

New Workers' Experiences in Child Welfare

Challenges with Power, Confidence & Feelings of Hopelessness

New Workers' Experience in Child Welfare
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ABSTRACT

How as a new worker could I have become better prepared by my education for child welfare work? What have other new workers experienced through their education that helped prepare them or hindered them? Lastly what are some creative ideas to better prepare new workers, specifically social workers, for the reality of working in child protection? These questions formed the focus of this study, which includes a literature review on new worker readiness and findings from qualitative interviews with new workers which utilizes an insider perspective towards data analysis. The participants in this research had varying experiences as new workers, however similar themes emerged. New workers struggled with power and experienced feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. New workers had difficulty transferring theoretical knowledge from their education into practice and did not feel prepared for the reality of child welfare work. Participants also described how they internalized conflict and the stress of the job. They suggested ways of coping including supportive supervision and a collaborative team environment. Increasing new workers' confidence was also seen as key to prepare new workers for a child protection position. This research was conducted through a partnership with my fellow MSW researcher Julie Huynh-Lauesen, who coauthored the literature review and conducted a similar, yet separate research study with child welfare managers. Both studies were then compared and contrasted for discussion and future purposes.

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INTRODUCTION

I fell in love with child welfare. How often do you hear such a statement? From my very first college placement as a crown ward youth worker I felt this field click. As a student I loved waking up every day not knowing for sure what would happen in my placement. I loved meeting different families and hearing their stories. I loved the challenge of working to develop plans with clients to best achieve their goals. The work was like a puzzle, one in which the pieces shifted daily and one never knew what would fit next. Once the placement ended I knew I had to pursue my education further if I wanted to continue a career in this field. I specifically chose an Ontario University that provided a Child Welfare Specialization to complete my Bachelor of Social Work. The course covered topics such as how to engage with children, build rapport with parents and utilize risk assessment and signs of strengths to develop intervention plans with families. Students enrolled in the Child Welfare Specialization participated simultaneously in a child welfare full year practicum. I was placed in a rural branch of The Children's Aid Society and soon thrived within it. Coming from a small town originally myself, I quickly fit in with the team and found myself carrying a small case load of families. I was swiftly immersed in a role of what I thought was real child protection work.

By the end of the program my placement supervisor and professors in the Child Welfare Specialization courses were impressed with my energy for the work and recommended me for a position at a local Children's Aid Society. The position started off well, my new supervisor was supportive of a new worker and had many years' experience managing a child welfare team to draw on. Most of the senior workers had been child

protection workers for a long time, however there had been quite a lot of turnover of staff on my team. This seemed to impact the team and it did not feel as supportive of an environment as I had experienced as a student.

Excited about my new position and armed with my newly graduated BSW, I set out on my first day with a positive attitude and confidence in my skills. I remember one of my first appointments was with a young mother struggling with concerns of child neglect and maltreatment, along with coping with limited supports while she raised her infant daughter. This mom was hesitant and mistrustful of me at first, she had already “been in the system herself as a child” before giving birth to her own child and firmly believed that CAS was “only bothering her because she had been a kid in care”. Drawing on theories from my social work program and utilizing core social work skills to build a rapport with this mom, I completed the necessary risk and safety assessment and developed a harm reduction intervention plan which included supports and community connections, which I thought best supported this family.

As the months flew by, my case load got heavier, worker turnover on my team continued and so the remaining workers needed to increase their workload to manage the demand. Paperwork fell behind and our supervisor started placing stricter expectations on documentation and ensuring the Ministry of Children and Youth guidelines were being met on time. My team was stressed, and this stress bred anxiety and arguments among us when we tried to negotiate coverage and assistance for each other in order to handle the increasing caseloads. My time with families became shorter. The initial goal was to visit the young mom once a week to provide direction and support, but soon I found myself

going out once a month and doing a quick scan of the apartment and check the baby for signs of abuse or malnutrition. I did not feel I had time to advocate, so instead, placed the expectation on her to call community supports herself.

During the daily struggle of managing a high number of families in crisis, and meeting standards and an expectation of efficiency, I was so immersed within the culture of the system that I did not realize how my actions were further oppressing my clients. Specifically the young mom who was struggling with meeting basic needs. I blamed her for her inability to improve her situation and did not reflect on the underlying oppressions which had likely kept her family living in poverty for generations. Shortly after my first year with the agency was completed, crisis in my own family struck and as such I was unable to focus on the work, and my empathy for my clients seemed to leave me. I remember simply surviving each day in a haze. When I left the agency, I reflected back sadly on how the year had started with such high hopes for a career in child welfare and I felt disappointed in the outcomes of my work.

