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THE CHALLENGES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES MEMORANDUM: FOSTER CARE AS A SUPPORT TO FAMILIES

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A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

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by

Rebecca Joan Sullivan-Oppenheim

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess what challenges, if any, there are to implementing the best practices as indicated in IM 20-06. IM 20-06 shifts the role of resource parents (aka foster parents) from being solely a support for the children, to a support for the entire family, including the biological parents. This represents a major child welfare culture shift. It was unknown if the IM information and recommendations were effectively disseminated to all foster care agencies. Interviews were conducted with foster agency case workers with open-ended questions about their beliefs about the relationships between resource parents and biological parents (the parental sets), how frequently they should communicate if at all, and what trainings and supports all parties are receiving regarding developing and maintaining these relationships. Analysis of the interviews indicates that social workers in local foster family agencies (FFA) have not been trained nor are they supported in the practices outlined in the IM. The implications of this means there has not been adequate dissemination of this information and it has not become local policy yet. Further, there are consequences of continued lower reunification rates than necessary by not creating these policies. Recommendations in order to assess the challenges with the implementation and of the IM include conducting interviews in areas that have incorporated the IM and have developed policies and programs. Additionally, addressing the realization of it locally is recommended.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my son, Tony, and his birth mother, Tammi, who opened my eyes to the world of child welfare in a new way and ignited my passion to promote healing and change.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation

On April 29th, 2020, the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Children's Bureau, issued a groundbreaking memorandum. Information Memorandum ACYF-CB-IM-20-06 (IM 20-06) provides best practice recommendations to improve foster outcomes for children and parents by building relationships between foster families (also known as resource families) and biological families. This comes on the heels of decades of research that proves the benefits of both families working together as a team. Some benefits include increased reunification, decreases in the amount of time it takes to reunify, and strengthening protective factors for children and families. This represents an attempt to make a huge shift in child welfare agencies' culture which had been to actively discourage foster families from engaging with biological families. Additionally, the memorandum addresses the shift in child welfare from reactive to preventative. In order to do this, we need to "view families that make contact with the child welfare system differently" (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families 2020a).

A national culture shift is needed to view parents involved with child welfare cases with compassion and empathy (Markey & Sankaran, 2020). They are valuable, vulnerable, hurting humans in need of healing, and deserve

respect. This is counter to most of the nation's public opinion, which has been one of judgement. That value is manifested in the allocation of funds for resources, legislation, and practice decisions. The shift towards humanization and a strengths-based view of biological parents will need to occur in the courts, legal system, with resource parents (aka foster parents), and case workers.

All of this is to address a history of slow and low rates of family reunification. One of the greatest contributing factors to successful reunification is frequent, high-quality visitation. Visitations are directly impacted by the relationship between resource parents and biological parents. The frequency of communication between the parental sets, the empathy, and ability to work together can affect how well visits go (Christophersen et al., 2017). This includes the coordination of visits, support, and the rate visits are missed.

Strained relationships between the parental sets have been a well-documented phenomenon due to biases, prejudices, and distrust (Christopherson et al., 2017). Biological parents report feeling judged, powerless, and disconnected from what is going on in the lives of their children. Strained relationships between the parental sets can add to the behavioral issues in the children and cause formal complaints filed by biological parents. Foster homes report that strained relationships with biological families are some of their biggest challenges (Bernedo et al., 2016). These are some contributing factors to placement disruptions.

It has now been a few years since the passing of this memorandum and some states and counties have taken action to re-educate staff and homes on this new format. Other regions show slower progress toward these lofty goals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess what challenges, if any, there are to implementing the best practices as indicated in IM 20-06. IM 20-06 shifts the role of resource parents from being solely a support for the children, to a support for the entire family, including the biological parents.

Overview of the Specific Problem

The wheels of change move at a slow pace, especially within government bodies. Given that IM 20-06 represents a major child welfare culture shift, it was presumed it would take time to see these changes take place. It was unknown if the IM information and recommendations had effectively been disseminated to all foster care agencies and therefore to resource parents. Although several curriculums are available to assist with the implementation, it was unknown if these had been disseminated and implemented in all foster agencies. It has now been four years which warranted an investigation into how the implementation is going.

Research Methods

This study was an exploration of challenges because it was a new area of research. Interviews were conducted with foster agency case workers. The broad qualitative data gathered may be used for future studies to create quantitative

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tools to further measure more narrow aspects, pinpoint problem areas, and then create solutions.

Significance for Social Work Practice

The results of this study could have an impact on social work practice at the macro, mezzo, and micro levels. On the macro level, it could contribute to the generation of adjusting child welfare policy. It produced testimony that has not been considered before and therefore may create the need to reform or create new procedures. The interviews identified issues in the implementation that will require new policies and new tools to be created. It is possible that the act of asking the questions and facilitating discussion during the research interviews may have generated more awareness and change within the interviewees. On the mezzo and micro level, individuals, children, and families could be positively impacted by any furtherance of enacting these new value shifts.

Phase of Intervention

The generalist intervention process includes exploration, assessing, planning, implementation, and evaluating. This study was an evaluation of the IM 20-06 as an intervention. We assessed the effectiveness of the intervention by examining what, if any, challenges there have been for resource parents and foster agencies.

<u>Research Question</u>

What are the challenges social workers perceived to resource families being a support to and co-parenting with biological parents as outlined in the Administration for Children and Families Information Memorandum 20-06?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will be a review of relevant literature regarding resource parents partnering with biological parents. It will expand some of the details of IM 20-06 and include related research studies on the topic. The most current data and information will be reflected.

IM 20-06 and Supporting Research

IM 20-06 begins with the value that out-of-home placement is significantly traumatic for children and biological parents, regardless of how short in duration. To improve reunification outcomes, we need to improve parental engagement, and strengthen supports and relationships. The memorandum provides background information, what prompted the current need for this, best practices, and resources and innovation (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families 2020a). For comprehension of this study, it is important to understand IM 20-06 in more detail.

