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WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

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WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH IMMIGRANT FAMILIES
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
Angeles J Tovar
Yvette Robles
May 2022

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Approved by:
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine what social work students and early career professionals need from their agencies, supervisors, and colleagues to work effectively with immigrant clients in child welfare. The literature on social work with immigrants suggests that this work is challenging due to a plethora of barriers related to language, culture, citizenship, eligibility, and organizational environment.

The study uses in-depth, qualitative interviews with seven social work students and early career social workers who work in child welfare settings in Southern California, either as interns or full-time employees. These interviews were conducted by the researchers from Fall of 2021 through Spring of 2022.

Thematic analysis revealed the following themes: language, cultural humility and competence, awareness and motivation, organizational, technical, bias and judgment, and social work education. The results that emerged from this study clearly indicates that child welfare agencies have neglected to provide the right tools and address the challenges that child welfare providers have encountered in working with immigrant families.

The findings of this research can be used in social work practice and education. Child welfare agencies could improve training and education for social work interns and professionals by providing workshops to promote diversity awareness and cultural diversity.

Schools of social work could improve social work curriculum to enhance cultural competence and skills needed to work with diverse groups by adding a specific course dedicated to working with immigrants and offer electives that promote immigrant students to get in touch and bring awareness with their culture and empower students.

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A very special thanks goes to Dr. Deirdre Lanesskog. You believed in my potential and helped me through some challenging times. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and kindness throughout these past few years. Thank you for being an amazing social worker, professor, and research advisor. I learned a lot from you.

Yvette, my dear friend. We made it!! We finally finished! Thank you for being by my side throughout these past few years. It's true that things are never quite as scary when you've got a best friend by your side. Thank you for your encouragement, your support, and for listening to me vent in times of stress and trouble. Thank you for showing me that good people exist in this world.

To my parents, thank you for your support and love. You may not understand why I sacrificed so much of my time on my education, but you have always shown your support, nonetheless. I love you.

To my husband, Victor, thank you for believing in me when I doubted myself. Thank you for encouraging me when I lost all hope. Thank you for your unconditional love. Thank you for the sacrifices you've made so that I can continue with my education. Thank you for being my biggest fan and supporting my volunteer work and also showing a passion for others. I love you!

-Angeles J Tovar

I want to acknowledge the School of Social Work faculty and staff at the California State University of San Bernardino. Thank you for giving me the tools to achieve my dream of obtaining my Master of Social Work. Through this journey, not only did I receive my degree, but I also met terrific cohorts who also strive to become competent social workers and make a difference.

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I thank my family and friends who have loved and supported me throughout my educational journey.

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I thank God for giving me the strength when I most needed it.

-Yvette Robles

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to every first-generation college student. Let this be a testament that anything is achievable if you keep on trying and believing in yourself. Your journey will not be easy. You may be doubtful and fearful navigating college without a roadmap. In the 10 years that it took me to get to this point in my life, I have learned that despite the many obstacles we faced, we, first generation college students, are resilient! We take risks. We make moves. We step out of our comfort zone and conquer the unknown!

Lastly, using the famous words of Snoop Dogg...

Last but not least, I wanna thank me.

I wanna thank me for believing in me.

I wanna thank me for doing all this hard work.

I wanna thank me for having no days off.

I wanna thank me for, for never quitting.

I wanna thank me for always being a giver.

And tryna give more than I receive.

I wanna thank me for tryna do more right than wrong.

I wanna thank me for just being me at all times.

Anngie, you are one strong individual!

-Angeles J Tovar

I dedicate this work to the loving memory of two gentlemen who always supported me throughout my educational journey. Leroy J. Martinez and Matteo Piero Porcedda.

Leroy, you always shared your words of wisdom regarding pursuing higher education and life. You were an amazing man, husband, father, grandfather, and friend. I will always hold our conversations close to my heart. I am forever grateful, and I will always “set my alarm.” I love you.

Awww, Matteo, you were a bright light in our lives. I thank you for being such a beautiful human. I still can hear you say, ‘Mrs. Roblesssss’. You always shared words of encouragement and believed in me. I thank you for enriching the lives of my children, myself, and those around you. I love you, mijo.

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To my mother, who showed me the true meaning of strength and resiliency. To my father, who showed me it was ok to have a kind heart, thank you for loving me. To my Tia Hope, who showed me unconditional love, you are the wind beneath my wings. To all the strong women in my life who inspired me and never let me give up, I thank you.

Those who fear going back to school later in life take the LEAP of FAITH;
I know it may be intimidating to be the older student in the classroom. Believe me
when I say do it, take your seat, and believe in yourself.

-Yvette Robles

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CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM FORMULATION

Introduction

As a growing number of immigrant families become involved in the child welfare system, schools of social work and child welfare agencies must equip practitioners with the necessary tools to work effectively with immigrant clients (Greenberg et al., 2019; Velazquez & Dettlaff, 2011). One of the multiple challenges that is seen in the child welfare system are the cultural differences, values, and unfamiliar issues that the agency and practitioners fail to recognize or address when working with immigrant families. Child welfare agencies often fail to train practitioners how to properly engage with immigrant clients. Practitioners who lack an understanding of the immigrant's cultural differences and immigration story, fail to establish rapport during the initial contact which is crucial to the therapeutic alliance (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2009).

Cultural competency is defined as having a set of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that allows the individual or systems to work effectively and respectfully with people of all backgrounds (NASW, n.d.) The NASW set of standards for cultural competence indicate that all social work practitioners must develop an understanding of how culture, traditions, family systems, values, and beliefs influence people of all ethnic backgrounds (NASW, n.d.) Additionally, social work practitioners must have a set of skills and knowledge used in the delivery of services to properly be able to advocate, empower, and apply

culturally based and evidence-based interventions (NASW, n.d.; Lin & Wiley, 2019). If a child welfare provider lacks the professional knowledge, tools, and skills necessary towards working with diverse groups, such as the immigrant family, then the practitioner is unable to adequately help their client succeed. Cultural competence in the field of social work is extremely crucial in serving immigrant families involved in the child welfare system.

Cultural, linguistic, and legal issues are barriers that significantly affect immigrant families and child welfare agencies' ability to provide their services effectively (Greenberg et al., 2019). For many practitioners, language becomes a barrier that causes cultural misunderstandings with families which affect the client's ability to engage and trust the overall process (Dettlaft & Rycraft, 2009; Greenberg et al., 2019). When cultural misunderstandings happen, the immigrant client may view the welfare system as unfair which in turn the client becomes resistant to the process (Greenberg et al., 2019). Language barriers affect the practitioner's ability to complete court-order case evaluations and exacerbate prejudice and discrimination on behalf of the practitioner's preconceived notions about the status of the immigrant client (Greenberg et al., 2019). Immigration laws can complicate the delivery of services to the immigrant family; therefore, a child welfare practitioner that lacks an understanding of immigration issues and law fails at helping and protecting the immigrant family (Greenberg et al., 2019). Dealing with the client's complex and tense situation, child welfare practitioners must be able to rely on the support of supervisors and colleagues. A lack of

support and a focus on administrative duties decreases the time the practitioner could have used to work with the immigrant family (Blome & Steib, 2014).

