Ryan, Garnier, Zyphy, and Zhai (2006) relate that the "caseworker guides the child and family through service provision and case reviews and, therefore, has a significant influence on when or if the child is returned to the parents' home" (p. 994). Ryan et al. refer to the eclectic framework describing this model as derived from the

primary assertion, that behavior is a function of the person (in this case, the caseworker) and the environment (essentially whatever else is not 'the person'). The model is informed by the biopsychosocial perspective, which offers a multidimensional perspective to assess human

behavior and development in social work practice and research, including biological, psychological, and social dimensions. At the center of the model both graphically and conceptually, is behavior.

Caseworker behaviors are, if not the cause, per se, at least the proximal antecedents of the outcomes a child experiences in the child welfare system.

(p. 994)

Reunification Success Needed for Mexican Parents

Ryan et al. (2006) also describe that Hispanic children are considerably less apt to reunify with their families. Hines et al. found that out of 109 children that were reunified, making a total of 32%. "Whites had a reunification proportion of 39%, Latinos 28%, Blacks 33% and Asians 16%" (2007, p. 281). There are many studies that demonstrate the reunification rates of Hispanics or Latinos but not specifically of Mexican families.

As previously mentioned, more research is needed to acquire a thorough, more concise knowledge tailored to Mexican families, as they are growing at a fast pace. Specific factors need to be gathered, which impact their

reunification success, in order to be of assistance in maintaining or forming safer and healthier families.

General Factors that May Influence Reunification Outcomes

There are studies that focus on the amount of contact there is between the reunification workers and parents and how this impacts reunification.

Saint-Jacques, Drapeau, Lessard, and Beaudoin (2006) highlight that frequent contact between the worker and parents yields to quicker reunification. Saint-Jacques, Drapeau, Lessard, and Beaudoin (2006) add that not only is frequent contact vital to a faster family reunification but that including the parents in this process is key for more effective outcomes.

Strolin-Goltzman and Trinkle (2010) explain that worker experience impacts reunification success. Social workers that have more experience in child welfare reunify children in foster care with their parents at a quicker pace (Strolin-Goltzman & Trinkle, 2010). Further, Strolin-Goltzman and Trinkle (2010) depict that children stay in foster care longer when they have inexperienced, those who had been employed in child welfare under two years, reunification social workers.

Employment and income are other factors that impacts reunification success (Alpert, 2005). Alpert (2005) highlights that parents who have employment when their child(ren) are removed from their care have more positive reunification outcomes. When parents have higher incomes, they are perceived to be more apt in providing more stability for the child(ren) (Alpert, 2005). Further, Alpert (2005) justifies that it is also possible that employment can be an impediment to reunification when the parent is trying to comply with their case plan.

Hope for Mexican Parents

Throughout the topics previously researched the terms identifying the Mexican population are used interchangeably. Hines et al. (2007) uses the term Latino, Maluccio et al. (1994) refer to Mexican families as people of color or minorities. Hogan and Siu (1988) attune to Mexican families as Hispanics and migrant children. This current study will solely focus on Mexican families and not Hispanics or Latinos, among other terms used to describe those who speak the common language of Spanish. Having more concise information will bring hope to the Mexican families, as they will receive the

assistance they long for to be able to successfully reunify with their children.

This research focused on answering the question of whether or not having a social worker that speaks the same language as the parents speak influences reunification success. Having a knowledge base on this specific topic will assist in shaping and meeting the needs of Mexican families. This study brought tangible information geared specifically to this fast growing population and assist in meeting the needs of those who do not have a voice and ultimately meet social work ethics which are on assisting minorities become successful.

Summary

This chapter covered a review of Mexican families' history, existing knowledge, limitations, and further research needed to assist families in reunifying with their children in higher rates than the existing records.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter will cover an overview of the study design, outlining the purpose of the study. Further, this chapter includes a description of the sample where the data will be gathered as well as how this will be obtained. The data analysis and instruments used in this study will also be depicted.