According to Vivien Burr (2014), social constructionism explains that our way of knowing the world is produced through our use of language, which flows through our social interactions with each other. Through these processes we construct a reality between us (Burr, 2014 p. 8). I believe social work has developed its own use of language which we use to understand and work within social problems, however, as I found through my first year as a child protection worker, power operates through this language and though unintentionally, it can be used to oppress. "Our construction of the world is

bound up with power relations because they have implications for what it is permissible for different people to do, and for how they may treat others” (Burr, 2014 p. 3).

Through my designation as a child protection worker, I had power to evaluate and determine the normalcy of family functioning, and then decide if there was a risk to children. The safety of children is arguably a noble reason to use power if one must, but my own perceptions of what was normal was influenced not only by my education, but also by my own social location, upbringing and lived experience. For example, in the child welfare course I remember a class discussion about how our own values of what is a clean home environment may not be the same as others and so long as a safety risk is not present our perception of a messy home should not be seen as a risk. However I soon found that learning about how one’s own perception may influence judgement in class is one thing, maintaining this awareness in the moment of an initial risk assessment with a family is quite another.

What I also didn’t reflect on during my first year as a protection worker, was how Neoliberal governments have progressively shifted our country’s resources away from our social safety support systems, to instead, ensuring our country offers productive environments for market driven corporations to make profit and cut costs. Because of this, funding to support our social services, including child welfare, has been greatly reduced and those in power have placed market expectations on the field, which sees fiscal accountability as paramount. The real agenda behind these shifts are not in fact, to better people’s lives, but to commoditize social work, which “has caused a fundamental

shift in power from the social work professionals (academics and practitioners) to those holding the purse strings” (Dominelli, 1996 p.172).

With the Neoliberal government in the political arena shifting responsibility from the social to the individual, accountability for new social workers to enforce the norm comes hand in hand with our current child welfare system. By shifting the direction for newly graduated social workers from a helping role to one of assessing risk, our work becomes less of supporting families to one of interpreting facts and forcing interventions. It appears that, “the professional person making the assessment is a relatively objective and passive party, who simply gathers empirical facts, puts them together and makes a judgement based on what the ‘facts’ say” (Fook, 2012 p. 133). Interestingly, as my workload and personal stress increased and the support from the team decreased, my own ability to empathize and strive for positive change for my clients waned. Ultimately I felt like a failure at child welfare work, yet initially I believed I had done all I could as a new worker to prepare myself for the field.

The university social work child welfare program that I attended several years ago continues today. A current course outline, similar to one I received as a student, sets out objectives that relate to being strengths based and family centred. The course focuses on understanding authority, learning how to identify child maltreatment signs, counselling in child welfare and learning how to complete risk and safety assessments and develop intervention plans with families. I believe I was able to meet these requirements and did in fact utilize these skills in my child welfare practice. When working with the young mom, I effectively developed a working relationship where I was

able to complete a comprehensive analysis of the family functioning and outline the risks associated. Through regular visits I developed an intervention plan which included enhancing the identified strengths of the family in order to mitigate risks and improve what I saw as abnormal family functioning. However using these methods within the organizational limits of the child protection agency I was employed by, I did not in fact help create sustainable change for this family and when my time as her worker ended, this child appeared to still be at risk, the young mother still living in poverty and likely even more resentful and mistrustful of CAS workers.

How is it then, if I succeeded in following the objectives and core competencies of a child protection worker, that I was not successful with this family? My Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) experience, like many North American BSW programs was grounded in a generalist practice approach. Topics such as how neoliberalism and the current political culture promotes market driven managerialistic approaches to social work and how this impacts working relationships with clients, was not a significant theme in my education. Perhaps if I had received additional education and knowledge about how this agenda fits into child welfare, I may have better understood the overreaching forces impacting my work and my relationships with clients. Additionally, if I had focused more on how power operates and influences relationships in my education, perhaps I may have found time to advocate with and for my client, while simultaneously meeting ministry standards and ensuring the child was safe. If the child welfare system was better funded by a more socially responsible political agenda, perhaps workers would have lower caseloads and be able to spend necessary time with families

and be better able to engage in social activist movements to improve the child welfare system. Perhaps if I had learned how to engage in reflexivity, I may have understood the unrealistic exceptions of balancing home and professional life when both were engaged in crisis and found ways to continue to connect and empathize with my clients.