U.S. immigration policies and laws create additional barriers for immigrant families and child welfare agencies in providing and receiving services (Velazquez & Dettlaff, 2011). Recent changes to immigration policies have amplified the fears and anxiety of many immigrant families (Congressional Research Service, 2021). With rigorous enforcement of immigration policies, child welfare agencies are finding themselves working closely with immigration enforcement agencies. Practitioners may find themselves searching for a temporary placement for children of undocumented parents that were detained by immigration enforcement and/or deported back to their country of origin. The Center on Immigration and Child Welfare provides valuable information for practitioners to refer to in the event a child enters the welfare system. It is vital that practitioners are aware that the ICE *Detention and Removal of Alien Parent and Legal Guardians Policy*, contributes a list of standards for ICE to comply with when a parent is involved in welfare proceedings and detained (The Center on Immigration and Child Welfare, 2019). The Migration Policy Institute (MPI), the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), and APHSA's National Associations of Public Child Welfare Administrators reviewed relevant literature and interviewed administrators to obtain a greater understanding of local and state child welfare systems when working with immigrant families (Greenberg et al., 2019).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the skills, expertise, and knowledge social work students and practitioners need to work effectively with immigrant clients in child welfare. It is important to understand this issue further because in doing so child welfare agencies can better support the needs of their social workers, prevent high turnover, and the child welfare providers can better assist and empower immigrant families in their community that are entering the child welfare system. Providing culturally competent services to immigrant families will establish and strengthen alliances with the immigrant communities. Additionally, any gaps in services can be addressed by examining the challenges child welfare providers encounter when working with immigrant families. To identify what social workers need from their agencies, supervisors, and colleagues to work effectively with immigrant clients in child welfare, this research will take on a qualitative approach. A qualitative study that is exploratory in nature is needed to identify common themes in the experiences that participants share through interviews and to have a better grasp of the research problem.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

The findings of this research will provide great suggestions for the field of Social Work and child welfare practice. This study promotes awareness of the importance of cultural competence and the need of meeting the needs of child welfare providers challenges when working with immigrant families. This study identifies barriers child welfare providers face at a micro, mezzo, and macro level. This study emphasizes the importance of child welfare providers' ability to rely on the support of their culturally competent agencies. Child welfare agencies will become aware of the necessary tools, resources, and training needed to better support child welfare practitioners and their clients.

This study will address the engagement, the assessment, and planning stage of the Generalist Intervention Model (GIM) by gathering data about the challenges child welfare providers are facing when working with immigrant clients. The data that is collected will be useful in the engagement stage of the GIM by providing recommendations to enhance the rapport building between client and practitioner. The data will also be useful in the assessment and planning stage of the GIM by providing recommendations to better acquire an understanding of the immigrant client's situation and to better evaluate the levels of intervention needed.

This research adds an insight on social work policy by identifying the need for agencies to be informed of laws and policies that affect the way they provide services and the clients that are most affected by those laws. Additionally, this

study has the potential to impact agencies to better develop programs that can better assist the needs of child welfare providers and the immigrant families they serve in the child welfare system. By identifying the challenges and barriers child welfare providers encounter when working with immigrant families will provide more awareness to policy changes that could be necessary in child welfare agencies to make them more culturally competent.

This study provides insight towards the challenges child welfare providers face as they work with immigrant families which can be used in social work research to improve social work curriculum to enhance the skills and cultural competence that social work students need to work with diverse groups. Furthermore, the findings of this research contribute important information to diverse social work research. This paper aims at answering: What do social workers need from their agencies, supervisors, and colleagues to work effectively with immigrant clients in child welfare?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the last three decades, the number of children with foreign-born parents increased to 18 million in the United States (Greenberg et al., 2019). Due to factors resulting from acculturation, many immigrant families are at an increased risk of becoming involved in the child welfare system (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2010). With more immigrant families entering the child welfare system, social work practitioners are encountering unique challenges. Dettlaff and Rycraft (2010) report that immigrant families who enter the child welfare system are often apprehensive and distrustful of the system; therefore, it is critical that child welfare providers are well equipped and trained to be able to provide the best quality of services and to facilitate the immigrant client ability to be an active participant throughout the reunification process. This study aims to explore what social workers/child welfare providers need from their agencies, supervisors, and colleagues in order to effectively work with immigrant clients. This chapter will examine our understanding of the challenges that child welfare providers are encountering, the methodological limitations such as gaps in the literature, theories guiding conceptualization of the study, and a summary of the findings.

Cultural Barriers

A theme that emerged from the literature review suggests the importance of the practitioner's cultural knowledge and sensitivity towards their immigrant clients. The literature suggests the significance of a practitioner's knowledge of the challenges and issues that impact their immigrant clients in order to be able to effectively work with them. This section will focus on studies that examine the experiences of practitioner's cultural challenges when working with immigrant clients. In a qualitative study by Lin et al., (2018), identified one of the challenges that many child welfare providers experience when working with immigrant families is an unfamiliarity with the client's culture. Child welfare providers need to be familiar of the cultural norms and immigrational challenges that immigrant families face in order to avoid cultural barriers and provide culturally competent services (Lin et al., 2018; Velazquez & Dettlaff, 2011; Greenberg et al., 2019; Lin & Wiley, 2019; Cardoso et al., 2014; Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2010). Some of the cultural barriers identified by Lin et al., (2018), Dettlaff and Rycraft, (2010) include differences in cultural values (e.g. respect, trust) and beliefs (e.g. religion, child-rearing), as well as non-verbal cues (e.g. gestures and body language) that may be misinterpreted by the child welfare provider. Cultural barriers affect the ability of the child welfare agencies and providers to work with immigrant families.

Linguistic Barriers

Another major challenge identified by the literature review that hinders the working relationship between provider and client is linguistic/communication

barriers. Communication barriers can affect both the immigrant family and the child welfare provider. It may lead to misunderstandings and affect the overall services provided. When asked, supervisors have expressed concerns that access to bilingual services is limited (Hernandez-Mckonnen & Konrady, 2018). Child welfare providers expressed that providing services for English-speaking clients can be done without any issues; however, when it comes to communicating with immigrant families, a translator may be needed to communicate effectively. Still, when seeking assistance for their Spanish-speaking clients, they encounter various challenges; for example, if a judge orders counseling for an individual, it may be challenging to find a licensed therapist who speaks Spanish (Ayón, 2009). These barriers may lead to inadequate services for the client. Practitioners report that when there are Spanish-speaking services, it often comes with limited spaces available, which may lead to being put on a waitlist. This may lead to not complying with a judge's order that may ultimately lead to a higher risk of losing their children (Ayón, 2009).

Part of linguistic barriers is a misunderstanding of proverbs or “dichos” which are very common in other cultures. If social work practitioners are not familiar with dichos, it may lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations of information being provided by clients. In a therapeutic context, the use of “dichos” can be a beneficial tool in tackling culturally based resistance (Ayón & Aisenberg, 2010). It is vital to understand that “dichos” may be used by older immigrants to

counsel or teach the younger generation (Ayón & Aisenberg, 2010).

Unfortunately, dichos may also lose meaning in translation. This adds to another layer of linguistic barriers that families in the welfare system may encounter.

An important part of overcoming a language barrier when working with immigrant families is personalismo (personal connection). From the very beginning of rapport building, it is critical that the practitioner utilizes their rapport building skills and cultural competence skills (knowledge in beliefs, customs, values) to build a sense of personalismo with immigrant clients. With the use of personalismo, practitioners may build a more intimate relationship with families. This may help build rapport and gain the trust of the families they are serving. For example, workers have shared that they have disclosed more information to families to be more accessible; they shared stories and used 'dichos' in their conversations to engage the parents (Ayón & Aisenberg, 2010).

Immigration Barriers

The lack of legal knowledge of immigration laws/policies affecting immigrant families creates a barrier between provider and client. Past and recent changes to immigration laws and policies and an upward in arrests of undocumented people bring uncertainty and fear amongst immigrant families (Greenberg et al., 2019). For immigrant families involved in the child welfare system, their legal status contributes to an existing barrier that affects the quality of services they receive (Greenberg et al., 2019). An immigrant family that has entered the child welfare system, regardless of causality, may be fearful of fully

cooperating with child services due to deportation if legal status were to be disclosed (Earner, 2007). Child welfare providers that work closely with immigrant families and are unfamiliar with immigration policies, related issues, and the legal status of their clients often fail to assist the family, thus complicating the therapeutic relationship and overall process of the case (Earner, 2007). Consequently, a reunification plan may have been created without properly considering the challenges (e.g. travel, time off work) that an undocumented parent(s) may have to fulfil that plan, thus causing a delay in reunification and evoking a sense of hopelessness (Greenberg et al., 2019; Earner, 2007). Furthermore, child welfare providers unfamiliar with the legal status of their clients, often fail to assist the immigrant family and make appropriate referrals (Earner, 2007).