Study Design

This study explored factors that may have impacted reunification levels among Mexican families where they had an open case with Child Services Division, CSD, in the year 2008. Additionally, this research study was completed in an effort to find solutions that can assist the Mexican population to continue being united even after they become established in a foreign place. Moreover, this study was designed to encourage further research that is geared specifically to Mexican families versus all Hispanics or Latinos, as each is a different population with separate needs. A quantitative study was

used to address the outcomes of reunification success among Mexican families.

Practical methodological implications and limitations of this study included developing a questionnaire apt to include all of the variables that might impact reunification in Mexican families. The fact that social workers, sometimes, do not include in the cases the exact ethnicity of the parents will also impact this study because the case option commonly used is the term "Hispanics." This term is used as an umbrella that encompasses Mexicans, Mexican-American, Salvadorian, and other populations whose primary language is Spanish. Therefore, it has been a challenge to select Mexican families only because no contact is possible with the clients, as a request of Riverside County where the files were obtained.

The objective of this study was to find an answer to the question, does having a social worker who speaks the same language as the parents, impact reunification among Mexican families?

Sampling

A convenience sample was used to explore reunification rates among Mexican families and the language they speak versus their social worker. The sample was drawn from what Riverside County considers to be the Desert Region. This region consists of individuals residing from Palm Desert to Blythe, California. Although this is the region's limits, social workers often serve individuals who reside in Cathedral City, Riverside, Los Angeles, and other disperse regions.

Ninety-three cases, for the purpose of this study a case refers to one child, were selected from Riverside County CSD from opening dates of January 01, 2008 to December 31, 2008. The two main qualifications required for a case to be considered were that there was at least one parent who was considered Hispanic or of Mexican descent and that they had a reunification period. The reason for this was because this study focuses on whether or not there is an impact on reunification success if the parents and social worker speak a common language among Mexican families. Therefore it is essential that the cases studied have a parent or parents who are of Mexican descent. Further, the factor of the parents having a

reunification process is essential because the study's purpose is to measure the impact on reunification success.

Data Collection and Instruments

The study consisted of analyzing closed case files of Mexican families. From the case files data were extracted pertaining to elements which involved the parent's ethnicity as well as the language spoken by them and their social worker. Additionally, whether or not they reunified as well as the length of time it took for them to be with their children again was also extracted from the case files.

The dependent variable was whether or not the family reunified. This variable was obtained through the case file information and considered a nominal level of measurement.

There were many independent variables, one being the language spoken by the respective parties such as the parents and social worker. The language spoken was measured by what was reported in the case file, therein considered a nominal level of measurement. Another independent variable explored in the study was the

language in which the services or resources were offered. This was measured by the information obtained from the case files, as referrals are maintained as well as the agency the parents are to attend. The language in which resources were offered was considered a nominal level of measurement because the numbers that were attributed to the "yes" or "no" response only represent a category. The parent's ethnicity will be considered a constant variable and measured by the information provided to the social worker, which is in the case file. This variable was considered a nominal level of measurement as well because the figures only represent a category.

The main instrument used for this study was data extraction and a questionnaire which had specific questions to be filled out with the information found solely on the case files. It was created based on what variables were perceived to impact reunification rates among Mexican families. Further, the instrument focused on the language commonalities between parents and social worker.

Moreover, since this instrument was created based on the perception of what information would be needed to complete this study there may be limitations and

strengths. A limitation that this instrument had is that the validity and reliability might not be very strong because it was the first time used, therefore, the instrument has not been tested to verify its validity and reliability content. A strength observed for this instrument was that because of its recent creation there is room to expand or adapt the instrument to fit future studies more effectively.

Procedures

After speaking to the assistant manager of the professional intern unit in Riverside County Children Services Division, a query of cases filtered with those opened from January 01 to December 31, 2008 and parents involved who are Mexican or Hispanic of the Desert Region, cities from Palm Desert to Blythe, California was solicited. A questionnaire was developed focusing on core elements that needed to be extracted from the case files to obtain the data required to conduct this study.

