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SAFETY ORGANIZED PRACTICE TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION IN CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

Alison Lucado

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SAFETY ORGANIZED PRACTICE TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION
IN CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

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
Alison Lucado

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the macro level implementation of the Safety Organized Practice framework for best practice in Child Welfare social work. Safety Organized Practice is a social work framework for engagement with families that is used in California and various other states. It is a relatively new approach to social work in Child Welfare so many agencies are in various stages of implementation. This study gathered qualitative data through virtual interviews with social workers.

The key findings of this study were that Safety Organized Practice implementation needs to start at the supervisor and management level to ensure social workers have the support they need when applying the new tools and techniques in their direct practice. The other key finding in this study was that social workers need the time to invest in trying a new approach and that is always going to be a challenge in this field. If an agency is hoping to fully implement Safety Organized Practice, consideration has to be made to the demands of Child Welfare social work and the worker's ability to learn and practice a new skill.

This study can be used for Child Welfare agencies to reference when starting to implement or considering the implementation of Safety Organized Practice to help the process be more efficient, successful, and supportive for the social workers and agency.

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CHAPTER ONE: ASSESSMENT

Introduction

Chapter one starts with identifying the focus question of this study, how Safety Organized Practice (SOP) is used, implemented, and supported in a Child Welfare agency in Central California. SOP is an evidence-based way of practicing social work that aims to make engagement with families more positive and relationship building easier, which is a core component of successful outcomes in Child Welfare. SOP uses social work skills such as solution-focused questioning, trauma-informed care, building safety networks, and teaming to partner with families and help them make the behavior changes necessary to safely care for their children. This is followed by an explanation of the chosen paradigm, post-positivism and rationale for choosing this paradigm for this study. Next is a literature review focused on Safety Organized Practice interventions, data, and implementation across the United States. After that, the theoretical orientation is discussed. This chapter ends by addressing the potential contributions of the research on macro and micro level social work practice.

Research Focus

The focus for this study was how SOP was implemented by the workers in the field, by the agency as a whole, and what the next steps are regarding implementation. This included which elements of training SOP are most relevant

to the work and helpful to the social workers and how workers were supported in implementing those elements. SOP training elements include foundation level training, support through coaching from peers and supervisors, and learning new skills specific to SOP to enhance engagement with families. A further focus of the study was whether workers were receiving sufficient guidance on how to translate the model to their day-to-day practice. This study was conducted in a medium sized county in central California in cooperation with the local Child Welfare Services agency.

Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

This study was conducted using the post-positivist paradigm. The post-positivist paradigm “takes an inductive exploratory approach to understanding an objective reality” (Morris, 2013) which best fit this study because it allowed the researcher to evolve the problem focus while conducting the research and take time for reflection throughout the process to support the data collection, analysis, and interpretation to best understand what was really going on in the agency being studied. The post-positivist paradigm assumes that reality is objective, but the “immutable laws and mechanisms” cannot be completely understood (Morris, 2013). Therefore, data needed to be gathered in natural settings through interviews and observations (Morris, 2013). The role of the researcher in a post-positivist paradigm is to remain neutral and understand and limit the influence they may have on the direction of the study (Morris, 2013). Objectivity is always the goal in any study, but the post-positivism approach accounts for some

aspects of human experience brought to the research which is why this approach best fits this study (Morris, 2013). The post-positivist approach understands that there is a data collection and measurement aspect of the research, but also supports the idea that a lot of information can be gathered through open exploration while keeping in mind any bias and anything else that can impact the study based on the topic and setting (Morris, 2013).

The post-positivist paradigm, compared to the positivist paradigm, assumes that strict methodology data gathering procedures cannot accurately describe human nature and what is actually going on in the environment (Morris, 2013). Because of this nature of reality aspect of post-positivism, qualitative data is the best fit for this paradigm. Using this approach allowed the study to eb and flow with the responses from the interview and created opportunity to better understand how SOP is being used in social work settings. The post-positivist paradigm supported the efforts of this study to gain knowledge about the focus problem, provided insight about successful interventions, and identified the impact on all levels of social work practice.

Literature Review

SOP provides an evidence-based foundation of skills for social workers to use when engaging with families in the Child Welfare System. This literature review begins by covering the definition of SOP and the values of the practice. Next, SOP integration with other aspects of Child Welfare, SOP interventions,

and agency specific implementation will be discussed. The literature review ends by describing the link between the literature and this study.

Definition

SOP is a way of doing social work that focuses on engagement, assessment, critical thinking, and creating safety for children and families involved in the Child Welfare system (UC Berkley School of Social Work, 2021). SOP builds on strength-based practices like cultural humility, trauma-informed practice, and structured decision making to help families create and maintain safety for their children (UC Berkley School of Social Work, 2021). Cultural humility refers to the idea that there is always something to learn about someone's culture and how it affects their interactions with the world around them. Nobody is an expert on every culture and an approach based in humility is best to support children and families. Trauma-informed practice refers to a practice that aims to understand the impact of trauma on an individual or family system and guides interactions in a way that honors the experience, reduces any further trauma, and supports emotional processing of that trauma. Structured decision making refers to the assessments that social workers in Child Welfare make at key decision making points in the case like investigating referrals, opening a case, reunifying children, and closing the Child Welfare case.

There are three main values within SOP: increased safety, permanency, and well-being; good working relationships; and improved critical thinking (UC Berkley School of Social Work, 2021). These values are achieved by establishing

purposeful relationships, behaviorally specific case plans, teaming, cultural humility, mapping concerns, and shared understanding about expectations (UC Berkley School of Social Work, 2021). Behaviorally based case plans refer to Child Welfare case plans that focus on a caregiver's change in behavior as opposed to service compliance. These plans aim to be specific and clear in regard to what behavior change is needed in order to successfully reunify children with their families and ensure safety, permanency, and wellbeing while in their parents' care.