Organizational Barriers

Another barrier that was identified by Greenberg et al., (2019) and Lin et al., (2018) are organizational barriers. Organizational barriers include stringent rules, regulations, lack of training and resources, and lack of support from authoritative figures and colleagues (Lin et al., 2018). Research from Lin et al., (2018) and Greenberg et al., (2019) identified that in child welfare agencies, many colleagues of immigrant child welfare providers did not understand the cultural norms and immigration challenges that immigrant clients experienced; therefore, these colleagues tended to be callous towards the challenges that child welfare providers were facing when working with immigrant families.

Additionally, providers that work with immigrant families and are immigrants themselves, experienced discrimination, and mistreatment from the agencies they work in and did not receive the support they needed when working with immigrant families (Lin et al., 2018). Due to the organizational barriers that child welfare providers encountered, they experienced more stress thus hindering their time that could have been used to assist the immigrant family (Lin et al., 2018). In the same study, child welfare providers that worked with immigrant families received non-solicited discriminatory advice from their colleagues often implying that the immigrant family was at fault for child abuse or neglect (Lin et al., 2018). In another study, some colleagues preferred to work with only English-speaking clients and one worker stated that working with a Spanish caseload “was too much work” (Ayón, 2009).

Limitations in Literature

Poverty, the psychological and financial stress of acculturation, isolation, mass deportations, and cultural differences are factors that may put immigrant families at risk for child welfare involvement (Cardoso et al., 2014). Large amount of research has discussed these factors; however, there is a gap in literature due to the few studies that focus on the challenges and barriers that child welfare providers encounter that prohibit or damage their ability to work effectively with immigrant families. Therefore, this study aims to identify research that provides a

better understanding of those challenges and what tools and resources are needed to better equip and assist child welfare providers.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The theory that best conceptualizes the framework for this study is the Person-in-Environment (PIE) perspective drawing from the Bronfenbrenner's socioecological framework. Using the person-in-environment perspective brings focus on the individual and the individual systems' transactions within their environment (Ungar, 2002). PIE will help us understand the child welfare provider interactions and challenges they encounter within multiple systems and helps us discover whether they are supported by the very own agencies they work with (Lin et al., 2018). With PIE, various system levels can be analyzed to help design a model in which child welfare providers can use to better understand and help their immigrant clients, and with PIE, we can focus on the environment and seek to reform and change them to help meet the needs of the child welfare provider more effectively. This is done by looking at the different levels involved in the system.

At the microsystem level, the focus is on the child welfare provider's knowledge, attitudes, and skills they have to work effectively with immigrant clients. One can look at the skills the child welfare provider may or may not have to effectively communicate with immigrant families and to interpret verbal and non-verbal cues. To better serve families and address intergenerational conflicts,

providers must have the skills to understand different ethnic groups, evidence-based practice, environmental influences, and self-awareness. Social workers will also benefit if they are aware of their own cultural, racial, and ethnic background before examining attitudes and negative beliefs towards other groups.

At the mesosystem level, the focus is on the child welfare provider's social support and interactions with other colleagues and clients. This may include support within their place of employment from colleagues and supervisors. This may be in the form of colleagues supporting and providing support to reach the families' and agencies' goals. This may include supervisors providing proper supervision and tools to succeed in their role as social workers. Clients are also an important part of the mesosystem; their communication with their social workers is vital to reach their goals.

The exosystem level consists of the worker's access to information, resources, training, leadership support, ideologies of the agency, and the agency's policies that may hinder the effectiveness of the workers' intervention with immigrant families. Lack of access to resources, training, and leadership support will give added stress to the child welfare provider. Although the interactions between the agency and of the child welfare provider may not necessarily involve the immigrant client; it still can influence the professional relationship between the immigrant client and provider.

Next to follow is the macrosystem level. At this level, the focus is on the extended relationships the worker may have with other agencies, community, and local, state, and federal laws that influence the child welfare provider's ability to affectively work with immigrant families. Local, state, and immigration laws and policies often create conflict for the child welfare provider by restricting services available to immigrant families.

Summary

This study will examine unique challenges social work practitioners may encounter working within the Child Welfare System and immigrant families. With the increase of immigrant families, social work practitioners must be properly trained and well equipped to provide the best services possible. This study will identify barriers that may impact the quality of services available. The Person-in-Environment (PIE) perspective will help examine at multiple levels if the social work practitioner is receiving support from the families they are serving, colleagues, supervisors, and agency.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This study used a qualitative approach to identify what social workers need from their schools, agencies, supervisors, and colleagues to work effectively with immigrant clients in child welfare. This chapter will review the design of the study and the sampling from which data was obtained. The data collection and instruments used in the qualitative study was presented as well. The procedures and protection of human subjects of the study were explained and information of how the qualitative data will be analyzed was provided.

Study Design

To best examine the challenges and needs of child welfare providers, a qualitative study that is exploratory in nature was needed. The best data source for this study is social work students that are currently or have worked in a child welfare agency. This study involved qualitative data; however, participants were selected from an extensive longitudinal mixed-methods study. A self-administered online survey was used to identify child welfare provider's basic demographics, work experiences, and experiences working with immigrant families. An in-depth interview with selected participants was conducted to learn more about their work with immigrant clients and the challenges they were facing

within their agencies. Methodological strengths for in-depth interviews were preselected themes that helped guide the interview process. Interview questions with additional prompts helped researchers get detailed responses. A limitation that was anticipated with interviews is that the participants may withhold answers for fear of retaliation from their agencies and that the participant may respond to questions a certain way based on the fact that they were being recorded.

Sampling

Selection criteria for this study was social work BASW and MSW Title IVE students and alumni as participants. People were sampled for this study by sending out a solicitation via e-mails for this qualitative interview who had completed the Qualtrics survey. Respondents who chose to be interviewed about their experiences working with immigrant families were contacted by the research team. The respondents that replied to the emails were then interviewed. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit participants for this study; those who participated in initial interviews were asked to recommend child welfare professionals, including those who supervised student participants' internships, who might offer additional insights or perspectives. Researchers then contacted those who were referred to request their participation in the study. Approximately ten subjects was anticipated to participate in this study.

Data Collection and Instruments

This study examined the professional experiences of undergraduate and graduate social work students working in child welfare with immigrant clients through a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews took on a constructivist approach as participants reflected on their experiences and constructed their own interpretations from working with immigrant clients in child welfare. Survey questions were designed to elicit participants' experiences, beliefs, and values related to their work with their immigrant clients and reflected on the system (e.g., educational, professional, governmental) they and their clients operated.

Qualitative data was gathered through the form of interviews that were completed by participants. All interviews were audio and video recorded. The interview questions were developed by the main investigator of the study. To increase the reliability and validity of the interview questions, the questions were discussed and reviewed by the research team and were developed by the expertise of the lead investigator. The validity of the interview guide was assessed by reviewing and analyzing the interview responses and determining if the questions were representative of the qualitative study.

The interview questions (see Appendix B) were designed to ask participants questions from four categories/topics: education/training, experiences with immigrants, organizational, and recommendations. Some of them are as follows: Tell me about your professional work experience. Which

languages do you speak? How would you describe your agency's approach to serving immigrant clients? How do your colleagues react to your work with immigrant clients? What would you want your BASW/MSW program/instructors to know about your work with immigrant clients/families?