As previously mentioned, cases were selected based on the factors that the parents had a Mexican of Hispanic background. Therefore, the questionnaire inquiry was geared toward the language spoken by the parents and

social workers, whether reunification occurred or not, how long and so on. Further, the sample size and data adhering to the questionnaire that was extracted will be analyzed. In order to be able to conduct a study based on a sample from Riverside County CSD, permission had to be obtained from the university's own Institutional Review Board as well as the Riverside County Research Proposal Committee.

Protection of Human Subjects

To protect the identity of participants and information of the cases reviewed, a number was assigned to each case to be able to track them through the research process. The names of the participants or other identifying information were not associated to the information gathered for this study to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the cases examined in this study.

Data Analysis

After analyzing the data obtained, quantitative procedures were employed to construe the existing information. For this study, data were analyzed inferentially to determine whether or not there is a

relationship between social worker and parent's common language in the reunification success.

Chi-squares were used to test the nominally measured variables in order to analyze if the language spoken by the respective parties and reunification are related, taking into consideration the results do not indicate that one variable causes the other.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the research methods that were used in the proposed study, which focused on analyzing the effects of having a common language between social worker and parents on reunification. Further, this chapter discusses what type of design was used and how the data were collected. In addition, the chapter addresses precautions taken to protect human subjects involved with the collection of data.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter will introduce the findings of this study. The demographics, reunification, language, frequency of contact and case plan characteristics will be presented. Furthermore, relevant information gathered from the various statistical tests will be discussed.

Presentation of the Findings

The sampling frame for the study was two hundred fifty-eight cases that were opened in the year 2008 in the Desert Region from Riverside County, which had at least one parent that was Hispanic or Mexican. For the purpose of this study, each child is considered a case and therein a father and mother will be considered separately. Out of over two hundred cases that were extracted in 93 cases at least one parent was offered family reunification services and one was considered Hispanic, making them qualified to be used in the study.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the participants. There were 43% of the fathers, which came in contact with CSD and had an open case, that were

between the ages of 28-35 and only one that was under the age of 20. Twenty-eight percent of the fathers included in this research were older than 36 years of age. Over 44% of the mothers were also between the same age brackets that the fathers were, 28-35 years, who had a case open in the year 2008. Fifteen percent of the mothers were over the age of 36 and 3.2% of the mothers were under the age of 20. Amongst the sampled participants, more than half of the parents, 54.8%, were not married. Pertaining to the fathers involved in the open cases, 92.5% were Hispanic, and 95.7% of the mothers were of the same decent. Nearly 26% of the sampled children were between the ages of 1-3. Children between the ages of 4-6 represented 24.7% of the sample. Further, 21.5% were children between the ages of 7-10. There were nearly 13% of the sampled children that were over the age of 13. About 10% of the children in this study were between the ages of 11-13. Only 5.4% of the children were under the age of 12 months.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Father's Age (N = 93)		
Under 20 years	1	1.1 %
21-27	22	23.7%
28-35	40	43%
36 +	26	28%
Unknown	4	4.3%
Mother's Age (N = 93)		
Under 20 Years	3	3.2%
21-27	35	37.6%
28-35	41	44.1%
36+	14	15.1%
Unknown	0	0%
Marital Status (N = 93)		
No	51	54.8%
Yes	15	16.1%
Unspecified	27	29%
Hispanic Father (N = 93)		
No	3	3.2%
Yes	86	92.5%
Unspecified	2	2.2%
Whereabouts Unknown	2	2.2%
Hispanic Mother (N = 93)		
No	4	4.3%
Yes	89	95.7%
Unspecified	0	0%
Whereabouts Unknown	0	0%
Child's Age (N = 93)		
Under 12 Months	5	5.4%
1-3 Years	24	25.8%
4-6	23	24.7%
7-10	20	21.5%
11-13	9	9.7%
13+	12	12.9%

Table 2 presents characteristics involving the reunification process of the respective cases. All of the mothers and 74.2% of the fathers were offered family reunification services. Of the parents that were offered

family reunification services, 81.7% of the mothers reunified with their child(ren), while only 38.7% of the fathers did. Regarding the mothers that reunified with their child(ren), 46.3% accomplished this within six months after their case opened. Pertaining to the fathers that reunified with their child(ren), 21.5% attained this within six months after their case opened.