History of SOP

SOP was developed out of the Signs of Safety Model. Signs of Safety was created by Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards in Western Australia. Edwards and Turnell collaborated with numerous child protection workers to develop a model that supports expanding the investigation of risk to include strengths within the family system and periods of safety that can be bolstered to stabilize a family (Elia International, 2023). This model aims to take a balanced approach to assessing for danger, strengths, and safety. Through the use of international gatherings hosted by the Signs of Safety organization, the approach was adopted by the United States. California, specifically, adapted the approach to take the foundation that Edwards and Turnell established and added the structured decision-making aspect to create Safety Organized Practice. Today, child welfare workers that practice SOP interact with and learn from those that

use the Signs of Safety approach because they are so similar and are based in the same principles.

Integration with Other Aspects of Child Welfare

SOP is intended to seamlessly integrate and even support other key aspects of Child Welfare like the Core Practice Model and the Child and Family Team process. The Core Practice Model was established in 2012 and identified practice and leadership behaviors to guide practice, service delivery and decision-making behaviors for county child welfare agencies (UC Berkley School of Social Work, 2021). A Child and Family Team is an opportunity for collaboration with all the people involved with a family in the Child Welfare system. These teams consist of informal support people like friends and family and formal support people like therapists, tribal representatives, and any professionals providing services to the family. Child and Family Team meetings give the team an opportunity to come together to discuss things that are going well, any concerns that are coming up, and make plans for the next steps with everyone in the same room hearing the same message. It limits the miscommunications and multiple conversations and allows for transparent conversations with plenty of support surrounding the family.

Language from SOP is used throughout the Core Practice Model, and SOP provides the concrete tools and strategies for social workers to put the Core Practice Model in to practice with families in the field (UC Berkley School of Social Work, 2021).

SOP is based on collaboration with safety networks and families, so the Child and Family Team process also uses SOP language to bring people together toward a common understanding of the strengths and concerns. Safety networks are defined as members of the family's team that understand the concerns of Child Welfare, provide support or safety for the family in some way, and are willing to meet with Child Welfare to discuss strengths, concerns, and be part of the plan for next steps to address the concerns. SOP tools are used to monitor the progress and effectiveness of a safety plan and safety network in between Child and Family Team meetings (UC Berkley School of Social Work, 2021).

Interventions

SOP provides social workers an abstract framework to conduct social work, but it also provides specific tools and interventions that can be used in direct contact with families. Some of the tools and techniques that are most commonly associated with SOP are the three houses, safety mapping, solution-focused questions, harm and worry statements, and safety circles. Refer to appendix C for a visual of the three houses tool, appendix D for the safety mapping tool, and appendix E for the safety circle tool. The three houses tool is used to support a social worker when interviewing children. There are outlines of three houses and the social worker guides that child through a discussion and drawing activity about good things that are happening in the home, worries in the home, and dreams they have about their family and home environment. Safety mapping is

done in the form of a four-quadrant map that supports the social worker, Child and Family Team, or anyone involved in the case in separating out the key pieces to get a clear understanding of the case. The four quadrants are labeled supporting strengths, acts of protection or safety, complicating factors, and present or future danger. Solution-focused questions are similar to motivational interviewing techniques in that they seek to bring people towards solutions and focus on moving forward. Solution-focused questions are usually categorized in the following ways: coping questions, scaling questions, position questions, preferred future questions, and exception questions. Harm and worry statements are clear and direct statements that help the Child and Family Team understand why Child Welfare is involved with a family. The harm statement reflects that was reported, investigated, and found to be true. The worry statement reflects what the team is worried about happening if nothing changes within the family system to ensure the safety of the child. Safety circles refers to a diagram used with a family to identify their support network. The diagram provides a visual representation of who is surrounding the family and supports the conversation about increasing the support the family relies on.

Most of these interventions can be used across the life of a Child Welfare case from the initial investigation through permanency, because they all focus on creating and maintaining safety for the children. The interventions are intended to help social workers connect with families and establish a shared understanding of the concerns and goals for the family.

Conclusion

Although SOP is an evidence-based social work practice, it has not been studied empirically. Specifically, there have been no studies of if and how the values of SOP are translated into day-to-day practice with social workers and the families they work with. There has also been a lack of research done examining SOP training processes and ongoing support for the workers. This study aims to fill some of these gaps and provide a more comprehensive idea of how SOP is being implemented.

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical orientation that grounded this study was the systems theory. Systems theory helps the researcher understand the relationship between a person and his/her environment, specifically how each component interacts and what benefits or complications that has on the individual (Friedman & Allen, 2011). In this study, systems theory helped the researcher understand the Child Welfare Agency system and what impact that system has on the social worker, specifically regarding training and agency support for SOP implementation.

The Child Welfare Services is a large system that is affected by several other systems like the State Child Welfare Agency and local county governments. It is important to be able to use Systems Theory to help understand the interaction of all these large systems and what impact that could have on SOP at the worker level. SOP is one component of a much larger and

more complex system, the Child Welfare System. Although this study examined one single component, it was important to keep in mind that it is part of a bigger whole. Any information that was derived from this study about SOP and any changes to the training or supports would need to be created in the context of the larger system.