Procedures

Student research assistants sent out emails to participants who agreed to be interviewed for the study. A contact log with times and dates of initial contact and follow-up information was utilized to record participants' interviews. A copy of the informed consent (See Appendix A) was given by email to participants and was read before the start of the interview process. These interviews were recorded and transcribed at a later date to analyze. Data was collected via Zoom interviews. Data collection and analysis took place in the privacy of each researcher's home due to Covid safety precautions. Each teammate of the research team was responsible for collecting and transcribing the interview recording they completed with the participant. All identifying information was removed from transcriptions. Generally, interviews took 30 to 60 minutes to complete. Reminder emails were sent to increase participation of sample size. Participants who completed the interview received a \$30 Amazon gift card at the end of the interview. Gift cards were sent immediately by email or text (as requested by the participant) after the interview was completed.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researchers of this study made every effort to ensure that participants' confidentiality is protected in both the survey and interview portions of the study. First, all data including survey response files, interview audio recordings, and interview transcripts was stored in password protected files in CSUSB Google Drive files accessible only by the researchers. Second, whenever participants' names and/or contact information were collected, researchers used this information only for recruitment purposes, not for analysis or to match responses to participant identities. Third, the researchers did not share the identities of any participants with anyone outside the research team. In addition, the researchers took the following steps to ensure participant anonymity and/or confidentiality at each step in the process.

All interview participants names, contact information, and electronic signed informed consent forms was stored separately from participants' interview recordings and transcripts. Participant names, contact information, and electronic informed consent documents was stored in password protected files on CSUSB Google Drive. Participants names was used during the interviews, and in the event that participants inadvertently reveal their identities during interviews, this information will be deleted from transcripts before the transcripts are analyzed. In addition, prior to the interview, all participants were advised that the zoom interview should take place in a private location where the participant cannot be overheard by colleagues/classmates, and where the participant felt

comfortable speaking openly about experiences at school and at work (e.g. not a campus computer lab, cubicle in an open office, etc.). Research team members conducted zoom interviews only from private locations.

Data Analysis

Once the qualitative data was collected it will be thematically analyzed. The data (audio recorded interviews) was transcribed by the research team and then reviewed for accuracy by the interviewer. Transcriptions were coded, first by individual members of the research team and then by the research team to identify themes in the data. Although the majority of our data analysis is on qualitative data, the participants demographic information was analyzed using descriptive statistics. This analysis provided details about the sample.

Summary

There is a need to equip social workers in child welfare with the proper tools and support from their agencies, supervisors, and colleagues to work effectively with immigrant clients. This chapter documented the steps used to implement this study and discussed how the confidentiality of participants would be protected.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter describes the findings of this study done through a qualitative lens. This study sought to answer the research question: What do social workers need from their agencies, supervisors, and colleagues to work effectively with immigrant clients in child welfare? The goal of this study was to provide social work students' and providers' perspectives on the challenges faced in child welfare agencies when working with immigrant clients and determine what necessary tools, resources, and training were needed to better support child welfare practitioners and their immigrant clients. Table 1 shows the seven significant themes identified: language, cultural humility and competence, awareness and motivation, organizational, technical, bias and judgment, and social work education. The seven concepts were identified through the thematic analysis of the interviews in which the participants shared similar views regarding their experiences working with immigrant families. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Demographics

For this study, seven participants were interviewed. The interviews were conducted over four months. Five participants identified as female; two

participants identified as male. Four participants identified as Latino/Hispanic, two identified as White, and one identified as Arab/Middle Eastern. The ages of those interviewed varied. All participants have earned a bachelor's level degree. Three participants have earned a Master of Social Work degree. Four participants are currently attending the California State San Bernardino Master of Social Work Program. Six of the seven participants reported being bilingual. Four participants identified as immigrants. Six of the participants reported having immigrant family members. The years of experience for the participants varied. Four participants reported having between one through four years of experience. Two participants reported their experience to be between five through nine years; and one participant had over ten plus years of experience. Five out of 7 participants had internship placements at a children and family services agency. Two participants had internship placements in a local school district. Three out of seven participants interviewed currently work with a local county.

Results

Table 1. Major Themes

THEMES	DESCRIPTION
1. LINGUISTIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate clearly & effectively • Interpret & translate effectively
2. CULTURAL HUMILITY AND COMPETENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a set of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that allows the worker to work effectively and respectfully with migrant families
3. AWARENESS AND MOTIVATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to feel /understand the client's emotions/situation which increases the worker's motivation to advocate and help the migrant client
4. ORGANIZATIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency structure and support from agency, colleagues, and supervisor. • Heightened workload. • Professional development & trainings • Agency's handle on xenophobic behavior
5. TECHNICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited referral services • Client's reluctance to use services due to fear • Client education and advocacy
6. BIAS AND JUDGMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate in organization • Racism from colleagues • Micro/macro aggressions from colleagues or other professionals
7. SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited knowledge or education with working with migrant families

Linguistic Barriers

A major theme identified by all the participants was the language barrier. All participants emphasized the importance of speaking the language of their immigrant clients to effectively communicate with them and avoid misunderstandings that may lead to inadequate services. Additionally, participants stated the importance of understanding the meaning behind the tone, words, and diminutives. Participant 5 talked of an occasion in which a colleague made a remark regarding their immigrant client's tone of voice. The participant stated,

The parent may come off as really excited and they raise their voice a certain way, and you know, it turns into kind of the worker feeling like, 'oh, she's coming off as aggressive'. And in my mind, I'm thinking, 'well she just seems really excited and just like any culture, there's people that speak loudly and others that don't'.

A child welfare provider that does not understand the language and how culture plays a vital role in the way one speaks, will cause misunderstandings and/or such tone would be misinterpreted as indifferent, aggressive, or confrontational. The participant stated, "that piece of it has to be really important...the piece of understanding what they're saying both verbally, like translating it and culturally."

Child welfare providers that fluently speak Spanish and know the culture are able to engage properly with their Spanish speaking clients. It is critical for

the child welfare provider to be able to utilize their rapport building and cultural competence skills to build a more intimate and trusting relationship with immigrant families. Participant 5 stated,

I feel very comfortable working with them [immigrant families] because I speak in their language. I am able to understand what they say instead of there being some sort of misunderstanding because of the tone they use...and I'm also familiar with the culture. So when they speak a certain way or say things a certain way, I understand what they're trying to convey or when they're frustrated and upset about something.

Although Participant 1 can speak and read in Spanish and has taken three years of Spanish courses in college, that has not been enough to properly communicate with immigrant families. Participant 1 reflected on a conversation with an immigrant client and shared how his conversation came across as cold, even when that was not his intent of doing so. A colleague advised Participant 1 the following, "You need to make sure you put more emotion in your dialogue with your [client]." This participant recognized the importance of speaking the same language the client speaks and how not being fluent in speaking such language can become a problem. He stated, "I'm not super comfortable speaking in Spanish which is definitely a barrier to working with some of these clients."

When asked what would be needed from the child welfare agency, Participant 1 stated, "I think that they [immigrant families] would need someone who can effectively communicate with them." Participant 5 shared the same

sentiment and stated, “If I had a family that didn’t speak English, I would have a translator there because I think it’s absolutely necessary. You can’t just wing it.”

Participant 4 answered the same question:

I would want them to know that, having people there that speaks Spanish fluently is the perfect way to be able to help those families. It can be already intimidating when someone ... is reaching out to you regarding your child, let alone with someone with broken Spanish that you quite don't understand everything you're saying, and you don't know how to help. And, as it is, it doesn't sound so good, but really having someone there that's from the Latino Community helps. Many of them [immigrant families] are not willing to open up to other ethnicities, even if the Spanish is spoken so I would definitely say hiring any more minorities, hiring more Latinos.

Additionally, having a child welfare provider that speaks Spanish and is familiar with the culture adds many benefits to the therapeutic relationship with the immigrant client. Participant 6 stated, “I felt like speaking their language is definitely helpful...it gives them a sense of comfort.” Understanding the culture and speaking the language helped participant 5 be able to work effectively with immigrant families; thus stated,

I think because I understand the culture and I speak the language; I am able to understand them better and kind of get to resolving the problem instead of building barriers. I feel I’m more of a bridge to some of these

immigrant families because I understand the culture and the language. If you don't understand what they're telling you, you need a translator.