Out of the 93 cases involved in this study, the greater majority, 92.5%, were opened due to substantiated allegations of neglect. About 4% of the cases were open due to sexual abuse. Two cases were opened due to serious physical abuse and only one due to allegations other than sexual abuse, neglect, or serious physical abuse. Within the cases that were opened due to allegations of neglect, 65.6% were due to substance abuse while 3.2% were as a result of other safety threats than substance abuse, domestic violence, or failure to protect.

As to the mothers that were included in this study, 73.1% had more than three prior open cases and all of the mothers had at least one previous open case. Over 80% of the mothers had over three referrals reported to the Riverside County Children Services Division and only 3.2% had only one prior investigation conducted. There were

51.6% fathers that had over three cases that were open prior to their current involvement. Only 1.1% of the fathers had no prior cases. Nearly two-thirds, 63.4%, of the fathers had over three investigations conducted prior to their current matter and only one had an unknown situation regarding the amount or prior referrals.

Table 2. Reunification Characteristics

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Reunification for Mother (N = 93)		
No	0	0%
Yes	93	100%
Whereabouts Unknown	0	0%
Reunification for Father (N = 93)		
No	22	23.7%
Yes	69	74.2%
Whereabouts Unknown	2	2.2%
Mother/Child Reunification (N = 93)		
No	17	18.3%
Yes	76	81.7%
Father/Child Reunification (N = 93)		
No	57	61.3%
Yes	36	38.7%
Length to reunify for mother (N = 93)		
Did not reunify	17	18.3%
3 months	5	5.4%
6 months	38	40.9%
12 months +	28	30.1%
Other	5	5.4%
Length to reunify for father (N = 93)		
Did not reunify	56	60.2%
3 months	1	1.1%
6 months	19	20.4%
12 months +	14	15.1%
Other	3	3.2%

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Reason for open case (N = 93)		
Sexual Abuse	4	4.3%
Neglect	86	92.5%
Serious Physical Abuse	2	2.2%
Other	1	1.1%
Safety threat/Neglect allegation (N = 87)		
Substance Abuse	61	65.6%
Domestic Violence	8	8.6%
Failure to Protect	18	19.4%
Mother Previous Open Cases (N = 93)		
0	0	0%
1	14	15.1%
2	11	11.8%
3 +	68	73.1%
Unknown	0	0%
Mother Previous Referrals (N = 93)		
0	10	10.8%
1	3	3.2%
2	5	5.4%
3+	75	80.6%
Unknown	0	0%
Father Previous Open Cases (N = 93)		
0	1	1.1%
1	29	31.2%
2	14	15.1%
3+	48	51.6%
Unknown	1	1.1%
Father Previous Referrals (N = 93)		
0	12	12.9%
1	8	8.6%
2	13	14%
3+	59	63.4%
Unknown	1	1.1%

In Table 3, the language characteristics of the participants are depicted. Out of the cases used in this study, 78.5% of the mother's and 77.4% of the father's primary language was English. Regarding the social workers that were assigned to the respective cases, about

Table 3. Language Characteristics

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Mother's Primary Language (N = 93)		
English	73	78.5%
Spanish	20	21.5%
Unspecified	0	0%
Other	0	0%
Father's Primary Language (N = 93)		
English	72	77.4%
Spanish	16	17.2%
Unspecified	5	5.4%
Other	0	0%
Worker/Mother Common Primary Language (N = 93)		
No	9	9.7%
Yes	84	90.3%
Unspecified	0	0%
Not Applicable	0	0%
Worker/Mother Translator Use (N = 93)		
No	84	90.3%
Yes	8	8.6%
Unspecified	1	1.1%
Not Applicable	0	0%
Worker/Father Common Primary Language (N = 93)		
No	9	9.7%
Yes	79	84.9%
Unspecified	3	3.2%
Not Applicable	2	2.2%
Worker/Father Translator Use (N = 93)		
No	79	84.9%
Yes	7	7.5%
Unspecified	5	5.4%
Not Applicable	2	2.2%

10% of the parents experienced a mismatch in language between the family reunification worker and themselves. Therein, the use of translators, other CSD staff that speaks the parent's language, was used to communicate

between the family reunification worker and the parents themselves.