Background

To preserve bonding, parents need to see and speak to their children daily and be involved with typical daily activities (Hedin, 2016). According to IM 20-06, resource parents need to view working with biological parents as central to their

responsibilities. Chateauneuf et al. (2018) discusses resource parents being open-minded about birth parents and accepting that they have different parenting styles without being judgmental. If resource parents can recognize the positive contributions that biological parents make, accept their limitations and different values, it will positively affect their ability to form supportive relationships. Case workers and courts need to support and provide positive pressure for these interactions. Foster families should continue this support even after reunification.

Research by Bernedo et al. (2016) discussed the need for reforming visitations. They showed that many children were not having visits, the visitation agreement was being broken, and that many visits were of poor quality. Children reported feeling more rejection from parents when visits were low quality (Bernedo et al. 2016). Informational Memorandum ACYF-CB-IM-20-*02* (IM 20-*02*) elaborates on the direct positive impacts of frequent quality "family time" (visitation) on reunification times and child outcomes. A key to accomplishing this is in co-parenting so that biological parents can remain involved and interact with their children on a daily basis (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families 2020b).

Biological parent well-being also greatly impacts reunification. They need social supports and continued motivation in what can seem insurmountable odds. Many biological parents struggle to provide safe homes for their children but frequently it's not for a lack of desire. Most are appropriately bonded with their children. The loss of their children is compounded by stigmatization which

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causes shame, and hopelessness (Markey & Sankaran, 2020). Many parents have their own history of being involved as a youth in child welfare services. They struggle with their own complex trauma. When biological parents are supported, they are more engaged in services which increases reunification and improves child outcomes. Resource parents can assist biological parents in learning how to meet the needs of their children while providing them social and moral support. Chateauneuf et al. (2018) showed a direct correlation between higher rates of empathy towards biological parents, frequency of visitations, and the positive relationship dynamic between parental sets.

<u>Why Now?</u>

The Children's Bureau periodically reviews the state of child welfare in order to ensure states conformity with federal regulations and improve outcomes. Round three of Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) was conducted on data from 2015-2018. It indicated that the typical approach to foster care needed reworking as it was struggling to produce timely and permanent reunification. The goal of families being better off after contact with child welfare services was falling short. Interviews with those with lived experience showed a need for higher quality services. Many areas of improvement were recommended. These included preserving and supporting the relationship between the parent and children and improving parental skills and capacity through needs assessment and services (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families 2020c). Foster families can help address these needs by becoming supports to the entire family.

<u>Best Practices</u>

Hundreds of biological parents were interviewed and demonstrated a fear and distrust of child welfare workers and foster families (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families 2020a). Not knowing how or if their children are being taken care of nor by whom creates much of this fear. Biological parents lose all power and control. This is confirmed in the study by Christophersen et al. (2017), who found they feel replaced as a parent when not able to participate in parenting. This creates a huge barrier to biological parents engagement in case plan goals and services due to hopelessness, which is a natural and normal human response to stress, grief, and uncertainty. When these goals aren't met, reunification is affected. Christophersen et al. (2017) suggests relieving some of the powerlessness by asking biological parents for advice regarding the children, offering daily life updates, inviting them into daily activities, and giving them control wherever possible. A Swedish study in 2015 suggests creating concrete co-parenting rituals, mutual planning for the child, and frequent in person meetings with both sets of parents and the child (Hedin, 2015).

To create this culture, agencies will need to create trainings, policies, and procedures. Foster families need to be recruited who are committed to this ideal instead of foster care as a track to adoption. To support this relationship, both sets of parents need to meet as soon as possible following placement and that needs to be facilitated *well* to encourage positive engagement. Both sets of parents need to be trained in co-parenting relationships. Hedin set forth these

conclusions and stated resource parents need to be open and inviting to the child and the biological parents (Hedin, 2015). Parents need to engage in talking about fears and struggles with parenting and co-parenting. Social workers can facilitate these conversations while continuing to promote the development of the parents' relationship. Christophersen et al. (2017) states that biological families reported better relationships when foster families were able to recognize their fears. Social workers can encourage both sets of parents to communicate directly and regularly instead of being a go-between liaison. They can involve both sets of parents in case planning which includes safety boundaries, roles, expectations, and communication. Parenting agreements can be co-developed as part of reunification. The expectation from recruitment for foster families to remain as supports after reunification can be made and can include concrete examples of what that could look like. And of course, as in all social work, small successes in growing these relationships should be celebrated.

One study performed after the release of IM 20-06 showed that parental relationships hinge on caseworkers supporting communication between parents. Unfortunately, social workers were frequently not proactive in facilitating these relationships. Critical first meetings were left unstructured, and no clear expectations were made. When parents were able to collaborate, relationships were often positive and mutually beneficial. Those that were collaborative were mostly in Midwest foster villages, which are supportive small communities (Leathers & Spielfogel, 2022).

<u>Resources and Innovation</u>

There are many programs that have been developed to facilitate relationship building with foster homes as a support to biological parents. Three programs throughout the country are highlighted and thoroughly explored in IM 20-06. They are Children's Home Society, North Carolina; FaithBridge, Georgia; and Ottawa County, Michigan. Some other programs include Bridging the Gap, Champs, and the Quality Parenting Initiative. Many of these can be adopted locally or used as templates.

<div align="center">Theories Guiding Conceptualization</div>

One of the major theories guiding much of this work has been Attachment theory. Attachment theory focuses on the bonds between a parent and a child and purports that the quality of these attachments has lifelong consequences. It affects self-esteem, mental health, and behavioral issues. The ability and quality to attach in future relationships can be compromised, creating generational cycles of abuse.