Contribution of Study to Micro and Macro Social Work Practice

The findings of this study have the potential to provide insight into what is working well, which areas needed additional support, and what should happen next in the process of implementing SOP interventions in this county. This insight could save the agency money and resources by helping ensure that the SOP training and implementation is executed efficiently and effectively. The goal of SOP is to provide meaningful engagement and teaming with families from the very beginning of contact with Child Welfare, so if SOP is fully implemented at the Emergency Response level, formal intervention could be avoided. For example, when San Diego County was able to master SOP, they were able to close two of their juvenile court rooms because there were so few cases due to the elite level of social work happening during the initial investigations. This resulted in fewer removals and fewer open cases, which saves the county money (Casey Family Programs, 2019). As shown in this example, more support for SOP and more support for the social workers learning the practice will translate into better outcomes for families involved in the Child Welfare system.

At the macro level, this study provided information that influenced agency wide policy about training and expectations of workers regarding SOP. At the micro level, social workers referred to interventions that have had positive results for other social workers working with very similar populations in the same county to enhance their own social work practice. This will hopefully increase positive outcomes for families in this community.

Summary

Chapter one started by identifying the research focus of this study. It went on to describe the research paradigm that will be used throughout the study. Next, a literature review was used to explore the aspects of SOP including the definition, values, integration with Child Welfare practice, interventions, and current implementation in a medium sized county in California. Following that, an overview of the theoretical orientation that will be throughout the research was presented. Finally, the potential contribution of the study to micro and macro social work practice was presented.

CHAPTER TWO:

ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Chapter two starts with a description of the study site for this research proposal and introduction and engagement of the gatekeepers at the research site. Next, chapter two discusses the self-preparation phase of the research. This chapter finishes with an overview of the diversity, ethical, and political issues associated with the research and the role technology plays in the study.

Research Site

The study site was a Child Welfare Services Agency serving a medium sized county in central California. This site provides Child Welfare investigations, family reunification and family maintenance services, permanency and adoption services, and voluntary family maintenance services to the community. Investigations are done when the agency receives a report of child abuse from the community and a social worker investigates to address the concerns and conclude the allegations. Family reunification and family maintenance services are court ordered services that provide guidance and make decisions regarding when it is safe to reunify a child with the family and when it is safe to close the Child Welfare case all together. Permanency and adoption services provide support to children for long-term care with relatives or community members and

establish a permanent plan for their care through court ordered adoption or legal guardianship. Voluntary Family Maintenance services provide an avenue for families to receive support regarding changing their behavior to enhance the safety for the children in the home prior to any court involvement on a voluntary basis.

The population this site works with are children and families in the community. This county has a population of 283,111 people as of 2019 (United State Census Bureau, 2019). The county has a majority Caucasian population with 88.8% identifying at white alone (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Just under 18% of the population is under the age of 18 and about 91% of the adult population graduated from high school (United States Census Bureau, 2019).

The social workers that work for this agency are required to have at least a Bachelor level education in social work or a related field. All social workers report to a supervisor that has a master's degree or at least six years of experience working as a social worker. In addition to formal education, each social worker goes through an induction training program upon being hired at this agency, which consists of agency specific policies, community resources, partnering agencies, and an overview of the Child Welfare System. The workers are then assigned to different units and continue training within those units. Information about the number of social workers employed at the agency and their demographic characteristics is not available.

The Child Welfare Services agency participating in this study did a department wide, year-long SOP training module in 2012. Since that time, there has been little to no support or oversight on the implementation of the SOP skills or interventions. In 2019, the agency decided to retrain all social workers, supervisors, and managers. This time the agency chose to implement SOP using a once monthly training lead by a social worker and supervisor within the agency. This decision was based on feedback from social workers that trainings lead by internal personnel were much more beneficial because the training could be tailored to the specific needs of this agency's workers. The trainings include lecture material and activities using active cases to help keep the workers engaged in the material. The agency also offers monthly SOP coaching sessions where social workers can bring a challenging case or referral and get support with mapping, behavior specific case plan goals, safety planning, or any other aspect of SOP that the worker requests. The agency will be utilizing SOP coaches within each unit once all staff are adequately trained. San Luis Obispo County is currently trying to implement a tool to measure fidelity within each unit as a form of accountability for workers and supervisors.

Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site

Engagement with the gatekeepers, including the regional manager that oversees the training program within the agency, was initially conducted through email. The researcher provided the regional manager with a copy of the research proposal and asked for approval to conduct the research within the training

setting. Further detailed communication was done through virtual meetings to ensure understanding and approval for the research. After regional manager approval, the researcher sought approval from the Assistant Director and Director of the agency through the same process.

The researcher explained the study and emphasized the benefits to the agency based on previous efforts made to train staff on implementation of Safety Organized Practice. The researcher explained that the outcomes of this study could steer the training team towards more successful outcomes and ensure the trainees are getting the most out of the curriculum. This research also helped the agency determine how well Safety Organized Practice is being implemented in the agency and what areas needed improvement. This interested the agency because there is not currently any tracking system for the new training program that has been implemented. The researcher allowed the agency leadership to review the findings prior to finalization of the write-up to provide feedback and to help the agency feel more comfortable about the material that is published. The researcher also provided the gatekeepers with an infographic to summarize the findings.

Self-Preparation

To prepare for this study, the researcher conducted a thorough literature review, including agency policies, training procedures, and current processes specific to the County. The researcher also reflected on the broader impact of SOP on Child Welfare agencies and how this study could impact the practice as

a whole. The researcher reviewed literature from across the United States and internationally to gain perspective on how child welfare intervention are affected by SOP.

Due to the limited amount of peer-reviewed literature regarding this topic, the researcher relied heavily on training materials and first-hand experience and knowledge about the topic to prepare for the study. Interviews and information gathering conversations were conducted with supervisors and peers prior to data collection to gain a comprehensive understanding of the population that were included in the study.