In Table 4, the frequency of contact between the family reunification worker and parents, as well as case plan characteristics are presented. The results indicated that the family reunification worker and the mother had contact once a month in 80.6% of the cases. The fathers and family reunification workers had contact once a month as well but in 66.7% of the cases. Nearly 22% of the fathers had no contact with their family reunification worker. The case plans that the mothers had to adhere in the reunification process of Children Service Division had more than three responsibilities in over two-thirds, 66.7%, of the cases. In the aforementioned mother's responsibilities, nearly 80% had other combinations of classes than parenting and domestic violence victim classes, substance abuse out patient, drug testing and parenting classes, substance abuse in patient and parenting, or parenting and counseling were court ordered. There were 57% of the fathers that had over three responsibilities outlined in their case plan. The actual responsibilities outlined in their case plan were other combinations of classes than parenting and domestic

Table 4. Frequency of Contact and Case Plan

Characteristics

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Mother/Worker Contact (N = 93)		
No Contact	0	0%
Once a Month	75	80.6%
Twice a Month+	18	19.4%
Other	0	0%
Father/Worker Contact (N = 93)		
No Contact	20	21.5%
Once a Month	62	66.7%
Twice a Month+	10	10.8%
Other	1	1.1%
Mother's Case Plan Responsibilities (N = 93)		
Not Applicable	0	0%
1	13	14%
2	18	19.4%
3+	62	66.7%
Other	0	0%
Actual Responsibilities/ Mother's Case (N = 93)		
Parenting & Counseling	8	8.6%
Substance Abuse In-Patient, & Parenting	2	2.2%
Substance Abuse Outpatient, Drug Testing, & Parenting	6	6.5%
Parenting, Domestic Violence Victim Classes	3	3.2%
Other	74	79.6%
Father's Case Plan Responsibilities (N = 93)		
Not Applicable	22	23.7%
1	4	4.3%
2	13	14%
3+	53	57%
Other	1	1.1%
Actual Responsibilities/Father's Case (N = 93)		
Parenting & Counseling	22	23.7%
Substance Abuse In-Patient, & Parenting	2	2.2%
Substance Abuse Outpatient, Drug Testing, & Parenting	8	8.6%
Parenting, Domestic Violence Victim Classes	10	10.8%
Other	51	54.8%

violence victim classes, substance abuse out patient, drug testing and parenting classes, substance abuse in patient and parenting, or parenting and counseling that were court ordered in 54.8% of the cases.

Chi-squares were conducted to analyze if there was a statistical significant association between length of time that it took for the parents to reunify and the variable of the worker speaking the mother's or father's primary language. The results indicated that there was no statistical significant correlation amongst the language the parents and their social worker spoke with the length of time that it took for them to reunify with their child.

A Pearson Correlation analysis was conducted on the frequency of contact between the worker and the length of time it took for the father to reunify with the child. The results indicated that the more contact there was between the worker and the father, the longer it took for him to reunify with his child. There was a statistical significance ($r = -.218, p < .05$).

A Chi-Square analysis was conducted on the length of time taken for the mother to reunify with her child and the duration of time the Family Reunification worker had

been employed in Riverside County at the time of the study. The results indicated that the longer the workers had been employed, the faster the mothers reunified with their child. There was statistical significance $X^2 = 22.934$, $df = 8$, $p < .01$, association found in the aforementioned analysis.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this study. The demographic characteristics among others were noted. In addition, the results of Chi-Squares and a Pearson Correlation analysis designs were portrayed in detail.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

A discussion of the major findings and limitations of this study will be presented in this chapter. Further, the implications the findings of this study might have for social work practice, policy, and research will be addressed. Lastly, suggestions for the social work professions will be included within this chapter.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify if language commonality among the family reunification worker and the parent impacted reunification success. The main intent in conducting this research was to provide child welfare agencies with supplemental insight on how to improve reunification success among the population they serve.