Working to protect and nurture attachment bonds between children and their biological parents while in the foster system has become a newly recognized need for focus within child welfare. In order to foster attachment, studies show that consistent, frequent, quality visits are essential. The relationship between the parental sets is foundational to these types of visits. This study will continue to operate under the theory of Attachment.

Ecological Systems theory looks at the functioning within families and the environmental factors that affect them. This theory looks at the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, and Macrosystem. The microsystem includes their immediate family, their work, and friends. The mesosystem includes the *interactions between* those areas of family, work, school, friends, etc. The exosystem includes extended family and the neighborhood. The macrosystem includes the economy, values, culture, politics. The interactions go both ways with the target affecting each of these environments and the environments affecting the client, mutually.

Viewing a child in foster care as the target, ecological systems theory facilitates looking at all the components that affect that child. On the mesosystem level, the interactions between the foster family and the biological family affect the well-being of the child. The goal of foster care is reunification. The functioning of biological families directly impacts reunification. Looking at the systems that affect biological families informs the views of this study. Foster, biological, and child welfare systems working together can strengthen the child and the family.

Summary

IM 20-06 thoroughly explained the background and need for the shift in child welfare culture and practice towards foster families as supports to biological families and co-parenting. It gives best practices and resources. There is a long history of research studies that have led to these conclusions and support this IM.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

Chapter three will be broken up into seven additional sections: study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis. As stated previously, this study explored the challenges social workers perceive to resource parents co-parenting with and being social supports to biological parents as indicated in IM 20-06. This chapter will further detail the methods that were used for this study.

Study Design

In evaluation of IM 20-06, we explored the challenges that social workers perceive to foster families co-parenting with and being a support to biological parents as best practices described within the Information Memorandum. Therefore, this study was both exploratory and somewhat of an evaluation of the policies and interventions. This chapter will further detail the methods that were used for this study that have been implemented to achieve the goal of resource parents as supports to and co-parents with biological parents. This study used qualitative data collected by means of interviews. This researcher has only been able to locate one study related to this topic since the passing of IM 20-06. Low amounts of research imply the need for exploratory research which is best achieved via guided but open dialogue with those involved in order to catch data

that could be lost with too narrow questions if using quantitative research at this point.

Interviews were conducted on Zoom. Interviewees included foster agency social workers. The objective was to gather a well-rounded understanding of the issues. A benefit to one-on-one interviewing is the ability to be thorough.

Although qualitative studies cannot provide causation relationships nor determine solutions, this study attempted to sort through and index the factors that social workers perceive as challenges to foster families as supports to biological families.

Sampling

The convenience sampling for this study was from local foster care agencies in San Bernardino County. It included seven social workers from two agencies. Interviews occurred following agency permission to participate and IRB approval.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data was collected from interviews taking place following IRB approval. Each participant was given a consent form, right to privacy, and information regarding the nature of the study prior to conducting any interviews. Length of service in foster care, amount of training on the topic, and time since last relevant training was collected.

A tool was created with questions to guide the interviews. Some of the questions asked included "What do you think the relationship between resource parents and biological parents should be? What should their interactions and communications be? How should they communicate? How frequently should they communicate?"

Based on the answers to these questions, further follow-up questions were employed. Then the interviewer asked questions regarding any training they have received regarding these relationships, and what interventions are being used to implement it. Participants were asked what problems they have seen in trying to support relationships between parental sets and why they believe these problems exist. Finally, they were asked what suggestions they have for improving these relationships.

Procedures

The researcher contacted each foster agency social worker, four of which had a previous relationship with the researcher, due to interning or attending classes together. They were each asked if they were willing to participate in a 30-minute interview. They were informed that participants will be in a drawing to win a gift card for $50 or $100. A brief description of the study and privacy policies were included. Consent and privacy forms were collected. The interviews were recorded.

Protection of Human Subjects

The study protocol was approved as exempt by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of California State University of San Bernardino and assigned # IRB-FY2023-260. Each participant was given an informed consent form to discuss and sign prior to the beginning of the interview. All individuals and organization names were coded for privacy. After the interviews, the interviewer addressed any questions.

Additionally, all participants were informed of the procedures for recording, storing, and destroying any identifiable information. All efforts were made to ensure confidentiality and follow established protocols. Electronic storage is password protected and will be kept for the required period of two years until it can be destroyed.

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. After the interviews were transcribed, a content analysis was conducted to identify patterns in staff perceptions. Overall themes and rates of occurrence were sorted for each question. General themes for the study emerged regarding policy implementation, knowledge of social workers, support needs for biological parents, and county worker issues. Frequencies were run for all comments. Word filler transcription was consistent. Individuals and organizations were coded for confidentiality. This researcher continuously analyzed data as it was collected and after. It was re-read and reanalyzed several times.

Summary

Following IRB approval, this study utilized convenience sampling for recruitment. Eligible participants were social workers from foster family agencies with a minimum of one year of experience. Interview questions included what they believe the relationships between resource and biological parents should be, if they should communicate directly and how often, and what trainings and support they receive in facilitating these relationships. Interviews were conducted over Zoom and recorded for data analysis, which included coding and looking for common themes.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This study examined foster family agency social workers' perceptions about the barriers they see to creating supportive relationships between biological and resource parents (aka foster parents). This chapter will give details regarding the data that was collected, including the data collection process and results. Convenience sampling was used to recruit seven participants from local foster family agencies.

Recruitment consisted of emails and phone calls using employee contact lists. These were provided by local agencies following their administrative approval. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Qualitative interviews were conducted with social workers using a 20-question guide asking open-ended questions on their practices and attitudes about foster and biological parents. The 20 questions included three questions establishing each participants experience level, six questions regarding agency training and support, three questions about specific actions these participants take, and eight questions about beliefs regarding biological parents and their relationship to resource parents. The results for each question will be presented. The interviews were conducted from December 2023 until February 2024. Interviews lasted from 20 minutes to an hour long.