The researcher worked closely with the agency training staff to cultivate questions for the study that capture the outcomes that were most beneficial for continued training and implementation of Safety Organized Practice in this agency.

The researcher had to be sensitive to the length of the study, as most social workers are very busy, and any extra work may become a burden and skew the results. The researcher had to be sensitive to the anonymity of the participants, as this agency was a very small county, and the participants must feel comfortable providing honest responses without the possibility of repercussion.

Diversity Issues

The main diversity issue that came up in this research was the attitude and willingness of the participants to engage in this topic. Social workers that

have been practicing social work for many years are often much more resistant to a new and different way of practicing social work and responded differently to this study than a newer social worker that has only been trained using the Safety Organized Practice method. Both populations have valuable responses and were included in the study to ensure an accurate representation of the agency is captured. The researcher ensured both populations were represented in the study using stratified purposeful sampling as detailed in chapter three of this proposal.

Another diversity issue that this researcher often encountered was participants not taking the research seriously due to the researcher's young age. The researcher had to work diligently at professionalism and ensure proper preparation was done for the study to limit this issue.

Ethical Issues

The main ethical issue that came up in this study is the researcher's conflicting roles of working within the agency and conducting the study. This issue was thoroughly discussed with the agency and gatekeepers to allow full transparency and agreement regarding the different roles. The goal was to keep the roles as employee and researcher separate, but this issue was discussed with participants prior to the study to ensure their understanding. The researcher attempted to conduct interviews outside of work hours to help ensure separation from the two roles.

The other ethical issue was anonymity, as discussed in the preparation section. The researcher discussed the importance of confidentiality prior to starting any interviews or surveys to help the participants feel more comfortable in providing honest responses. The researcher also reached agreement with the agency that anonymity will be respected throughout the study to limit any push back or potential issues. The researcher removed any information from the interview that would potentially make the interviewee identifiable.

Political Issues

In general, the agency supported this research and was welcoming of the results as it can improve the training and practice of the workers, which will hopefully make a positive impact on the outcomes of families in the system. To help the agency feel more comfortable with the research, the researcher allowed the agency leadership to review the findings and allowed them to have final say on what does and does not get shared.

A political issue came up between the researcher and participants because they share the same role as social worker. Sometimes in research studies, the researcher can be seen as holding a position of power over the participant (Morris, 2013). This was further complicated when the researcher and the participant share the same role outside the study. The researcher addressed this issue by clearly explaining the role of the researcher as simply an information gatherer and continuing a positive peer relationship when the study was completed.

The Role of Technology in Engagement

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, technology was relied on heavily in this study. The initial contact with the gatekeepers was done through email and the subsequent meetings were done through a virtual platform. Much of the study had to be conducted via virtual interviews and telephone calls because it was unsafe to meet in person.

Summary

This study was conducted at the Child Welfare Agency in a medium sized county in California. The researcher contacted the regional manager in the agency to obtain approval for the research. The researcher prepared for the study by reviewing the literature and conducting interviews with training staff. Diversity issues included the previous training for social workers and the researcher's young age. The ethical issue in this study was the researcher's conflicting role of employee and researcher. The political issue was maintaining the anonymity of the participants throughout the study. Finally, the role of technology was discussed as it was the main source of communication throughout the study.

CHAPTER THREE: IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

Chapter three starts by discussing the study participants and how the participants will be selected. A section on data gathering and the phases of data collection follows. Next are sections on data recording and data analysis. Chapter three ends with a section about termination and follow up.

Study Participants

The participants in this study were social workers from a medium sized county in central California. There were fourteen participants with thirteen female and one male. The social workers ranged in age from mid 20s to mid 50s. The social workers also ranged in professional experience from less than one year to over fifteen years. Both monolingual English-speaking social workers and bilingual Spanish and English social workers were included in the study. The participants included workers from different units within Child Welfare, including emergency response, dependency investigation, family maintenance and reunification, and adoptions. Refer to Figure 1 for study participant data table.

	Age	Gender	Years of Experience
Participant 1	46	Female	16
Participant 2	29	Female	3
Participant 3	37	Female	6
Participant 4	33	Female	5
Participant 5	25	Female	1
Participant 6	51	Female	25
Participant 7	36	Male	10
Participant 8	36	Female	7
Participant 9	48	Female	8
Participant 10	26	Female	1
Participant 11	29	Female	4
Participant 12	30	Female	2
Participant 13	44	Female	12
Participant 14	25	Female	1

Figure 1 Study Participant Demographic Data Table

Selection of Participants

This study used a purposeful sampling technique to gather information from a small sample and to limit credibility issues by reducing suspicion of bias (Morris, 2013). Purposive sampling is preferred to random sampling as it provides an opportunity to identify participants that can give the most accurate and complete data about the subject (Morris, 2013). For this study, purposive sampling was used to narrow down the sample to social workers within the specific study site. To further narrow down the participants, maximum variation sampling was used. Maximum variation sampling is intended to include participants with varying experience to highlight any shared patterns in the experiences (Morris, 2013). In this study, participants were chosen from the Child Welfare Services division across various programs and with varying degrees of experience as a social worker. The last type of sampling used in this

study was criterion sampling. Criterion sampling narrows down the sample to include a specific characteristic in the study (Morris, 2013). In this study, criterion sampling was used to target participants that have received SOP training through the study site. The researcher sent out an email to all Child Welfare social workers within the agency that received the SOP training, approximately fifty workers, and asked for participation in this study. This type of selection process best suited this study because it allowed voluntary participation from participants within a specific population with the identified criteria. The downside of using this method was the limited number of participants and the extensive time it took for participants to respond and follow through with completing the interview.