This study found that there was no statistical significance in the family reunification worker speaking the parent's primary language and their reunification success. This is not consistent with Davis and Gelsomino (1994) who depict that parents thrived more in their

journey to reunification if there was an equal race and language worker to them because they felt more trust towards them. Inconsistency between the findings of Davis and Gelsomino (1994) and this study could be due to the possibility that data was entered incorrectly into the database that this study gathered its data from. There can be a probability that English as a primary language was selected in the drop box versus Spanish, which can have a great impact in the results of this study.

This study also found that the length of time that the worker had been employed with the county impacted reunification rates among the mothers. That is, the more time the worker had been employed with the county, the faster the mothers reunified with their child. These results are consistent with Strolin-Goltzman and Trinkle (2010) who depict that workers with more experience were more likely to return children in foster care to their respective parents quicker than inexperienced workers. Experienced workers can possibly have tactics learned throughout the years they have worked in child welfare to assist parents and children in order to reunify them sooner.

The study also found that there was no significance between the length of time that the worker had been employed and the father's reunification outcomes. This is not consistent with Strolin-Goltzman and Trinkle (2010) who generalized that both parents are impacted by having quicker reunification the longer the worker is employed. It is likely that the inconsistency between this study's findings and those of Strolin-Goltzman and Trinkle (2010) could be due to father's lack of involvement in the case where the worker works more closely with the mother to achieve reunification. It is also probable that due to the experience that the workers gain from being employed in the county, they witness more mother involvement and therein focus their attention and time to them versus the fathers therein slowing down their reunification process.

Further, this study found that the more contact there was between the mother and worker the faster reunification occurred. Saint-Jacques, Drapeau, Lessard, and Beaudoin (2006) concur with the results of this study and even broaden their findings by highlighting that frequent contact between the worker and the mother as well as the father is vital to a quicker and more effective reunification process. Additionally,

Saint-Jacques, Drapeau, Lessard, and Beaudoin (2006) explain that the inclusion of parents during their open case is germane to the reunification of families. Frequent contact between the mother and worker can possibly accelerate the reunification process because they have ample opportunities to communicate, comment, or update each other regarding the progress of the case and well being of the child(ren).

The findings of this study showed that the more contact between the worker and the father, the longer it took for him to reunify with his child. The results of this study are not consistent with Saint-Jacques, Drapeau, Lessard, and Beaudoin (2006), as they depict that both the mother and father's frequent contact with the worker allow for a quicker reunification. It is possible that the findings of this study do not coincide with those of Saint-Jacques, Drapeau, Lessard, and Beaudoin (2006) because of the gender difference that exists between the fathers and the social workers. The fathers may have difficulty engaging with a female, as the social work field tends to be female-dominated, in a setting where the female appears to have higher authority than the males.

Overall, the results of this research suggests for further research on this topic. It is essential to continue research that is guided towards Hispanics more specifically to the Mexican population to be able to discover how to best serve them in the reunification process of the Children Services Division.

Limitations

The following limitations apply to this study. One limitation of this study is there was no variation in data. For example, the majority of the parent's primary language English and only a few spoke Spanish. Further, the majority of the parents were considered to be Hispanic versus specifying their ethnicity to Mexican, Salvadorian among others. Therein, since the primary intention of this study was to focus on the Mexican population of the Children Services Division (CSD) who typically are considered to be Spanish-speaking and the data did not vary to represent this, the findings of this study could have been influenced.

Another limitation that this study had was the source where the data was collected to conduct the study. The research was based on secondary data that was input

by the social workers that worked with the parents directly. At times, as social workers, the demands of the employment can be overwhelming and there is not much time to input the information adequately. There can be many factors, such as high case loads, paperwork, supervised visits, meetings, and others, impinging on true and correct information being entered into the agency's database.