These are the dilemmas and questions which inspired my interest in this research. How as a new worker could I have become better prepared in my education for child welfare work? What have other new workers experienced through their education that helped prepare them or hindered them? Lastly what are some creative ideas that could be developed to better prepare new workers, specifically social workers, for the reality of working in child protection? These questions form the focus of this study, which has included a literature review on new worker readiness and qualitative interviews with new workers and utilizes an Interpretive Critical methodological lens with an insider perspective in the data analysis. A unique aspect of this thesis was the opportunity to form a partnership with a fellow MSW student, Julie Huynh-Lauesen, who coauthored the literature review and conducted a similar, yet separate, research study with child welfare managers. We compared and contrasted findings from both studies. Each of us, then, individually analyzed the findings for our discussion sections. Our goal was to unearth information and ideas that can be used to better prepare students through their Bachelor of Social Work for entry into child welfare work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Coauthored by Dinh (Julie) Huynh-Lauesen

New workers, who are often new BSW graduates, find themselves thrown into complicated and stressful positions with an incredible amount of liability and authority placed in their hands. High turnover rates among new child welfare workers are common and this has created difficulties surrounding recruitment of qualified staff, productivity and available resources to families. “In 2007, the rate of turnover among all Ontario Children Aid Societies was 7.7%. Between 2007 and 2008, the Children’s Aid Society of London and Middlesex alone hired 66 Child Protection Workers with the cost to train these workers exceeding \$350,000” (OACAS.org, 2010). This raises the question of what social work education needs to look like in order to assist with preparing future child welfare professionals. Perhaps through education, new workers can be better prepared to work and maintain a career in child welfare. But what does being prepared actually mean? How well do BSW programs prepare new workers for the reality of practicing within the child welfare system? This section of the paper will review the research and literature available on this subject, in an attempt to better understand new worker preparedness for the child welfare system.

Brief History

Working in child welfare is a particularly difficult job due to its complexity, mandatory nature, the political paradigm of neoliberalism and the scope of public scrutiny placed on professionals in the field. As a state sanctioned social service, there are mandated expectations that need to be followed. Given the history of child welfare,

there have been shifts to its paradigm and approaches, leaving debates over the qualifications of those who are competent to carry out the child welfare work (Bramham, 2015). Social workers comprise the majority of those employed in the child welfare protection roles “several studies have cited the importance of social work education for workers providing services to children and families” (Hopkins et al, 1999).

The concept of who is deemed qualified to provide child protection services to families can be traced back to the nineteenth century (Ellett & Leighninger, 2007). At that time, volunteers, mainly through churches, provided the bulk of child protection services, such as providing alternate arrangements for children who they thought were abused or neglected. As society shifted towards science and away from religious faith, child welfare work was seen to be better provided by a profession that had a social science background. “While the field of child welfare was emerging, social work had begun to define itself as a profession” (Ellett & Leighninger, 2007, p. 7). As further economic and social upheaval occurred during the early twentieth century there was recognition that a profession like social work was needed in order to properly assess the needs of families, particularly the safety of children while considering socio-economic factors. This led to the development of schools of social work in Canadian universities, with child welfare being a field within social work (Zastow, 2009). According to Ellett & Leighninger (2007), the need for social work training became more relevant as child welfare began to encompass various responsibilities, such as family services, foster care, adoptions, and investigations, especially in relation to how societal expectations affected families.

In his article, *Rescuing the Waifs and Strays of the City: The Western Emigration Program of the Children's Aid Society*, Clay Gish (1999) explains how in the mid-1800s Charles Brace, founder of the Children's Aid Society in New York State, believed it was better to remove children from unhealthy homes and place them in nurturing positive environments rather than institutions. Under his leadership, "CAS developed innovative organizational methods still employed by modern social services agencies, such as using salaried case workers instead of volunteers, maintaining client case records, and conducting home visits to assess need and provide ongoing supervision" (Gish, 1999, p. 121). Brace's ideology stemmed from a time when religious charity approach was the only support available for those living in absolute poverty and patriarchal classist dominant views held sway. Since that time, Ontario developed policies and procedures through Ministry directives to ensure that children are protected under the law. Designated provincial child welfare agencies are licensed to intervene with families if children are determined to be at risk.