Data Gathering

Qualitative data was gathered for this study through individual interviews. The interviews were conducted via a virtual platform as that is currently the only safe form of communication at the time. The researcher started by explaining the purpose of the study and the role of the researcher and the participant. The researcher did not use any throw away questions to build rapport with the participants but did build a mutual understanding with the study participants at the beginning of the interview that focused on what the interview was about and what they can expect to help the participants feel more comfortable providing responses. The interview consisted of questions that covered topics like training received, agency messaging about SOP, improvement and additional support needed, barriers to implementation, and support received. The researcher

utilized mostly open-ended questions to elicit responses from the participants that allowed for individualized responses and room for exploration based on what was said. Refer to Appendix A for the interview questions.

Phases of Data Collection

The researcher started the individual interview process by obtaining informed consent from the participant. The researcher continued the interview by asking general questions about the training process and then go to more specific questions about training and support received from the agency. The researcher closed the interview with any follow up questions based on the responses provided by the participant and asked for any additional input that was not brought forward by the interview questions. After the interview, the researcher reflected on the interview. This reflection included reviewing the transcripts and making notes about further questions, body language, tone of voice, and thinking about ways to expand on any topics that were brought up to enhance future interviews. The researcher also used a journal to make notes for better interviewing strategies, how to help participants feel more comfortable in the interview, and ways to foster genuine interaction and responses within the interview setting. The researcher reviewed feedback from each interview and made adjustments based on this feedback to allow for a more conversational feel to further interviews. The researcher also documented themes in the data that came up to ensure that those themes were explored in other interviews and to enhance data analysis. Transcripts from the interviews and journal notes were

reviewed prior to any subsequent interviews and throughout the data analysis process.

Data Recording

The researcher obtained consent from each participant to record the virtual individual interviews. Video recording ensured accuracy in documenting the information, but if the participant was not comfortable with being recorded, the researcher took handwritten notes during the interview. Since the interview was virtual, handwriting notes was not too distracting or uncomfortable for the participant. If the researcher noticed that note taking during the interview was not creating a good environment for the interview, the researcher took notes immediately after the interview.

The researcher also kept two journals. One journal was for interview notes and the other was for researcher reflection.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis for qualitative research using a bottom-up approach starts with open coding. Open coding helps the researcher identify common themes in the responses and allows the researcher to refine the interview questions as needed based on the coding information (Morris, 2013). Next, the researcher did axial coding on the data. Axial coding creates categories and dimensions to the data for further studying (Morris, 2013). After axial coding, selective coding, or theory development, took place (Morris, 2013). Finally, the researcher compiled

the data, documented the findings, and explained the impact to the field of social work.

Summary

This chapter covered the implementation stage of the study. It started with an explanation of who the participants of the study were and how they were selected. Next, the methods of data gathering, phases of data collection, and data recording were discussed. The chapter ended with a description of the data analysis process.

CHAPTER FOUR:

EVALUATION

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data for this study was done through open coding and axial coding. Open coding revealed nine open codes: module training, coaching, mandatory training, supervisor support but lack of knowledge, best practice, training needs, time to utilize the SOP tools and techniques, feeling uncomfortable with trying new tools, and support from SOP leads.

Open Coding

Module Training

The code module training is defined as a training series for social workers in the agency represented in this study that was implemented in 2019. The series consists of eight modules that focus on different topics within SOP like safety planning, case planning, interviewing children, trauma, and culture. These trainings were offered monthly, and all Child Welfare social workers within the agency were required to complete all eight modules.

To further define this open code, participant three stated “we received a lot of training through the internal module training series that supported our initial learning of the concepts in SOP and gave us a good foundation for how to start using it in our social work practice.” Participant nine stated “we did those

mandatory virtual trainings that focused on specific topics monthly which helped me learn the basics of SOP and start to get familiar with how to change my social work to incorporate the new skills.” Participant six stated “the module training series was the first training I got regarding SOP as a social worker in [this agency] which really changed my perspective about SOP and gave me some great tools to work into my engagement with families.”

Coaching

For this study, coaching is defined as informal feedback or formal four quadrant mapping regarding a case or referral. The social worker provides an overview of the family system and concerns and is able to receive guidance, suggestions and ideas about engagement strategies, safety planning, assessments or other aspects of SOP. Coaching can be done in one-on-one or group settings.

To further define coaching in relation to this study, participant four stated “we also had training through monthly coaching opportunities where we could bring our hard cases and get feedback and guidance from peers.” Participant five stated “coaching gave me the opportunity to practice more of my skills and get ideas from other social workers in the room. It also helped me get all the aspects of a case out at once and process through the nuances to be able to accurately assess the family and the needs.”

Mandatory Training

The open code mandatory training is defined as the training requirements tied to the SOP implementation plan for this agency for social workers.

To further define this code, participant twelve stated “we got emails all the time from staff development, management and our supervisor that we had to attend the mandatory SOP training that month.” Participant eight stated “there was a lot of mandatory training involved with SOP that was good for accountability but also sort of overwhelming at times.” Participant thirteen stated “I was clear about the expectations regarding the training because it was messaged from [the agency] as mandatory and attendance and participation was tracked. There wasn’t any wiggle room to not attend which was good because then everyone was trained on the same things the same way.”

Supervisor Support but Lack of Knowledge

The open code supervisor support but lack of knowledge is defined as the social worker supervisors providing support and accountability for SOP but lacking the knowledge and expertise to fully support implementation within the specific units of social work.