Cultural Humility and Cultural Competence

Another important theme discussed was cultural humility and competence. Cultural humility and competence can be defined as having the ability to understand and respect how different cultures may approach family and parenting styles, gender roles, and the treatment of elders (NASW, n.d.; Lin et al., 2018; Velazquez and Dettlaff, 2011). This could also include the views on mental health stigmas, alternative and traditional medicines. When asked, 'Do you see differences when working with immigrant families versus other families?', Participant 3 shared that she encountered a family that believed their 16-year-old granddaughter was possessed. The client struggled with schizophrenic-type symptoms. Participant 3 stated that the grandparents wanted to have an exorcism performed. The participant stated,

But it seems like people that grew up in the United States have more of an understanding of what mental health is and the process of getting treatment, whereas when we get immigrant families to come in, you know it was, they didn't understand mental health and thought their family member that was struggling with mental health was, it was like a choice or were on some kind of drug-like they didn't understand that mental health was really a thing.

As a child welfare provider working with immigrant families, it is vital to understand the cultural beliefs about mental health to serve each family better. It is crucial to understand that not all cultures hold the same views and ideas. Participant 3 stated, “a lot of the issues that we would run into with them is the cultural barrier being mental health.”

Another essential portion of cultural humility and competence is understanding possible traumas related to migration and separation. When conducting interviews, participant 4 described the time that she was given a case while working at the district. The case involved a student with behavioral issues. She stated that it was said, throughout the school, that he was a “troubled kid.” When participant 4 began to work with this family, she soon discovered that “nobody bothered to see what was going on in the home.” Participant 4 contacted the student’s mother, who only spoke Spanish, and they discussed issues that the family was facing. The participant stated, “she (mother) mentioned that’s his father had been deported four months before school started and his brother had been deported a week before school started.” Participant 4 helped the family find financial support, legal help, and food resources. Participant 4 stated,

So, we were able to see that, you know, his behavior was just a result of what was going on at the home of the lawsuit that he was having.

Thankfully, we were able to make that connection between the counselor and the school principal. So, he was able to get the help that they needed,

but without Spanish and without the willingness to speak to the mother into what was going on, we wouldn't have known what had happened.

Reflecting on the last previous statement of participant 4, child welfare providers may recognize that a significant part of cultural humility and competence is the ability to build rapport. This can be done by using social work skills that may include active listening and showing empathy. Participant 5 stated, "I try and do my best and make them feel comfortable in their own language." Participant 1 discussed his insight as to how his immigrant clients must feel approached by a white man. He stated,

I don't feel that I've been trained in [working with immigrant families] and I think that it would be beneficial to me...as a white man...to have these trainings so that way I could be like as approachable as possible dealing with these clients.

Participant 2 shared his thoughts on working with immigrant families and engagement. He stated,

I think maybe having a guide on how to approach, how to work with immigrant families. I think in child welfare our presence may seem even more confusing and more difficult, especially if English is not your native language. And just our presence may be even more traumatic for immigrant clients. So maybe having a guide on how to interact and how to approach, specifically immigrant clients.

When asked what does participant 2 think his immigrant clients would need from the agency, supervisor, or colleagues, he replied:

I think maybe understanding who we are and why we are in their lives in written form and to know that we are not there to take the kids away...that we are there to help them in the best way we can. And that we are not going to deport them. They are still going to be remaining here in the US. We're not going to call the police on them...to know that they should feel safe in this country.

It is also crucial to help families understand the roles of child welfare providers. Participant 3 shared her insight as how immigrant clients view child welfare providers. She stated,

I would want them to know that we are incredibly intimidating. I'm now referring to the county, one of my issues that I have with the county that I'm sure lower supervision understand, but I feel like it's higher management that doesn't. [It's] this will dress code thing. Like when you when you show up dressed all business like to someone's door. You know, that's intimidating. That's really intimidating to people, I think it puts... I think it puts a power barrier between us and our clients. You know, I'm not saying, let us dress like we're slums, but you know, we should be able to wear jeans and a t-shirt to have these conversations, because I feel like it would make it a little bit easier for the clients to feel more comfortable with us.

If child welfare providers can explain their roles and the roles of government agencies to families, it may help build rapport and gain the trust needed to serve families better.

The experience participant 7 has working with immigrant families demonstrated how important cultural competence and humility is in her work. Participant 7 discussed of a case in which she saw the social worker she was shadowing display cultural competence and humility when working with an undocumented immigrant family. She stated,

I can see how hard it is for our clients to engage with us because of that cultural barrier. Having cultural humility plays a big part of it, because I think, you know that the social worker that I was shadowing was white, so you know, they could have gone at it from a completely different lens...and kind of pushed for them [client] to disclose information [that] they didn't feel comfortable disclosing. Instead, I feel like she [social worker] really made them feel comfortable enough to, you know, have them understand like "hey, you know I'm not here to like ruin your life and I'm not here to, you know, get you in trouble like I'm just here to figure out what's going on."

Awareness and Motivation

An unexpected theme that arose from the interviews with participants was awareness and motivation. Awareness and motivation can be described as being

able to feel and understand, on a deeper level, the client's emotions and situation which increases the child welfare provider's motivation to advocate and help the immigrant client. The difference between awareness and motivation from cultural humility and competence is that this deeper level of awareness comes from the personal experiences of the social worker/child welfare provider. Participants 4, 5, 6 and 7 that identified themselves as immigrants or children from immigrants had a deeper understanding and awareness of the challenges their immigrant clients faced because they personally experienced the same struggles, or their families faced the same challenges.

Participant 7 stated,

I feel pretty well prepared mainly because of my experience and how I am able to relate to them on a personal level. I feel like that's kind of what pushed me to do social work. I see how much my family has struggled and I feel like if I am in the position to be able to make a difference for them...then I'm here to help you. You're seeing a family just trying to make ends meet. You can see how that causes high stress and how that can cause struggles within someone's relationship and stuff like that, and it really does make you think of you know, the majority of our clients are trying to make ends meet you know. So how can we help them without punishing them.

Participant 4 shared the same sentiment thus indicated,

The immigration experiences are pretty harsh for the undocumented population. I have noticed that when working with immigrant families, specifically for me, I tend to relate more which often has gone into me trying harder to help them. So, my boundaries do tend to get tested when working with immigrant families.

Participant 6 shared that during their childhood, their parents talked about family members getting caught in raids. The experiences of the participant have given her insight as to what challenges immigrant families and clients face. In a child welfare case, the participant shared how a child who had been in the child welfare system for five years, their immigration process to get their green card had not been started so when the case was transferred to this participant, she started the process right away. She stated,

I started the process. So those are the types of things that could fall through the cracks that I worry about...If you're not from an immigrant family, you may not necessarily think that this child needs a green card or what they're going to do when they're 18...And I need to think the urgency behind it, because I thought, 'okay, if she ages out and doesn't stay in extended foster care, and even if she does, time is running out. And I don't know how long this process is going to take for her particular situation, but I know that it can take a long time.' So that's why when I found out that she needed to begin that process, I immediately tried to get it going and I did. But other workers that maybe don't have immigrant parents or what

not, they may not realize the urgency behind it, the length of time that it actually takes to get all that done and how important it is for her.

Organizational Barriers

An important theme that all participants emphasized was organizational barriers. When discussing interpretation services, participant 7 described the organizational barriers she encountered. She stated, “workers are kind of deterred from becoming certified [translators] because their caseload goes up. The agency does a good job at trying to encourage bilingual workers to be certified but I think that [they] may need additional support...” Participant 5 shared similar sentiment by stating, “I see mainly the frustration of having to find translators and then not being able to understand what they say so it brings a frustration around that case for the workers.”

Participant 6 shared her experience seeing other colleagues frustrated with the amount of time a case was taking due to the wait time they faced when requesting interpretation/translation services and the amount of time the overall case was taking because more time spent was required to assist the immigrant family. She stated,

I understand workers that get frustrated. Frustrated because that’s what I kind of see a lot of them get frustrated because we don’t have a lot of time to do our work. I guess for me, I see mainly the frustration of having to find translators and then not being able to understand what they say. And so, it

brings kind of like a frustration around that case for the workers that don't speak the language. It's a couple of times I have seen that these families, because [of] the language...the language barrier; it's easier to just say, 'oh', kind of dismissed them because it's like 'okay, this is what they said. Now dismiss this situation and let me move on to the next one because I'm so frustrated with it, and I don't even want to deal with it'. And so, things sometimes can fall through the cracks.