Despite the development of formalized education and what appeared to be the good intentions of service providers in the past, the history of child welfare is filled with decisions that are now marked as mistakes and seen as oppressive to different populations within society. Social work is a profession that mediates the relationship between people and the state. It positions itself as advocating against oppressive societal beliefs and structures. Yet social workers are often employed by government funded organizations, and are complicit in carrying out actions, supported by policy, that in fact, end up oppressing the very people social workers believe they are helping. McKeen talks about

how over the recent years “the conceptual norms of the mainstream social policy subtly shifted to embrace a casework doctrine that social problems can be addressed solely by treating the supposed deficiencies of the individual” (2006 p. 37). By focusing on the individual only, it ignores the social inequalities and injustices inherent in the neoliberal systems within society. “This approach further advances social norms that effectively blame the victim, whatever the good intentions of policy makers and social advocates” (McKeen, 2006 p.38).

An example of this is the “sixty scoop” where in the 1960s, child welfare workers apprehended many aboriginal children from their homes and communities, deeming them unsafe, and placing the children into the foster care system, with many of these children being adopted (Blackstock & Tocme, 2005). This mass removal of aboriginal children resulted in fragmenting cultural and parental teachings that were traditionally passed down from the older generations to the young (Blackstock & Tocme, 2005). Cindy Blackstock, an advocate for aboriginal children, argues that a disproportionate number of aboriginal children still reside in foster care and how despite the crippling effects that child welfare has historically inflicted upon the aboriginal population, the passage of time has not changed the approach to child welfare. Blackstock also explains that the current child welfare practice and its child protection workers are not adequately equipped to work effectively with the aboriginal peoples (March 6, 2015).

Nigel Parton (1998) explained how changes throughout child welfare history have resulted in new strategies being adopted which may not have the best interest of children and families at heart. Parton described how the notion of normalcy was founded

on mainly white, middle class values. Parton further argued that the compartmentalizing of people as either normal or unhealthy creates a shift towards pathologizing the individual. “Normalizing mechanisms require knowledge of the whole person in his or her social context, and depend on medio-social expertise and judgments for their operations” (1998 p. 9). Parton explained how this shift has created the emergence of social workers as social police agents, who are the modern day solution for surveillance of normalcy (1998).

Dominelli (1996) pointed out that those in power have placed market-type expectations on the field which increase managerialism, accountability and decrease spending, with a belief that these practices will enhance our society’s well-being by encompassing market models. According to Fook, the commoditization of social work in a managerialistic society is one which service organizations (the sellers) are measuring knowledge and skills by cost values, as ways to prove they are able to provide the required services within the budgets set by the government (the buyer), as they compete for fewer dollars allocated for social welfare services (2012,).

The child welfare field in Ontario has however made a shift towards Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) in order to address the inherent power imbalances in our society. This movement calls for a more reflective practitioner, one who considers how power dominates and exploits our interactions with each other. “If oppression was operating at every level of society, including intimate interpersonal relationships, then the anti-oppressive social worker had license to intervene, highlight and minimize such power imbalances” (McLaughlin, 2005 p. 289). The critique of this movement however,

is that it is somewhat idealistic and hard to put into practice when language and political climates embrace racist and oppressive terminology (McLaughlin, 2005). Additionally an AOP stance, although unintentional, can misdirect reform, in that racist or discriminatory acts are seen in larger society as individual actions, not inherent within the whole country. Therefore political bodies are relieved of responsibility of acknowledging how the neoliberal system oppresses and maintain inequality (McLaughlin, 2005). To make this point, McLaughlin borrows a quote from Philot:

“I used to think I was poor. Then they told me I wasn’t poor I was needy. They told me it was self-defeating to think of myself as needy, I was deprived. They then told me deprived was a bad image, I was underprivileged. They told me underprivileged was over used, I was disadvantaged. I still haven’t got a dime. But I sure have a great vocabulary”. (Philot, 1999:13 quoted in McLaughlin, 2005 p. 291).

Social Work Education and Child Welfare

Child Welfare workers are required to possess in-depth knowledge and become specialists in a variety of complex policies, programs and family dynamics. Workers are called upon to understand not only risk and safety threats to children, but also to understand family functioning and be culturally sensitive and aware of societal factors which impact families. “Studies completed in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s indicated that professional social work education provides the type of knowledge and skills that are required for effective work in the Child Welfare field” (Albers, Riely & Rittner, 1993).