Further, the data entered into the CSD database may be incomplete. There is a section for the ethnicity where Hispanic can be the main umbrella but another sector for specification is available, although many times overlooked, which for the purposes of this study impeded for more precise findings.

The small sample size and possible lack of variety in the participants used in this research project may have impacted the outcomes. The participants consisted of Hispanic parents who are mainly not married, middle-aged, and whose primary language is English. This sample may not accurately represent the Hispanic families that are referred to Riverside County. The Hispanic families that may come in contact with Children Services Division can be composed of parents that are in their twenties and

their primary language is Spanish. However, the aforementioned statement was not addressed in this study. Therefore, the findings may not be generalized to the families that Riverside County serves.

Another limitation that existed in this study is that this was the first time this particular extraction tool was used. Therefore, the measure, face, and content validity has not been established or tested for this extraction tool.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

The findings highlight that frequent contact between the mother and worker is critical for reunification. Additionally, results from this study yielded for the need to maintain social workers employed to gain experience in the area, which resulted in a faster reunification rate for parents, when their workers had been employed with CSD for longer periods of time.

In addition, the study suggests a compelling need to educate workers on the need to thoroughly complete database sections. It is suggested the county considers providing further training to workers on data entry and its implications. Riverside County already holds further

education of its worker as a core value and promotes the value in it to its employees. There in it is recommended for the county to hone in trainings directed to data base entry.

Further implications to the social work field include the dire need for workers more culturally attuned. It is suggested that workers consider being sensitive to the needs of the Hispanic population. Moreover, that female workers consider being sensitive towards male parents and possibly approaching them with what they consider to be respect in an effort to engage them and include them more often in the reunification process. Therein, the county can consider providing culturally sensitive trainings, in addition to the ones already available to their workers, where male parents are invited to speak about their feelings or views regarding how they perceived to be approached. Maybe considering an approach where Mexican families voice their opinions via a meeting possibly, to the county so that they may get a clearer picture of their reunification needs.

Since this area of research has not been explored thoroughly, it is highly recommended that with the

increasing number of the Mexican population, more studies be conducted to be able to come to a more precise understanding of the needs of Mexican families in the Children Services Division.

Conclusions

All in all, this study was focused on the Mexican population that came in contact with the Riverside County Children's Services Division. The implication of the study was to bring awareness to the county on further ideas that can be developed or changes to increase reunification success amongst this population, as this appears to be rapidly growing.

Key findings that this study yielded were that more frequent contact with mothers increased reunification. Contrary to the findings regarding the mother and frequency of contact between them and the worker, the more contact there was between the father and the worker the longer it took for reunification to occur. Another finding of this study was that the longer the worker was employed with the county the quicker the mother reunified. No significance was found in this study regarding the father and the length of time that the

worker had been employed in the county. There was no significance found pertaining to the social worker and parents speaking the same language and reunification success.

Further, research is suggested to target specific populations in an effort to assess their needs to be able to assist them in reunifying with their children at a quicker pace. Insight is much needed on how to assist parents and children in order for them to reunify faster and not re-enter into the Children's Services Division. Perhaps conducting a study where data is gathered directly from the parents themselves via interviews can yield more precise findings regarding the Mexican population.

Awareness of the specific needs each population, such as Mexicans, Salvadorians, Guatemalans, etc., can be of assistance in Riverside County Children's Services Division and in other resource grounds in an effort better provide assistance in a fast-pace changing society. The more insight known regarding the growing Mexican population, the faster families can reunify and the less re-entry rates are to CSD. Riverside County has implemented several measures to be of assistance to their

employees such as implementing training units that are dedicated to newly-hired employees or those in need of guidance. These training units focus on providing support and direction to Riverside County employees to increase the level of work quality and etiquette. It is proactive measures as the aforementioned ones that Riverside County has embraced that are needed and continue to be essential in the child welfare and overall social work arena.