The organizational barriers that many bilingual child welfare providers face is heightened workloads including additional job duties such as interpreting and translating for other colleagues. When asked how often does participant 5 speak Spanish at her placement, she shared what a typical day is for her as a bilingual child welfare provider. She stated,

It really just depends sometimes I'll get up to like three [or] four phone calls in a day of just workers [asking], 'Can you help me out real quick...like I just showed up at this house and this caregiver only speaks Spanish'. So it's like that. Or sometimes it's like actual scheduled, you know, intake interviews or assessments or two a week to 10 a week.

When asked what type of support or reaction you would like from your colleagues, Participant 5 stated,

I would just say the same, just like some acknowledgement. You know, see the importance in [the] service that we're providing. How big of a deal

it is to have somebody there that actually understands versus someone that doesn't.

When asked what type of support or reaction the participant would like from their supervisors, participant 2 shared, "more check-ins. More individual supervision to kind of get to know us more." Participant 1 answered, "there should be structural things within the county for if someone needs help with services they shouldn't have to rely on their direct supervisor." Participant 5 stated,

I think it would be nice to just even [get] some acknowledgement on when it is a different group family or a specific one like in my case, Spanish speaking family, because, you know, I am doing a little extra more work when it comes to families like that. Many times [other] families would ask me to relay messages. And a lot of the questions, I don't have that [answer] because I'm not their worker. But I do my best to either find out or communicate it to the worker, so I think, in that sense, it would be nice to have my supervisor acknowledge that.

Another organizational barrier that arose in all interviews was the lack of professional development and training on immigrants. Participant 1 stated, "I feel like it [working with immigrant families] didn't get that covered in either coursework or at internship." Further on in the interview, participant 1 touched again on the subject and stated, "I don't feel that I've been adequately trained

specifically dealing with immigrant or undocumented families.” Participant 2 explained,

In terms of having a specific course dedicated to just working with immigrants across the board, whatever nationality they are, we did not receive anything like this. In child welfare, [the focus] was geared more towards the safety of children and not so much [on] immigrants.

Participant 7 shared similar views which stated,

We have had a lot of trainings...sometimes it does touch very briefly on it but nothing specific. We need more trainings specified with working with undocumented families. I think sometimes things are too general, and the truth is that immigrant experiences don't fit those, you know, other experiences. They [colleagues] found themselves asking me questions about my own experiences [as an immigrant].

Participant 5 stated,

It doesn't help to have a training, you know, ten years ago and then not have it again. [We need] more trainings for not only us, but colleagues that are higher up-like social workers and supervisors, in with the struggles that immigrant families face.

Technical Barriers

Another major theme that was seen across the interviews with all participants are technical barriers, including lack of citizenship status, clients'

reluctance to use services due to fear of detection and cost, and managing trauma due to deportation or incarceration. Participant 2 stated that “there is a lot of uncertainty and fear” seen in immigrant families and clients that enter the child welfare system. Participant 7 shared the same sentiments stating, “I think that there’s also that little sense of fear of them not knowing what your purpose is, or you know, them thinking that you’re against them.” Due to fear and uncertainty, participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 acknowledged that many immigrant families in the child welfare system often remain silent, avoid disclosing legal status, and/or were reluctant to use services due to fear of cost and detection. In a child welfare case that participant 7 was a part of, described the immigrant father’s fear of disclosing his legal status. She stated,

Dad didn’t want to disclose much because he didn’t specifically say that he wasn’t undocumented. He kind of pulled back...he knew that if he were to like get in trouble...that would really derail everything for him—but you kind of knew based on his answers, you know. I believed that the mom had said, which was his partner, that she didn’t want to call the police on him even though it was domestic violence, because she knew what was going to happen—they were definitely like protecting each other, which I could definitely see because we know they’re family at the end of the day, so what happens to mom, it happens to him...and to you know, to their child.

Participant 6 recalled of a case where the immigrant parents were afraid to question the previous worker's work. She stated,

That's another interesting thing that I see in some [immigrant] families; they're afraid to question a lot of the things that happen to them –they might not be right. So, they [immigrant parents] weren't really questioning why they weren't getting visits, for example. So, I said, 'okay, something's wrong'.

Another technical barrier that child welfare providers face is the lack of knowledge in identifying appropriate resources that are beneficial to their immigrant clients. Participant 5 shared, "Give us some more support –give us resources to help immigrant families so we can directly provide [it] to them."

Participant 4 recalled a case where she only knew of some resources to help the immigrant client. She stated, "they [client] should have more legal resources. I remember only having three options to give them." Participant 1 shared his frustration in having a limited grasp of what resources are available for his immigrant clients. He stated,

I would just like some more specific trainings about...what specific resources are available to these [immigrant] clients and what legal loopholes, or workarounds or things like that do we need to be aware of and also what sort of outreach and things are we doing in these communities to make sure that these people know that its okay to approach the county.

The lack of legal knowledge of immigration laws and policies affecting his immigrant clients has created a barrier between him as the provider and his client. He remarked on how the agency teaches workers how to handle cases involving immigrant families. He stated,

So, I would say that there isn't anything super structural in terms of how my internship has addressed working with immigrant families or clients. In my experience, it has been... um... you get assigned a case, and if on that case there is an undocumented family member or client or someone with some sort of like varying...status, we will deal with it when it happens, instead of teaching us or giving those resources ahead.

Bias and Judgment

A theme that arose in the interviews with participants and is important to examine is bias and judgement from co-workers in social services settings that serve immigrant families. Child welfare providers who work with immigrant families have experienced stigma, discrimination, and mistreatment from their own colleagues. Participant 4 shared her experience of discrimination and mistreatment. She stated, "I have noticed that [at] my internships and my current job that most of us are experiencing the same stigma and the same discrimination."

Participant 5 wanted her agency, supervisors, and colleagues to be more "understanding [of] our openness, less judgment, less biases, which is hard

because we all have biases...but those things.” It is the responsibility of those working with immigrant families to be aware of any biases or judgments they may have. Identifying biases and judgments and addressing those issues will help child welfare providers render better quality services.

Providers that worked with immigrant families find themselves receiving non-solicited discriminatory advice from their colleagues often implying that the immigrant family was at fault for child abuse or neglect or that they are faking it. Reflecting on a previous case handled by participant 6, she stated,

I did see that [the] previous worker had the same consensus, which was, ‘Oh she understands English. She is just pretending’. And I said, ‘Well, that’s...uh...well I didn’t confront them about it. I just spoke about my case with my supervisor. I said, well, she understands it but she [client] understands some of it verbally but its limited. And she definitely can’t read. She doesn’t know how to read it and she doesn’t understand big words, unfortunately, as much as I would like to say, that we talk differently to our clients sometimes, we always revert, probably. And I’m just speaking in general. We revert to the language we use every day in the office. So, I could see that she did understand some, but she still needed a translator. Well, a couple of workers, I would say that they kept insisting [that] she doesn’t need a translator, [that] she understands. She’s just pretending... it’s not the first time I’ve seen that in my line of work; that

type of mentality. Especially in the last few years there's a lot of different opinions everywhere.

Additionally, participant 6 continued on describing that the previous worker of this case was not happy about the court granted reinforcement services that this participant was able to get for the immigrant family. She added,

So, the other worker who had the case prior to me, she, for example, came up to me and she was pretty upset that I got reinforced services for the family. And she says, I don't want it back. I don't want it back. I'm not touching it. I did it, and I'm not touching it again. I don't know. It was a very tense it was pretty bad. Yeah. Honestly, I do think that it was, I don't know, some sort of prejudice had to be there, to be honest. And it was just kind of obvious. And then on top of it, there was some sort of power struggle there that they weren't happy that I went a different way, which that's the part I don't understand, because our goal is to if we can't send families, children home safely, then that should be our goal. In that particular case, I do think there is some bias and some prejudice there. I don't know. I can't speak to. I mean, racism is hating somebody just because of what race they are. I don't know if I don't think it went to that extreme, but there's definitely something going on there, particularly.