To further define this code, participant three stated “my supervisor always supported me attending the trainings and trying the tools and strategies, but never really gave me any feedback or guidance about how or when to implement things.” Participant four stated “it seemed like my supervisor didn’t know how to utilize the tools or skills from SOP so they always told me to ask someone else

for help.” Participant seven stated “I was always able to move my schedule around to be able to attend trainings and coaching activities, but when I went to my supervisor for guidance on how to implement or try some of the tools I learned from the training when I interviewed families, I didn’t get much feedback and she seemed uncomfortable with me asking her. I don’t think she really knows how to use the SOP tools or techniques herself which makes it difficult to help us.”

Best Practice

The open code best practice is defined as the approach that is most effective and well received by families and the community within the field of social work. It is the ideal way to do social work in Child Welfare.

To further define this code, participant two stated “staff development and my supervisor always message that SOP is best practice social work and that was really motivating for me.” Participant six stated “SOP feels like the best social work I can be doing when I am engaging with children and families. I can get better engagement which allows me to assess for safety more accurately.” Participant eleven stated “learning about and implementing SOP feels like the best practice social work the trainers are talking about. I can see how engaging in this way builds better relationships and creates better outcomes for the families in the Child Welfare system.”

Training Needs

The open code training needs is defined as the ideas or suggestions the participants in this study brought up as needs for SOP training beyond what they have already received.

To further define this code, participant one stated “I really want additional support with SOP skills that are specific to my job and how I interact with families. It needs to be more than just overviews and general topics because I feel like I have all that basic knowledge already.” Participant ten stated “the in-person training that we did before the pandemic was so much more useful and interactive. I felt like I learned so much more being in the same room as my peers and trainers.” Participant twelve stated “training that focuses on something that applies directly to my work and allows me to interact with peers, trainers, and new social workers to build ideas and collaborate would be great.”

Time to Utilize the SOP Skills and Techniques

The open code time to utilize the SOP skills and techniques is defined as the social worker having the time during the contacts with families to try out a new SOP tool or skill to enhance engagement.

To further define this code, participant nine stated “I have so many things to do that I feel like sometimes the SOP tools and skills would add more to my plate that I don’t have time for.” Participant six stated “training and practice took some time and I had to be intentional about it, but now I feel like using SOP is natural and actually takes less time to engage in meaningful conversations with

the families I work with.” Participant two stated "social workers have so many tasks to do each day and with each client that is can be really overwhelming and take more time to learn a new technique like SOP.”

Feeling Uncomfortable with Trying New Tools

The open code feeling uncomfortable with trying new tools is defined as the social worker expressing that is it hard and there is discomfort in trying a new tool that they learn through SOP, especially in interactions that are challenging or with people that are upset.

Participant ten stated “it’s uncomfortable to try something new and not be confident in the outcome like the tools in SOP encourage social workers to do. We don’t know how the family will respond or what to do if they don’t want to engage at all. It’s hard to find motivation to put myself in that position, so I don’t think I use the techniques as often as I should” Participant thirteen stated “maybe if I would have started my career with learning to engage with families using SOP, it would be different, but at this point, I am used to my way of doing things and I know what to expect. I don’t have to be in uncomfortable situations where I’m trying something new so why would I try SOP?” Participant five stated “it was hard in the beginning to be nervous and to just try something new with a client that may or may not respond well, but the more I did it, the less uncomfortable I felt. Now, I still get nervous, but I at least have some tools and things to fall back on from SOP when I struggle to talk to a client about what is going well or any concerns I have.”

Support from SOP Leads

The open code support from SOP leads is defined as the social workers having access to peers, supervisors, and training leaders that are confident in SOP and using the skills with families. The social workers can access SOP leads through email, in-person within their assigned units, and through coaching to get extra support with specific case or referral needs. SOP leads offer one-on-one and group coaching as well as provide SOP training to further knowledge and implementation in the agency.

To further define this code, participant three stated “we got a lot of coaching and support from other social workers that were really natural and good at using SOP in our units like the SOP leads.” Participant seven stated “SOP leads provide a lot of support for specific situations that I am struggling with including having hard conversations, creating clear statements to share with the families, and offering some ideas for behavior specific case plan objectives.” Participant eight stated “I think the most support I received for SOP implementation was from the SOP leads in [the agency]. They are easy to access via email, provide a fast response, and have direct practice knowledge so their feedback is really practical and works.”

Axial Coding

The following codes emerged from the axial coding process: void in implementation, creating commitment to this new approach, next steps, and the elephant in the room.

The void in implementation comes from the open codes module training, coaching, support from SOP leads, and supervisor support but lack of knowledge. This study revealed that there were many aspects of implementation that went well. The module training series provided a foundation of knowledge to the social workers to build from. The coaching and support from the SOP leads allowed further implementation and specialized training for direct practice. Despite these good aspects of the process this county took, the lack of SOP knowledge from the supervisors in the agency was clearly a missed piece of the process.

The axial code about creating commitment to a new approach comes from the open codes mandatory training, best practice, and uncomfortable trying new tools. The messages from the leadership team of this agency that SOP is a best practice approach and that there is mandatory training involved helped to boost the motivation of the social workers and create buy in for the beginning of implementation. The desire to do better in the Child Welfare field is strong, so tying this new approach to the concept that it is best practice and providing additional support to train the workers through mandatory trainings supported the commitment to the new SOP approach. Although this was a good approach to motivate most social workers, there was a gap in this tactic in addressing the social workers that are uncomfortable trying new things and feel confident in their abilities that have gotten them far in their career.