The participants of the study were five females and two males. Years of experience in foster or related services were from 18 months to 13 years. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions were coded for words and themes which were grouped together, when possible, but unique answers were also included. The coded answers were then summarized for each question.

The following will be a discussion of the result of each question. First, each question will be provided and will be listed in numerical order according to how they were presented in the actual interviews. Following each question will be the summation of the answers received for that question. Trends and themes will be presented which may represent homogeneity, or a lack thereof. Examples will be given, and quotes will be included for additional illumination.

Presentation of Findings

1. How long have you been working with foster services or related services? What is your role?

The range of experiences were from 18 months to 13 years. Two respondents were interns. The vast majority of everyone's experiences were within foster family agencies which are focused on serving resource parents to support the children.

2. In your role what is your contact with resource parents?

All respondents reported extensive contact with resource parents. Visits were weekly and included in-person and telecommunications. The purposes

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were to assist with household functioning via safety plans, discipline plans, and case management such as getting them medical cards. This included on-going education of resource parents on diverse topics related to their roles as resource parents and the needs of their children. One respondent summarized by saying that their focus was "… making sure the kids' needs were met…" Another responded, "We can collaborate together to … provide support to the resource parents."

3. In your role what is your contact with biological parents?

In general, contacts with biological parents were extremely limited. Some reported arranging visitations via email or text or passing on concerns from biological parents to resource parents. One stated that their contact included participating in the "initial visit as far as introducing the biological parents to the resource parents, maintaining report with the bioparent too. Sometimes helping to support visitation. If that's something that's court ordered or something that I need to support the resource parent in. So also ongoing, but it's on a case-by-case basis."

4. What do you think the relationship between resource parents and biological parents should be? What should their interactions and communications be? How should they communicate? How frequently?

These answers ranged from minimal contact, only regarding visitations, to highly active frequent communication. Most stated interactions needed to be determined by safety concerns and confidentiality issues first. Approximately a

third stated it should be minimal, business, cordial, but with a friendly report. Almost half discussed details of attending doctors' visits, school events, and celebrating birthdays together. These answers included both the interns. The remaining third was in the middle, for example, one stated "They should communicate weekly. It should be an educational interaction - where they can learn from each other because they have a mutual connection through the children."

5. What do you think your foster family agency believes the relationship between them [biological and resource parents] should be?

The respondents all felt they were aligned with what their foster family agencies believed. They mentioned that their agencies believe there should be equality between the parental sets – meaning neither one is more important nor better than the other. The agency encourages everyone to work as a team to serve the children. They also mentioned both sets of parents should have a mutual understanding of each other. Approximately a third reiterated that the priority is safety, specifically if there are concerns with biological parents being safe, or confidentiality issues with sharing the foster home address or contact information. Beyond safety, the degree of relationship between the parental sets was at the comfort of the resource parent. "We never pushed a foster family to have that relationship. It was if the foster parent chose to go out of their way to have that relationship." Another expanded at the end of the interview and said "…to try to foster the relationship between both of the parents, … It's definitely

not discouraged, but I don't know if it's like encouraged either. I don't think it's there as much."

6. What training have you received about supporting and building the relationship between biological and resource parents? When was the last training session?

None of the respondents were able to identify trainings that specifically and directly taught them how to build and support the relationship between parents. They identified trainings that may indirectly lay a foundation to potentially create an environment that could support a relationship. But nothing was concrete.

For example, they mentioned trauma-informed trainings that inspired empathy towards biological parents. One stated regarding trauma-informed training, "I'm understanding that [it] is not only the child that's having a traumatic experience, the parents are also…when their kids … are removed from them and so we help our resource parents see them [biological parents] as people and not as problems or their circumstances. And so, we make sure that … they understand that no matter what information was shared with them about their biological parent we never want to judge them…" Also mentioned were cultural diversity trainings to encourage cultural awareness issues. Additionally general resource parent education trainings discuss how resource parents can monitor and supervise visitations with a focus on safety.

7. What, if any, specific things do you do to support the relationship between

   biological and resource parents?

Most of the participants said they support the relationships between

parents by answering their questions, advocating for both parties, relaying

messages between the parents or county worker, and arranging or conducting

the visitations. Some said they support the relationships by being supportive of

whatever the resource parent wants regarding the relationship but not pushing

the issue. One participant stated they do "very minimal" to support the

relationship. Another worker talked about resource parents being judgmental of

biological parents and countering that judgement by building their empathy

towards biological parents. They expanded, "I think a lot of resource parents can

find themselves having like this "Karen complex."   … [When resource parents]

open up their doors to take care of another child, they might feel like they're

better. And I'm not saying that they do, but I'm just saying this could be a part of

that complex. You know, where they feel more equipped to take care of the child

and subconsciously probably judge that bio-parent."

8. What discussions do you have with your supervisor or agency about

   building or supporting the relationship between biological and resource

   parents?

Most of the participants did not have discussions in order to build and

support these relationships. Approximately a third said they did not remember

ever having discussions with their supervisors or agencies about building or

supporting relationships between biological and resource parents. Half of respondents said they discussed safety issues, roles of all parties, and were encouraged to be the go-between or liaison for communication between the parental sets, which is not part of building a supportive relationship. Another third spoke about getting support from their supervisors in order to help build a rapport between the families and encourage direct communication instead of being the go-between. One respondent discussed that "the caregiver doesn't have to give them [biological parents] their phone number. But we can use [programs] like WhatsApp. And then there's this fake number to exchange with each other."

9. What are the strengths of biological parents?

All the participants were able to identify positive attributes of biological parents. One of the main themes was that biological parents show resiliency by continuing to show up and work on their case plans. Additionally, they love their children. This was demonstrated by knowing their children well, being bonded with them, wanting their children back, and being a support to them. One respondent shared that biological parents can "provide a lot for the child's mental and emotional wellbeing with what they're saying to them, and how they're communicating with them… and can really help their child navigate their time in foster care and utilize … [and] maximize the services."