When asked if she heard her colleagues make anti-immigrant remarks, participant 6 answered, "In the past, yes. I think we're talking about like maybe two years ago it was more common...more okay to do." Additionally participant 6

shared that in her place of employment, there are a good percentage of colleagues that do not understand their work with immigrant families which can lead to micro aggressions and unwanted remarks. She said, “There are a few that do not [understand]. And you could probably see it. I would say that most people understand it, but maybe a 40% [of colleagues] is probably going to be a challenge or difficult for them.”

Social Work Education

Another unexpected theme that arose from the interviews was social work education. All of the participants in this study expressed their frustration and desire to have specific courses regarding working with immigrant clients. Regarding their social work education and working with immigrant population, participant 2 shared wanting professors to teach “more about working with immigrant families.” Participant 5 said, “It would have been helpful to receive trainings or like mentorship.” Participant 6 shared,

If they had a specific one [class] that was called specifically for immigrant families, because we do have to know each family, we have to try to understand where they’re coming from.

Participant 4 explained how she feels comfortable working with immigrant families based on her own personal experiences and not so much from school learning. Participant 1 stated,

I feel like [working with immigrant families] didn't get that covered in either coursework or at internship. I think it would be very important for our instructors to place a little bit more of an emphasis on working with those [immigrant] clients and get the student body more comfortable and prepared for when they either go to internship or start working”

Participant 7 shared her thoughts on her social work education and what it means to work with immigrant families. She stated,

I think it's a privilege for all of us to be able to work with undocumented families and I wish that our professors would kind of touch on it a bit more. Some of them don't really have that like that direct personal experience. It is really good for the students to see people in power that are able to relate to them. I really hope we have a class ...i feel like that would really help all and would encourage first generation students to become more in touch with their culture and embrace it rather than have to feel the need to assimilate.... I just got the opportunity to do that Spanish and clinical skills training. I wish there was a class like that because it was really good but that's the only training, I have been able to get. [Working with immigrant clients] it's not really touched upon in class. I feel like just having a class that specifically devoted to working with undocumented families would have been really helpful, because I know that some of my colleagues who work with them [immigrant families] may not feel the same [comfortable] way.

Summary

This chapter identifies the demographics of the participants interviewed. This study aims to determine and understand what challenges social workers in child welfare working with immigrant families may encounter. This study is intended to help identify what social workers may need from their agencies, supervisors, and colleagues to work effectively. This study identified several barriers social workers face when working with immigrant families. The seven critical themes identified are language, cultural humility and competence, awareness, and motivation, organizational, technical, bias and judgment, and social work education.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of, and the skills, expertise, and knowledge needed by social work students and practitioners in order to work effectively with immigrant clients in child welfare. The findings that emerged from this study indicate that child welfare agencies could do more in providing the right tools and training to address the challenges that child welfare providers encounter in working with immigrant families. This chapter provides a discussion of the results of this study, addresses the limitations of the study, and presents recommendations for future social work practice, policy, and research

Discussion

The findings of this study have provided great insight into the challenges and needs of child welfare providers and practitioners who work with immigrant families. The data derived from this qualitative study is consistent with the contentions of Lin et al., (2018), Velazquez and Dettlaff (2011), Greenberg et al., (2019), Lin and Wiley (2019), Cardoso et al., (2014), and Dettlaff and Rycraft (2010) which revealed that child welfare providers experience barriers in cultural competency, linguistic, organizational, and technical expertise in their work with immigrant families. Additionally, the findings expanded on Lin et al., (2018) that

child welfare providers who work with immigrant families and are immigrants themselves, experience mistreatment, discrimination, and non-solicited discriminatory advice in the workplace. Participants who identified as immigrants expressed receiving the same discriminatory treatment as their immigrant clients. Furthermore, our participants explained that their colleagues gave non-solicited discriminatory advice or made remarks that the immigrant family was at fault. For many immigrant families in child welfare, their non-disclosure of their legal status contributes to the quality of services they receive (Greenberg et al., 2019). If a child welfare provider has that negative notion of immigrant families, she or he can compromise and treat the immigrant family poorly.

Statements from participants aligned with the previous literature that emphasizes the importance of the child welfare provider's cultural competence and humility when working with immigrant families. The literature stressed that child welfare provider's unfamiliarity with their immigrant client's culture affects the way verbal and non-verbal communication is interpreted and the data derived from the interviews is consistent with such findings (Greenberg et al., 2019; NASW, n.d.; Lin & Wiley, 2019).

The findings also illuminated the importance of assigning a culturally competent and bilingual child welfare provider to work effectively with the immigrant family. The participants' responses were consistent with the literature regarding linguistic barriers which suggest that linguistic barriers lead to

misunderstandings, misinterpretations of information, noncompliance, and affect the quality of services provided (Ayon, 2009; Hernandez-Mckonnen & Konrady, 2018).

Participants' responses concerning organizational barriers aligned with previous literature which suggest that child welfare providers do not receive the support, resources, and training needed from their agencies (Greenberg et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2018). Participants expressed frustration with the heightened workloads that they experience and the lack of understanding of the challenges they face in their work with immigrant families. Research from Lin et al., (2018) and Greenberg et al., (2019) identified that in child welfare agencies, colleagues tended to be callous towards the challenges that child welfare providers were facing when working with immigrant families. Furthermore, participants voiced their concern with the need of professional development and training on immigrants and shared their sentiments that they felt inadequately trained on how to properly work and engage with their immigrant clients. These findings are consistent with the previous literature on organizational barriers.

Findings Beyond the Literature

Several of our study's findings are not well-addressed in the existing literature on social work with immigrants in the child welfare system. As the number of immigrants families engaging with the child welfare system increases, it is crucial to be aware of the challenges workers encounter in their agencies.

This study identified three additional themes not often addressed in the existing literature: environment: 1) awareness and motivation, 2) biases and judgment, and 3) limitations in social work education.

Our participants emphasized the importance of having the ability to understand and feel what a client may be feeling or experiencing – being aware of clients' experiences and motivated to help them. Participants believed this heightened level of awareness comes from personal experience. Similarly, our participants noted regular and pervasive stigma, discrimination, and mistreatment from colleagues – something we define as biases and judgment. Finally, all our participants mentioned the lack of specific courses geared toward working with immigrant families in their social work programs, as well as in training and mentorship for students. These unexpected, but important findings illuminate these workers' experiences and suggest possible gaps within the child welfare literature, as well as in agency training and social work curriculum.

Limitations

After completing interviews and data collection, researchers were able to identify several limitations. A significant limitation of this study was due to the Covid-19 pandemic. With the pandemic restrictions in place, in-person interviews were not an option. Therefore, finding participants for interviews via Zoom, WebEx, and other virtual meeting platforms was challenging. In addition, the

closure of the campus limited researchers' access to possible participants within the School of Social Work. This limitation impacted the number of interviews.

Additionally, the diversity of the interviewees was also limited. It is crucial to conduct a study to have the perspectives of a large and more varied group. It was also limited to only interviewees in the Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. Because researchers were limited to seven interviews, this study did not reach saturation.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Future Research

As child welfare providers work with diverse groups of people with multifaceted needs, they must be properly trained and equipped with the skills, expertise, and knowledge to be effective in their social work practice. To remain effective, Child welfare agencies can benefit from taking a cultural approach towards understanding and addressing these challenges.