Additionally a study by Liberman, Hornby & Russel (1988) found that Child Welfare workers who held BSW and MSW degrees “reported feeling better prepared for the work than did workers without a social work education” (Hopkins, Mudrik & Rudolph, 1999 p. 752).

Hopkins, Mudrik & Rudolph (1999) in their article *Impact of University/Agency Partnerships in Child Welfare on Organizations, Workers and Work Activities* explained how some universities and child welfare sectors in the United States are partnering to enhance social work education in order to rebuild child welfare to a recognized professional service. Additionally, “models of these university/agency partnerships are being shared across North America to promote strategies to: (1) build effective collaborations between public child welfare agencies and universities; and (2) design educational curriculum-and innovative field internship experiences [Beard & Haynes 1995; Birmingham et al. 1996; McFadden et al. 1995; Risley-Curtiss et al. 1995]. The research conducted with the workers/students and those representing the managers/agencies suggest that the MSW education experience produced a noticeable change in the workers, specifically they became more knowledgeable and skilled, they felt more competent, and they acquired a professional identity. These findings are consistent with what has been found through university/public child welfare agency partnerships in other settings. In Florida, Louisiana, and California, public child welfare workers who returned to school for a MSW degree also have been found to be more knowledgeable, competent and confident in their abilities and able to produce positive outcomes for their clients (Hopkins, Mudrik & Rudolph, 1999 p. 8).

Contrary to the above literature, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies who are the representative body of child welfare agencies in Ontario submitted a request September 2009 for an exemption of the Social Policy Bill 179, and in this submission stated that a social work degree is not necessary to work in child welfare. "Child welfare professionals come from a variety of educational backgrounds and experiences which may include both college and university programs, but do not always include degrees in social work. These educational backgrounds are enriched by extensive in-service child protection training, mandated by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services" (OACAS, 2007). This statement claims that training on child protection workers' competency is therefore more important for a worker to develop than simply a social work degree. This attempt to have CAS workers exempt from the Social Policy Bill 179 may be due, in part, to the limitations of rural Ontario agencies ability to recruit professionals who hold specifically social work degrees, and therefore may provide allowance for those agencies to hire other degrees for child welfare work (Zapf, 1993).

Perry (2006) explains how a study utilizing a proportionate, stratified random sample of both supervisor and peer evaluations of child welfare workers, identified findings which presented that "the educational background of child welfare workers is a poor predictive variable of their performance" (Perry, 2006 p 403). This study received a wide range of criticisms from professionals (Hughes & Baird (2006); Ellett (2006); Zlotnik (2006); McCarthy (2006) in the field, who challenged the validity of the research and findings provided (Perry 2006). Zlotnik's (2006) assertion for example, argued that there is a validated role for professional social workers as child welfare workers. As a

response, Perry (2006) then put forward another paper, arguing against social work as the prerequisite academic background for child welfare suggesting in the title that degrees do not guarantee competency,

If we are truly interested in increasing the knowledge, skills, and retention of the child welfare workforce, why should the financial and educational benefits of specialized Title IV-E programs (if they have demonstrated effectiveness) be restricted only to social work majors? If we are genuinely interested in reprofessionalizing child welfare and maximizing the retention of quality workers, should not the opportunity to participate in specialized educational programs be open to those with a genuine interest in a career in child welfare (Perry, 2006 p 440).

Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining & McDermott Lane (2005) explain that the Title IV-E Education for child welfare is a partnership program in the United States which provides federal funds for collaborations between public child welfare agencies and universities, usually BSW and/or MSW social work education programs, to encourage retention and professional social work degrees in the child welfare field. Zlotnik, et al. (2005) explained that a recent “systematic review of research and outcome studies was undertaken by the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (IASWR) in collaboration with the University of Maryland School of Social Work to answer the question: What conditions (personal and organizational factors) and strategies influence the retention of staff in public child welfare agencies?” (Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining & McDermott Lane, 2005, p. 1).

Zlotnik et al (2005) explained that despite the funding provided through Title IV-E training funds,

“Few if any states are able to prepare enough child welfare workers through this mechanism for it to be the only recruitment and retention strategy used. In addition, the great variation across IV-E partnership models, and the fact that the programs change and evolve or devolve as state administrations change, makes it difficult to obtain a complete picture of what is happening nationally” (Zlotnik et al, 2005, p. 4).