10. What are the difficulties working with biological parents?

A variety of answers were provided; however, almost half of the respondents mentioned that the mental health of biological parents creates the

biggest challenge to working with them, including unresolved personal traumas. Some stated that the lack of communication with the county social workers made it difficult to work with biological parents. Other factors discussed included biological parents being difficult with resource parents as a result of a power struggle and resentments on the part of the biological parent. Additionally drug abuse, poor communication, missing visits, inappropriate behaviors during visits, and being defensive were listed. One stated "it could be difficult sometimes to help them understand that we are here to help and not here to take their baby …or keep them from their child but to help them become more aware of their situation and how they can get better."

11. Can biological parents change?

All participants agreed that biological parents can change and do change. One stated, "… I'm a parent. And I'm not the best parent. I do my best, but I could do better. I always see myself as not being different from any other parent who's tried to raise another human being. It's a very difficult job. And it's just more difficult for others, for some. And it just depends on if they have a support system or not. So yes, absolutely. I think, anybody can change."

12. What training do resource parents and biological parents receive about building their relationship together?

Most of the participants stated they did not believe resource parents received training on how to build a relationship with biological parents. Several mentioned other trainings that may support, in an indirect way, some of the

foundational skills that could lead to the ability to build a relationship such as trauma-informed and communication skills. The participants reiterated that their agency did not serve the biological parents and did not offer them trainings. They were unaware of any trainings biological parents participated in. One stated, "the agency is definitely… more focused on … reaffirming to the caregiver. [The agency tells the resource parent:] This relationship is not mandatory between you two. You don't have to give out your information. You don't have to do those things. But if you so choose that's up to you."

13. How do both sets of parents meet? What do you do when the parents first meet each other to support that meeting?

All of the participants said the parents usually meet at the initial visitation with the child; however, most of the participants stated they have never been involved in a first meeting. Some mentioned the parents meet at Child and Family Team Meetings and that these are sometimes on zoom. When there was any support offered by the social worker, it was by discussing and giving resource parents a list of rules, expectations, and roles to enforce if they are monitoring visits. One participant mentioned thanking the biological parents for collaborating with them in order to support the meeting. Another participant discussed reaching out to both parties after visits to "ask how the relationship went between them, if there's any issues and concerns."

14. Do resource parents have biases against biological families? Do you challenge those biases, if any? And how do you challenge them?

All participants agreed that resource parents have biases against biological parents. They challenged the biases with discussions to remind the resource parents to be open-minded, to empathize, and be supportive. The social workers reiterated the negative impact biases or words can have against the children. They asked resource parents to put themselves in the others situation, or shared the biological parent's story, and encouraged resource parents to try to see the good in the other. One social worker stated the biases especially occur in resource parents who are looking to adopt (which can create a conflict of interest). Another respondent said "We're human. And … sometimes I do [have bias against biological parents]. I try not to. So, I can only imagine if these resource parents do. Because we all know why we're here and it's hard to not be biased with these biological parents."

15. Do you encourage your resource parents to communicate directly to the biological families? Or do you act as liaison? Why?

The answers were divided between direct and liaison. More than half of the respondents said their families communicate directly to each other and that they only intervene in rare, complicated cases as needed. Reasons given for intervening and acting as a liaison included setting up visitations and communicating with and about the children. Examples of direct communication included one social worker stating that biological parents should "know that their kid just visited the ER because they have a really bad case of the flu." Another

social worker reported one of their families spend Sunday dinners and birthdays together.

The remaining said it was a case-by-case determination if they were able to encourage direct communication and that they still typically ended up being the liaison. This was due to either safety issues or discomfort on the part of the resource parents.

16. What problems have you personally seen in trying to support the relationships between both sets of parents?

All of the answers revolved around issues with biological parents. Almost half of the respondents cited issues with biological parents' biases against the resource parents. These included feeling like the resource parents are against them, having unrealistic expectations, and being antagonistic. One respondent linked these issues to trauma, denial, and feelings of guilt and shame. The other half of respondents cited resource parents having issues with biological parents regarding inappropriate behavior during visits, safety, privacy, and biases from previous bad experiences. A few also said biological parents' problems with transportation or geographical distance can create visitation issues which affect the relationship between parents. On social worker gave an example of "a bio-mom nitpicked about everything as far as like there being diaper rashes or anything on the babies. So, I had to step in and monitor the visit. Even during my time stepping in the monitored visit, Mom was still nitpicking. Mind you, these

situations had already occurred when the babies were in her care… she called CPS on my resource parents."

17. Why do you believe problems between foster and biological parents' relationship exist?

The majority said a lack of communication and judging each other. Biological parents are defensive that someone else is caring for their child. They have a loss of control, they fear for their children's safety, and fear the potential risk of adoption. One third directly pointed out that biological parents need more support. In an expanded discussion at the end of an interview, one interviewee went into great detail to describe biological parents being disenfranchised, and both parties having implicit and explicit biases. Furthermore, a barrier to biological parents becoming close with resource parents would be the fear of potential additional negative reports being made against them, which does occur.

Resource parents struggle with biases and being open-minded enough to believe that biological parents can change or deserve the chance, especially if they want to adopt. One respondent stated "it is interesting because they're all very child-centered problems that I feel form between the two of them [fear for the safety of the children]. But if you were to take those and just focus on the child … it could be so much better."

18. What resources, tools, or directions has your county social worker, or your agency given you to use in order to support relationships between the parental sets?

Most of the participants were not given any tools, resources, or directions to support the relationship. Almost half of the respondents were not able to describe any resources, tools, or directions given to them. Slightly less than half said they are able to consult with their supervisor on a case-by-case basis for directions in managing conflicts (which is not pro-active to support or build relationships). For example, one participant shared "I don't think I've ever gotten any resources. As far as like directions or like what to do. I think it's just whatever situation is arising. I do consult with my supervisor, and we do try to create alternatives to try to help…the resource parent side to work with the bio parents."