APPENDIX
DATA EXTRACTION TOOL

DATA EXTRACTION TOOL

1. Was the mother offered Family Reunification, FR, Services?
0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified 3 = Whereabouts Unknown
2. Was the father offered Family Reunification, FR, Services?
0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified 3 = Whereabouts Unknown
3. Is the mother Mexican?
0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified 3 = Whereabouts Unknown
4. Is the mother Hispanic?
0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified 3 = Whereabouts Unknown
5. Is the father Mexican?
0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified 3 = Whereabouts Unknown
6. Is the father Hispanic?
0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified 3 = Whereabouts Unknown
7. What was the mother's primary language?
0 = English 1 = Spanish 2 = Unspecified 3 = Other
8. What is the father's primary language?
0 = English 1 = Spanish 2 = Unspecified 3 = Other
9. Does the FR worker speak the mother's primary language?
0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified 3 = Not Applicable
10. Was a translator used to speak to the mother during any mutual contact between the FR worker and her?
0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified 3 = Not Applicable
11. Does the FR worker speak the father's primary language?
0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified 3 = Not Applicable
12. Was a translator used to speak to the father during any mutual contact between the FR worker and him?
0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified 3 = Not Applicable

13. Did the mother reunify with the child?
0 = No 1 = Yes
14. Did the father reunify with the child?
0 = No 1 = Yes
15. How long did it take for the mother to reunify with the child?
0 = Did not reunify 1 = 3 months 2 = 6 months 3 = 12 months+
16. How long did it take for the father to reunify with the child?
0 = Did not reunify 1 = 3 months 2 = 6 months 3 = 12 months+
17. Why was the case open?
0 = Sexual abuse 1 = Neglect 2 = Serious physical harm 3 = Other
18. If the allegation was neglect, what was the safety threat?
0 = Substance abuse 1 = Domestic violence 2 = Failure to protect
3 = Other than sexual, serious physical or emotional abuse
19. How many open cases has the mother had with Child Services Division, CSD?
0 = 0 1 = 1 2 = 2 3 = 3+
20. How many prior referrals has the mother had with CSD?
0 = 0 1 = 1 2 = 2 3 = 3+
21. How many open cases has the father had with CSD?
0 = 0 1 = 1 2 = 2 3 = 3+
22. How many prior referrals has the father had with CSD?
0 = 0 1 = 1 2 = 2 3 = 3+
23. Were services available in the mother's preferred language?
0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified 3 = Not Applicable
24. Were services available in the father's preferred language?
0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified 3 = Not Applicable
25. What was the frequency of the FR worker's contact with the mother?
0 = No Contact 1 = Once a month 2 = Twice a month+ 3 = Other

26. What was the frequency of the FR worker's contact with the father?
 0 = No Contact 1 = Once a month 2 = Twice a month+ 3 = Other
27. How many responsibilities were outlined in the mother's case plan?
 0 = Not Applicable 1 = 1 2 = 2 3 = 3+
28. What were the mother's case plan responsibilities?
 0 = Not Applicable 1 = Parenting 2 = Parenting & counseling
 3 = Substance abuse inpatient & parenting
 4 = Substance abuse outpatient, drug testing, & parenting
 5 = Parenting & domestic violence classes 6 = Other
29. How many responsibilities were outlined in the father's case plan?
 0 = Not Applicable 1 = 1 2 = 2 3 = 3+
30. What were the father's case plan responsibilities?
 0 = Not Applicable 1 = Parenting 2 = Parenting & counseling
 3 = Substance abuse inpatient & parenting
 4 = Substance abuse outpatient, drug testing, & parenting
 5 = Parenting & domestic violence classes 6 = Other
31. What is the father's age?
 0 = >20 1 = 21-27 2 = 28-35 3 = 36+ 4 = Unknown
32. What is the mother's age?
 0 = >20 1 = 21-27 2 = 28-35 3 = 36+ 4 = Unknown
33. Are the parents married?
 0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Unspecified
34. What is the child's age?
 0 = >12 months 1 = 1-3 years 2 = 4-6 years
 3 = 7-10 years 4 = 11-13 years 5 = 13+ years
35. How long has the FR worker been employed with CSD?
 0 = >1 year 1 = 1-3 years 2 = 3-5 years 3 = 5+ years

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