The next steps axial code comes from the open codes training needs, supervisor support but lack of knowledge, coaching, and support from SOP leads. This code identifies where the agency should go from here to make this implementation even better and more effective. The two main ideas that were brought forward in the data were real time, in-person training that is job specific. To support this, some suggestions were to continue to allow access to coaching and SOP leads to provide peer-to-peer support, interaction, and brainstorming about ways to engage with families using SOP tools and techniques. A major piece that would need to be addressed in the next phase of implementation is training for the supervisors to close the gap in their knowledge and allow supervisors to provide real time support and guidance to social workers.

The axial code, the elephant in the room, addresses an important aspect of this study and so many others in Child Welfare Services agencies which is the idea that there is always going to be push back for any change in practice, regardless of outcomes, due to social workers feeling overwhelmed, overworked, and constantly out of time to do their jobs. This is a permanent piece of the Child Welfare System that will continue to impact the ability to create positive change in the system unless it is deliberately addressed. If an agency is serious about implementing a new best practice model to improve outcomes for families, like SOP, the big systemic changes to help reduce caseloads, increase retention of social workers, and lighten the mental and emotional load social workers carry need to be made.

The following Venn diagram shows the similarities and relationships between the axial codes using the open codes.

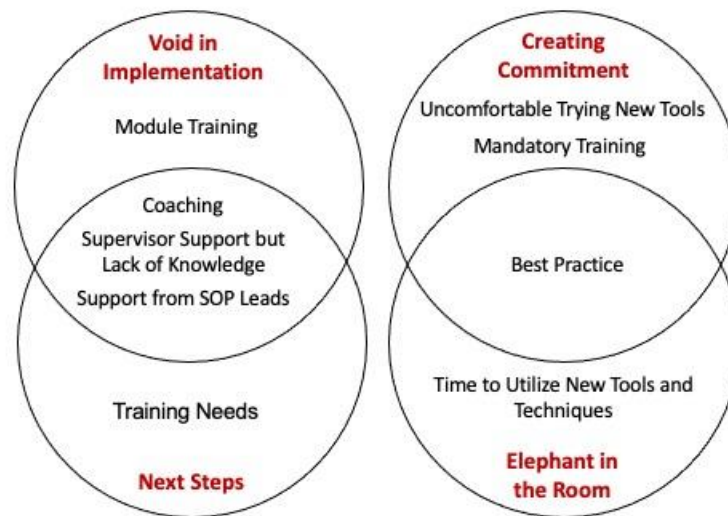


Figure 2 Axial Code Relationships

Implication of Findings for Macro Practice

This study implies that when a Child Welfare agency is trying to implement a new social work framework, like SOP, a focus on training from the top down is needed. Management and supervisor knowledge and support is a key piece of successful implementation for SOP. There should also be consideration and a

plan to address the continuous issue of social workers not having enough time to implement a new process, or even try new techniques, without major changes in the structure of the Child Welfare system.

Summary

This chapter focused on analysis of the data that was gathered in this study. It also highlighted the interpretation of the data to provide further clarification and meaning to the data from this study. This chapter also discussed the implications for macro practice based on the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

Introduction

Chapter five presents the termination of the study and the communication of the findings to the study site and participants. The chapter also explains how an ongoing relationship with the study site and participants will be maintained and a plan to disseminate the information from the study.

Termination of Study

Termination of the study was done when the researcher notified the agency stakeholders that the study was complete, and the outcomes of the study would be available after May 2023. Termination was completed with each participant at the end of their interview and they were also provided with the information that the outcome of the study would be made available after May 2023. At the completion of the study, the researcher emailed the stakeholders to thank them and the participants for being a part of this study. The researcher will also be presenting the findings from this study in poster form for the research symposium at California State University, San Bernardino.

Communication of Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

The findings of this research were documented in detail in a report filed with California State University, San Bernardino. In addition to this report, a shorter summary that outlines the key findings and outcomes was provided to the gate keepers and other key players. The purpose of the summary was to inform and educate the agency, particularly leadership and staff, and the community about SOP and how to improve the current training process. The researcher shared the information gleaned from the study with all necessary parties.

The researcher also provided the agency with an infographic that highlights what is working well within the agency and what the needs are based on the data from the study.

Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

A relationship will be maintained with the study site key players and the participants due to the researcher continued employment at the agency and to follow up on any additional questions regarding the research that may come up. The researcher will be available via to answer questions and help with accessing the published study on the university's ScholarWorks website.

Dissemination Plan

The study will be published on the ScholarWorks website after review. The researcher will provide the study site and participants with directions on how to access the published study via email. This researcher will continue to be

available to answer any questions regarding accessing the study and the researcher will remind the study site and participants that they are welcome to contact the researcher after reviewing the study with any questions that may come up.

APPENDIX A:
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your role in the agency and what unit are you in?
2. What training have you received regarding Safety Organized Practice?
3. What is your understanding of Safety Organized Practice in relation to your current role?
4. How do you use Safety Organized Practice in your current role? And what is working for you about that?
5. What is the Department's message to social workers regarding Safety Organized Practice? For example, is there management support, supervisor support, training opportunities, etc.
6. What are the areas that need improvement in the Safety Organized Practice training practice?
7. Are there any barriers to using Safety Organized Practice tools and techniques in your practice?
8. What value do you see in utilizing Safety Organized Practice?

9. What support do/did you receive when learning about and trying Safety Organized Practice techniques when working with families on your caseload?
10. Do you need additional support to help you fully implement Safety Organized Practice in your interactions with families? What would that look like?
11. Is there anything you think I should know?

Developed by Alison Lucado

APPENDIX B:
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the implementation of Safety Organized Practice (SOP) within the Child Welfare Services agency. This study is being conducted by Alison Lucado, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Teresa Morris, Coordinator for the Pathway Distance Education Program in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of SOP within the agency.