Recommendations for social work practice includes equipping child welfare providers the skills and knowledge of resources that are specifically targeted to help immigrant families. This study gave insight into the way child welfare agencies are perceived by the immigrant community. Social work practice can benefit to deepen their understanding of the perception their superseding on immigrant families creates in the community to address any misconceptions. To address the negative perception of child welfare agencies,

community outreach should be a top priority to demonstrate and educate the immigrant community that child welfare presence is not always negative, and its main goal is to provide resources and education to keep the family together. To continue outreach efforts, child welfare agencies can benefit from hosting community meetings with immigrant clients and families to answer any concerns, questions, or to open the floor for grievances. Another benefit to social work practice in child welfare is to assign a department specifically designed to help child welfare providers and immigrant families be able to connect to resources, aid, and translators.

Recommendations for social work policy focuses on child welfare agencies and their efforts in addressing racism and xenophobia at the workplace. Child welfare agencies can benefit from taking these findings into consideration and improving their policies on discrimination and workplace behavior. Increasing workshops to promote diversity awareness and cultural diversity for all employees to participate in will bring forth many benefits for personal and professional development. Changes to improve translation services available for child welfare providers and immigrant families is beneficial and important to have available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and free of charge to help bridge the gap of communication between providers and clients.

Future social work research can benefit from the findings of this study to improve social work curriculum in schools to enhance the skills and cultural

competence that social work students need to work with diverse groups. A recommendation shared by the participants is to have “a specific course [in schools] dedicated to just working with immigrants” (Participant 2). Social work students benefit from having their professors place more emphasis on working with immigrant clients. Future curriculum in schools should offer electives that promote immigrant students to get in touch and bring awareness with their culture and empower students.

Summary

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from this study is that child welfare providers working with immigrant families encounter challenges that impact their services and the providers’ work environment. The seven significant themes were identified to briefly look at what social workers lack in their agencies. If these barriers are addressed, it may improve the services provided to immigrant families and lead to an improved work environment for child welfare providers.

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to help us understand social work students' and practitioners' preparation for and experiences serving immigrant clients in child welfare. This study is being conducted by Dr. Deirdre Lanesskog, Assistant Professor, and Dr. Armando Barragan, Assistant Professor at California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, Social Work Subcommittee, California State University, San Bernardino.

DESCRIPTION: You are being asked to complete a virtual interview in which you will be asked to describe your experiences learning about and working with immigrant clients in child welfare.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, and you can stop participating at any time. We will not notify the Title IV-E program, the School of Social Work, your employer, or your professors of your decision to participate.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your identity and anything you say will be kept confidential. Only the CSUSB research team will have access to the information you provide. This information will be kept in password protected files. We will destroy the audio recording after transcription, and we will remove any information that might be used to identify you from the transcript. We will not identify you or anything that might reveal your identity in any of our future reports or articles. The only time we would reveal your name is if we were required to do so by a judge or if you tell us that you intend to harm yourself or others (including if you disclose child abuse).

DURATION: This interview is expected to take between 30 and 60 minutes.

RISKS: There are minimal risks to you from participating in this study, such as feeling uncomfortable talking about your experiences.

BENEFITS: There are no direct benefits from participating in this study. What we learn from this study may help us to improve services for clients and for staff.

AUDIO RECORDING: Interviews will be audio-recorded with your permission and these audio recordings transcribed word for word. _____ (check here) I understand that this research will be audio recorded.

CONTACT: If you have questions about this study, you may contact Deirdre Lanesskog at (909)537-7222 or at dlanesskog@csusb.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the Research Compliance Officer, Michael Gillespie at (909)537-7588.

RESULTS: Results from this study will be available one year from your participation date from Dr. Lanesskog at 909-537-7222.

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

SIGNATURE: Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide
Title IVE Research Project

- 1) Tell me about your professional work experience.
PROMPT: What is your current job? With what agency?
PROMPT: How long have you been working in the field? With this agency?
PROMPT: What other positions have you held? With this agency or other agencies?
- 2) Tell me about your education and training background?
PROMPT: Do you have a degree? In what field, from what school(s)?
PROMPT: Any on the job training?
- 3) Which languages do you speak?
PROMPT: Do you consider yourself fluent in speaking, writing, reading?
PROMPT: How did you learn this language? At home, at school? Any education or training in this language?
PROMPT: Do you use this language at work? How often? If no, why not?
- 4) Tell me about your personal experience with immigrants/immigration.
PROMPT: Are you or family members immigrants? From which country(ies) and when?
PROMPT: Describe your understanding of immigrants and immigration experiences?

As I mentioned, I'm especially interested in your experiences working with immigrants.

- 5) Tell me about your professional experiences with immigrant families.
PROMPT: How often? What percentage of cases?
PROMPT: How well prepared were you to serve immigrant families?
PROMPT: Any differences working with immigrant families vs. other families?
- 6) Thinking back over the past year, think about one particular case involving an immigrant client or family. Walk me through what happened in this case and how you worked with the family.
PROMPT: What happened?
PROMPT: What did you do? What was the outcome? What did you learn?
PROMPT: What skills, knowledge or expertise were important?

Next, I'd like to ask some questions about the role of your agency, your supervisor, and your colleagues in your work with immigrant clients.

- 7) How would you describe your agency's approach to serving immigrant clients?
PROMPT: In what ways does your agency support your work?
PROMPT: Thinking about the case you described earlier, what did or could the agency do to support your work with the family?
- 8) How would you describe the support you receive from your supervisor in your work with immigrant clients?
PROMPT: How well does your supervisor understand this work?
PROMPT: Recall that challenging case you described? How did your supervisor respond?
PROMPT: What type of support would you like from your supervisor?
- 9) How do your colleagues react to your work with immigrant clients?
PROMPT: How well do your colleagues understand this work? Do they serve immigrants?
PROMPT: Recall that challenging case you described? How did your colleagues respond?
PROMPT: What type of support or reaction would you like from your colleagues?

We're almost finished with this interview. Now I'd like to ask you for your own recommendations.

- 10) If you could tell the leadership at your agency about your work with immigrant clients/families, what would you want them to know?
PROMPT: What do you need, if anything, from your agency/supervisor/colleagues?
PROMPT: What do your immigrant clients need, if anything, from your agency/supervisor/colleagues?
- 11) What would you want your BASW/MSW program/instructors to know about your work with immigrant clients/families?
PROMPT: What could we have done, if anything, to better prepare you?
PROMPT: What advice would you give current students about their future work serving immigrant families?
- 12) If you could wave a magic wand and have all the power and resources you needed to serve immigrant families, where would you start?
PROMPT: What would make the biggest difference? Why?

PROMPT: Who or what might get in the way?

- 13) Are there other social workers you suggest I should talk to who might be able to explain more about social work with immigrants, or who might have a different perspective?

PROMPT: Any colleagues? Former classmates?

PROMPT: Name and contact information?

APPENDIX C
IRB APPROVAL



April 15, 2021

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Administrative/Exempt Review Determination

Status: Determined Exempt

IRB-FY2021-38

Deirdre Lanesskog Armando Barragan Jr., Samar Natour
CSBS - Psychology, CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
[5500 University Parkway](#)
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Deirdre Lanesskog Armando Barragan Jr., Samar Natour:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Social Workers Experiences Serving Immigrant Clients in Child Welfare" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants. Important Note: This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Visit the Office of Academic Research website for more information at <https://www.csusb.edu/academic-research>.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. The Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse

IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

Important Notice: For all in-person research following IRB approval all research activities must be approved through the Office of Academic Research by filling out the [Project Restart and Continuity Plan](#).

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

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2021-38 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive from participants and/or others related to your research may be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Nicole Dabbs

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

ND/MG

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

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

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Angeles J Tovar and Yvette Robles

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Angeles J Tovar and Yvette Robles

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

a. Introduction and Literature:

Assigned Leader: Angeles J Tovar

Assisted by: Yvette Robles

b. Methods:

Team Effort: Angeles J Tovar and Yvette Robles

c. Results:

Team Effort: Angeles J Tovar and Yvette Robles

d. Discussion:

Assigned Leader: Angeles J Tovar

Assisted by: Yvette Robles