A novelty situation was described by one social worker in which one of their parental sets were able to form a bond because of a resource parent's advocation for a youth to be diagnosed with autism following learning about it on website called Foster Parent College. Foster Parent College is a national resource that their agency encourages resource parents to use which provides a variety of information and trainings.

Only one responded with a tangible resource which was continued psychoeducation and support for a trauma-focused lens. This helps them to ask biological parents what they need, find supportive language, be open-minded, and remember there are two sides to conflicts.

19. Are you aware of the importance of a supportive relationship between parental sets for the sake of the children, including much higher rates of

reunification and lower reentry into the system which is based on decades of research.

Most of the volunteers were aware of the importance of the relationship to some degree. Only two of the participants did not have any knowledge of the importance of relationships, the impact, nor the research. The remaining five did have some knowledge. Several had extensive knowledge and were able to go into some detail. These included both interns. One described having families that have remained engaged after a case was closed. Another described the negative impacts on children's behaviors when parents are unsupportive of each other which then adds to placement changes. One participant spoke about a previous supervisor who was passionate about research and a humanistic approach. They said the supervisor "just really described about connecting with individuals. Even as a representative of the agency, how we connect with the resource parent. And how that connection then affects the resource parents' connection with the bioparent and the resource parents connection with the county worker. And basically, we are the lead in that connection. So, whatever we lead with, and we leave with kindness and respect, the resource parent, as a representative of the agency, will also lead with kindness and respect."

20. What suggestions do you have for improving the relationships between both parental sets?

A variety of ideas were given. All participants responded with an increase in some type of communication and interactions. Between parental sets, in-

person meetings, and written communication were the themes. In-person interactions between the parental sets had several suggestions: more consistent Child and Family Team Meetings, taking training or classes together, and spending time together in natural settings such as dinners and birthday parties. In initial meetings, roles would be specified, and it would be explained that resource parents are "not to replace parents but to support them." Additionally, one participant stated parents could learn about each other which would increase empathy. Texting (or the use of programs such as WhatsApp as necessary in order to keep phone numbers private) was suggested, including with the county worker, in order to verify and have records of what has been said.

More than half of the volunteers mentioned communication issues with the county worker :either between the social workers, or between the county and the biological parent, resulting in missed meetings, and a lack of direction and support. Almost half spoke about biological parents needing more support. They mentioned biological parents needing more training such as how to be a team player.

One respondent questioned if county workers are trained in the importance of building relationships between parental sets. They stated "certain county workers are like, oh, what is that? I don't know what that is. But then another thing is that there's a lot of turnovers."

Summary

Overall findings show that foster family agency social workers' perceptions about the barriers they see to creating supportive relationships between biological and resource parents were varied. Issues with biological parents were cited as the main problem, however a lack of support for them by the county worker was repeatedly acknowledged as part of the problem. Additionally, participants expressed that both sets of parents judge each other. There is a lack of communication and interactions between the parties, especially with the county worker. Additionally, trainings and tools are not provided to any of the parties in order to facilitate these relationships, despite most of these social workers believing these relationships are important. Finally, individual definitions varied regarding what a supportive relationship between the parental sets is, and what that looks like. And these definitions were mostly in contrast to the definitions and examples given in the Information Memorandum.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to assess what challenges social workers perceived to resource families being a support to and co-parenting with biological parents as outlined in the Administration for Children and Families Information Memorandum 20-06. IM 20-06 gave best practice recommendations based on research, examples of how to implement them, and listed several resources for trainings and tools.

This chapter will discuss the findings from the study and the relationship to previous studies. Implications and recommendations for the field of child welfare social work will be explored. Finally, limitations of the study, disclosure of conflicts, and recommendations for future studies will be suggested.

Discussion of Results

In this section we will discuss the general findings from the study. These findings include a lack of implementation of the IM, lack of use of the IM's examples for tactics to achieve these goals, and lack of trainings. Important adjacent reoccurring themes will be discussed and expanded in the following sections.

General Findings Regarding IM 20-06

The results of this study ultimately showed there is a lack of dissemination of information and knowledge from IM 20-06 regarding these best practice recommendations in general. Although these social workers all believe relationships between resource parents and biological parents are important, what that looks like specifically and how to achieve it has not been addressed in a meaningful way. Therefore, individual interpretations varied significantly, and most contrasted with what the best practices recommendation in the IM demonstrate. One frequently cited problem was judgement issues between parental sets. This is addressed in the IM and would be improved as part of building these relationships. Existing programs have trainings available for agencies to use with staff and parents.

Since the IM 20-06 recommendations have not begun to be executed, it is not possible to get an accurate assessment as to the challenges social workers are experiencing with implementation.

The IM gave examples of what the relationships should look like between the parental sets, including visitations with children, direct and daily communication, and how social workers can assist and support that relationship. For example, the IM encouraged co-parenting, treating biological parents as the expert of their child's needs by asking for their input, and including biological parents in daily life activities like going to school functions and doctor's visits together. Social workers can set (and explain) these as the expectations and

support them by directing parental sets to communicate directly instead of being the liaison. Additionally, they can support these goals by creating friendly first meetings and facilitating discussions about each parties' fears. Approximately half of the respondents implemented some of these tactics to varying degrees, such as direct communication instead of being the liaison, but the rest were unaware of this being a standard to work towards.

The study found that neither social workers, nor parental sets received any trainings on building or maintaining this supportive relationship. Nor were any tools given, despite several programs being available and listed in the IM which include specific, concrete, and evidence-based examples. Some of these examples were having the parental sets communicate directly, and social workers facilitating friendly first meetings.

Therefore, the challenges mentioned by the social workers demonstrate responses that would be expected to be received from social workers without the direct goal and training to assist families in establishing supportive relationships. These challenges are congruent with previous studies which led to the creation of the IM and were mentioned therein.