DESCRIPTION: Interviews will be audio recorded through Zoom. Informed consent will be read with the participant and verbally agreed to as audio recorded through Zoom. Participants continuing with the interview indicate consent. Participants will be asked a few questions on the training process, current support, what is working, and any barriers when using SOP in practice.

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

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

DURATION: It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete the interview.

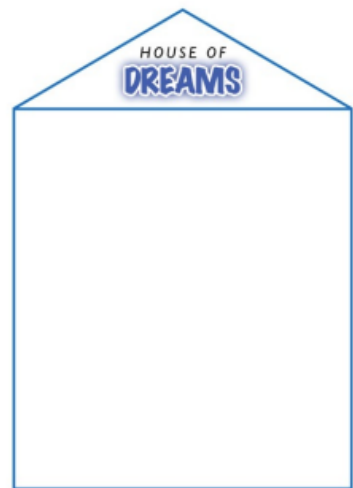
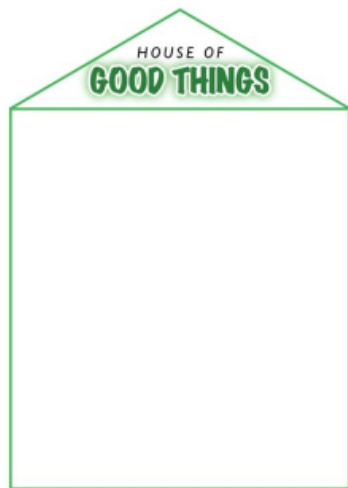
RISKS: Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. The findings from this study may improve services.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Teresa Morris at 909-537-5561.

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2023.

APPENDIX C:
THREE HOUSES TOOL



APPENDIX D:
SAFETY MAPPING

SAFETY MAPPING
Adapted from Turnell and Edwards, 1999 and Chin, Decter, Madsen and Vogel, 2010



List all indicators of Past Harm, Present Harm or Future Harm

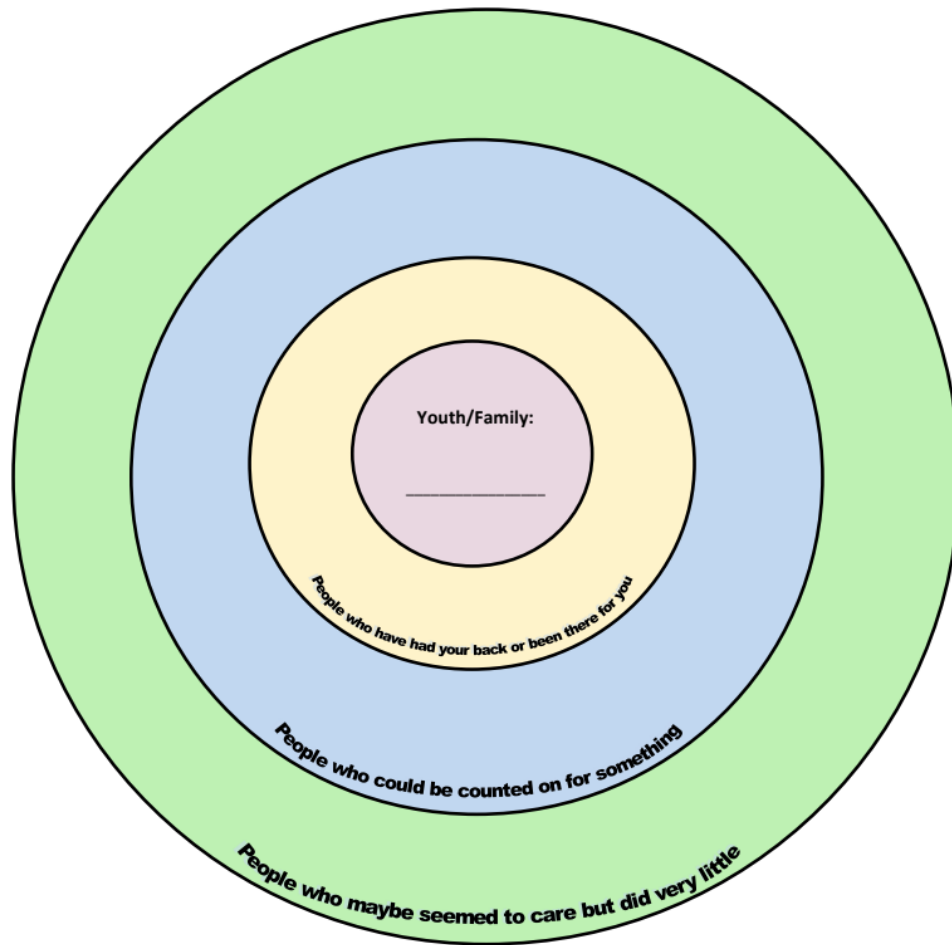
List all indicators of Acts of Protection, Caregiver Capacities, and Supporting Strengths

What are we worried about?

What's working well?

<p>Past Harm to the child → Present or Future Dangers</p>	<p>Acts of Protection (Directly related to danger)</p>
<p>Complicating Factors</p>	<p>Supporting Strengths</p>
<p>What needs to happen next?</p>	

APPENDIX E:
SAFETY CIRCLES



People you should probably avoid

APPENDIX F:
IRB APPROVAL LETTER



CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2022-190

Teresa Morris Alison Lucado
CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Teresa Morris Alison Lucado:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "SAFETY ORGANIZED PRACTICE TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION IN CENTRAL CALIFORNIA" 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 weighed the risks and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants.

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. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's [COVID-19 Prevention Plan](#) for more information regarding campus requirements.

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.

- **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-FY2022-190 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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