<u>Adjacent Themes</u>

There were two reoccurring indirect or adjacent themes that arose from the data. They do not directly answer the research question of what challenges social workers perceive to families being a support to each other, however they are important to include because they indirectly affect that question. The adjacent

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themes that arose from the data collection included 1) Biological parents are under-supported 2) County workers are unable to meet the needs of communicating with Foster Family Agency (FFA) social workers and parental sets on a regular basis, let alone supporting biological parents. These themes are not new to child welfare however they were not found in other studies relevant to this topic nor in the IM.

Five of the interviewed FFA social workers indicated biological parents need more support and communication. They mentioned biological parents reaching out to them and asking questions or for assistance and being directed back to their county workers. All the FFA workers reiterated that biological parents are not their clients, their agencies do not support biological parents, and they have little contact with these parents. Biological parents are currently supposed to be supported by their county workers.

Resource families and children are supported by FFA workers. They meet with their worker weekly for updates, encouragement, direction, and assistance. Officially, biological parents are supposed to be supported by their county worker, however the reality is that it is inadequate. Biological parents are met once a month by their county workers for approximately one hour. Frequently these contacts have an agenda and specific topics/questions that need to be re-asked every month and documented. For example, they are asked if their living or relationship situation has changed and if they have any Native American ancestry. There is little time to build a supportive relationship. Additionally, public

child welfare has a historically negative reputation. County workers are frequently seen as adversarial by biological parents. That creates an additional challenge to county workers being seen as a support by biological parents.

One of the premises of IM 20-06 is creating more support for biological parents by way of the resource parents. That would address some of the deficit, but it is unknown if it would fill the gap left by low county social worker contact.

It is well-known that public child welfare is under-funded and under-staffed. Lack of retention and turnover rates have plagued the sector for decades and possibly since its inception. Countless studies have been conducted on worker burnout. Some efforts have been made but they have largely been ineffective to address the hemorrhage. However, there have been other sectors who have been able to address similar issues with staffing, for example teaching and nursing. They still have shortages, however, there have been significant improvements over the last decade. Their success could be studied and applied to child welfare for retention.

Staffing shortages create massive caseloads which means less time with each client. Frequently these are more than twice the nationally recommended best practice of 12-15 cases for each worker. This affects relationships and the quality of support being provided. Although additional research is needed, one study shows caseworkers believe there is a direct relationship between their caseloads and reunification rates (Chatterjee et. al. 2018).

IM 20-06's ideals of creating supportive relationships between parental sets, begins with a supportive relationship by the social workers to facilitate smooth first meetings, set standards and tones, encourage building relationships and navigating tough situations well. It takes time and effort on the part of the social worker. However, county child welfare workers lack the time to be able to support biological parents and navigate these relationships well.

This researcher anticipated collecting data that would implicate county social workers actively discouraging communication and relationships between parental sets to FFA workers. However, only one respondent gave any kind of confirmation of this. The respondent was more familiar with creating supportive relationships with parental sets and questioned if county workers are trained in the importance of it. They stated "certain county workers are like, oh, what is that? I don't know what that is…" However, no additional interviews referenced any issues. It is worth noting this was not a specific question asked.

Unanticipated Findings

Unanticipated findings came from an open dialogue with one of the study participants which explored two topics. Biases between resource and biological parents are common and affect their relationships which in turn impacts reunification. Research on these biases is focused on socioeconomic and parenting differences. However, there is also a high probability of unexamined implicit racial biases amongst parents and staff which also affects these

relationships. Implicit biases are unconscious stereotypes and beliefs which shape our understanding and decisions.

All cases are required to begin with the official goal of family reunification. However, there are many FFA families that go into foster care as caregivers with the goal to adopt and expand their families. That is a conflict of interest which may unconsciously create further critical judgement and biases against biological parents to meet the resource parents' needs. If the goal of child welfare is strengthening families, then unintentional barriers against reunification need to be examined and addressed.

Implications and Recommendations for Social Work

As previously mentioned, trainings and information regarding the best practices as outlined in IM 20-06 needs to be disseminated and adopted on a larger scale nationally. Some states have already taken the initiative and are using programs. There are currently a few counties in California who are also. The state could create a mandate for the remaining counties with a deadline for implementation.

Staffing issues for county social workers needs to finally come to a resolution and biological parents need more support. Problems stemming from the biological parents are the reason for the Department's involvement and yet they get less support than the other parties. Their mandated classes and therapy are not sufficient support to navigate their cases successfully.

FFA workers typically have much smaller caseloads and are closer to the recommended 12-15 cases. Frequently, they are even lower. One possible solution could lie in having FFA workers include biological parents in their cases as members to support. They could then facilitate the initial meetings and help build the parental relationships. This would also address the need for biological parents to have more support in general. If we are to conceive of the concept of the parental sets being a unit and co-parenting, then sharing mutual supports from case workers may promote it further.

<center>Limitations and Disclosure</center>

Some of the limitations in this study were the time available to the researcher and the number of participants. Having only seven volunteers did not reach saturation. With more time, additional data could be gathered with more interviews. Additionally, the region selected to gather the data was one which has not begun to strongly institute the supportive dynamic as demonstrated in IM 20-06.

The researcher was personally familiar with several of the study participants by either working or attending school with them. One of the participants was involved in a previous discussion on the topic which was the inspiration for this study. This may have inadvertently influenced the findings however it is unknown fully to what capacity this has occurred. One known way is by including other students who have also participated in some of the same

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trainings as this researcher regarding non-traditional and informal visitation options including parental sets sharing dinner and celebrations together.

The degree to which these findings can be generalized to a broader base of social workers in FFAs is mixed. As previously mentioned, there are some counties and states that have already implemented programs and policies to promote supportive relationships between the parental sets. Therefore, results of this research if conducted on FFAs in those regions would create results that would accurately evaluate the challenges of these practices, compared to the results of this study that indicate implementation has not occurred.

However, there are some auxiliary findings that may be able to be generalized to child welfare social work. These include: 1) Biological parents need more support 2) County social workers need to communicate more 3) Resource goals of adoption may impact reunification rates 4) Racial biases may affect parental set relationships.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Studies</div>

Recommendations for future studies on this topic include replicating this study using regions that have already adapted IM 20-06's recommendations for supportive relationships between parental sets to assess what challenges social workers perceive with its implementation. This could include supervisors, administration, and county staff as well. This would be a more accurate representation and evaluation for the outcomes from IM 20-06.

As previously mentioned, this study indicated the supportive needs for biological parents are not being met and that county caseloads affect reunification. Further studies should be conducted to explore these topics. Biological parents could be interviewed or surveyed to determine the level of support they have received during their case from the department and if they felt their needs were met. A research question could be, "Do biological parents feel their needs for support are being met during active child welfare cases?" And statistics could be gathered from multiple counties and examined for caseload sizes and reunification rates to see if there is a correlation. This research question could be "What is the correlation between caseload sizes and reunification rates with public child welfare?"

Many studies exist that examine the biases within the parental sets that affect their relationship issues, which impacts reunification. These biases focus on socio-economic and parenting differences. One discussion with a participant in this study explored the probability of racial biases amongst parents and staff also affecting these relationships. Further exploration of this topic may illuminate necessary changes within the industry to address these issues.

Finally, all cases begin with the goal of family reunification. However, there are many FFA families that go into foster care as caregivers with the goal to adopt and expand their families. Further studies could be conducted to demonstrate if the goal of adoption impacts relationships and reunification.

Summary

The Administration for Children and Families released Information

Memorandum (IM) 20-06 in 2020 entitled "Foster Care as a Support to Families."

It detailed recommendations for resource families to become supports to

biological parents and both parental sets co-parenting together. At this point, the

largest barrier to creating supportive relationships between resource and

biological parents is the lack of adoption and implementation of the policies within

counties and agencies. Social workers show inadequate evidence of knowledge

of these practices locally. We cannot know more, nor address its challenges, until

this initial step is accomplished. The information needs to be disseminated and

implemented first.

The IM recommendations were to address poor outcomes for families

involved with public child welfare. The implications of this are continued

reunification rates lower and slower than what is possible. Recommendations to

assess the challenges with the implementation of the IM include conducting

interviews in areas that have successfully incorporated the IM and have

developed policies and programs.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1) What is your role? How long have you been working with foster services (or related services)?

2) In your role, what is your contact with resource parents?

3) In your role, what is your contact with bio-parent?

4) What do you think the relationship between resource parents and biological parents should be? What should their interactions and communications be? How should they communicate? How frequently?

5) What do you think your foster care agency believes the relationship between them should be?

6) What training have you received about the relationship between bio and resource parents?

7) When was the last training about the relationship between bio and resource parents?

8) What, if any, specific things do you do to support the relationship between bio and resource parents?

9) What discussions do you have with your supervisor/agency about building or supporting the relationship between bio and resource parents?

10) How do you feel about biological parents? What are your perceptions about them, positive or negative?

11) What are the strengths of biological parents?

12) What are the difficulties working with biological parents?

13) Can biological parents change?

14) What training do resource parents and biological parents receive about their relationship?

15) How do both sets of parents meet? What do you do when the parents first meet each other to support that meeting?

16) Do resource parents have biases against biological families? Do you challenge those biases, if any? How do you challenge them?

17) What do your county child welfare social workers (CPS) believe the relationship between the families should be?

18) Do you encourage your resource parents to communicate directly with the biological families or do you act as the liaison? Why?

19) What problems have you personally seen in trying to support families' relationships?

20) Why do you believe these problems exist?

21) What resources have your county workers (CPS), or your agency given you to use in order to support families' relationships?

22) Decades of research show the importance and impact of the relationship between parental sets including much higher rates of reunification and lower reentry into the system. Many countries have decades of practical evidence. Many regions in the U.S. have implemented new formats

successfully and have created tools to assist other regions and workers. Are you aware of this?

23) Are you aware of the research that shows the importance for children of a supportive relationship between parental sets including much higher rates of reunification and lower reentry into the system?

24) What do you know about the Administration for Children and Families IM 20-06 which was titled "Foster care as a support to families"?

25) What suggestions do you have for improving outcomes regarding parental relationships?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the challenges to foster families co-parenting with and being a support to biological parents as outlined in the Administration for Children and Families Information Memorandum 20-06. The study is being conducted by Rebecca Sullivan-Oppenheim, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Laurie Smith, Director of the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to examine the challenges to foster families co-parenting with and being a support to biological parents as outlined in the Administration for Children and Families Information Memorandum 20-06.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked a few questions on their knowledge and understanding of the memorandum, their views on biological parents, visitations, attachment, resource parents' roles, their training on these subjects, and resource parent trainings.

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 any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will remain confidential, and data will be reported in coded form.

DURATION: It will take approximately 30 minutes to 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. However, findings from the study will contribute to our knowledge in this area of research and may inform future social work practice.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Laurie Smith at lasmith@csusb.edu or (909) 537-3837.

RESULTS: Results of the study will be given to your organization or can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database

(http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2024.

****

I agree to have this interview be video/audio recorded: _____ YES _____ NO

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

_____

_____

Place an X mark here   Date

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

November 15, 2023

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2023-260

Laurie Smith Rebecca Sullivan-Oppenheim
CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Laurie Smith Rebecca Sullivan-Oppenheim:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Barriers to implementing "Foster Care as a Support to Families" (Memorandum 20-06)" 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. You can find the modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure forms in the Cayuse IRB System. Some instructions are provided on the IRB Online Submission webpage toward the bottom of the page.. 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-FY2023-260 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,

King-To Yeung

King-To Yeung, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

KY/MG

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