The Social Work Policy Institute in the United States however reported findings from several studies commissioned by the NASW (National Association of Social Work) specifically, (Barbee, 2003; Harrison, 1995; Lewandowski, 1998; Jones, 2002; Okamura & Jones, 1995; Vinokur-Kaplan, 1991; Ellett, 2003) which argue that in child welfare, “Staff with social work degrees — and those who are IV-E trained — are most inclined to stay” (Socialworkpolicy.org, 2010). This underlines some of the challenges with incorporating university/agency partnership into social work education for child welfare practice.

Whipple, Solomon-Jozwiak, Williams-Hecksel, Abrams & Bates, (2006) explained how their research has in fact focused on a collaboration between a university and agencies in order to better prepare both BSW and MSW students for child welfare practice. They described,

Probably the single biggest factor contributing to the successful implementation of the CWLC (Child Welfare Learning Collaborative) was the fact that it was agency- and not university-driven. University outreach administrators, based on many years of experience, realized that at least during the first year of implementation, faculty members should be the minority at the table. This better enables the wisdom to flow from the field to academia (rather than the other way around), which was viewed as an essential component. (p. 96).

Programs developed from University and Agency partnerships, they argue, must tap into a combination of expertise held by both practitioners in the communities and universities. The current curriculum, Whipple et.al explained for most social work programs across the United States provides students with a generalist approach to micro, mezzo and macro systems yet

In child welfare, for example, students need heightened exposure to working with highly challenging parents and children simultaneously with the systems (e.g. courts, mental health) within which they must operate. A two year program is often too short a time span for many students to see the bigger picture and put all the pieces of theory, practice, research, and policy together (p. 105).

In the *Review of the Literature on Child Welfare Training* Collins, Amodeo & Clay explained how partnerships between Universities and Agencies can be complicated. “The academic institution’s mission is education, while the child welfare organization’s is practice. Although visions of the common good can serve as unifying principles, differing views on implementation can result in particular challenges” (Collins, Amodeo & Clay, 2007 p 77). Additionally, Collins, Amodeo & Clay, (2007) describe how the generalist curriculum focus in some schools of social work at the BSW level can conflict with the specialized child welfare focus of agencies. Collins et.al also reported that challenges arise between the university’s more theoretical model of education, and the agency’s preference for practical training.

Cash, Mathiesen, Barbanell, Smith, and Graham, (2006) present findings from a study undertaken after students had completed a Child Welfare Certificate Program through a university/agency partnership developed through the Department of Children and Families (DCF) again in the United States. The authors describe how the perspectives of both students and current child welfare workers were sought in order to provide multiple perspectives on how the curriculum met their learning goals (Cash et al, 2006). The results showed the students and workers each rated knowledge of reporting, investigation assessments, and case planning in the real world, along with therapeutic and personal boundaries, as the most important components of their learning. As such the authors recommend that

Students in a child welfare program should have the opportunity to apply their knowledge to real case situations and to use current tools and assessment instruments. The more realistic the classroom environment can be, the more prepared the students will be to synthesize their knowledge into their field work (Cash et al, 2006, p.137).

Auerbach, McGowan & LaPorte (2007) examined public child welfare employee's perceptions of their graduate social work education. The study asked if the skills and knowledge gained in social work education promoted work satisfaction and led to a desire to remain working in child welfare. The authors described their findings as

96 percent emphasized their desire to serve children and families better. These graduates were very positive about their academic and field experiences, with almost all saying they would recommend MSW training to others. There was a constant progression in their perceived knowledge and skill level over time.- It was striking to note the respondents' attitudes about remaining employed at ACS.

Only 13 percent of those who responded said they planned to leave within the next two years (p. 55).

Auerbach et al additionally identified that satisfaction with the nature of the work and pay were the two strongest predictors of the length of time the participants planned to stay working in child welfare. “These are important findings because they demonstrate that public investment in MSW education can have significant pay-off by increasing the knowledge and skills of public child welfare workers and encouraging long-term commitment to the work” (p 55). As many of the studies conducted focused specifically on students obtaining their MSW, perhaps the United States social work education may differ from Canada’s and therefore the focus on the MSW as the entry level degree may not be directly applicable to a Canadian context. However these studies do emphasize the value of developing university based social work education to better prepare workers for a career in Child Welfare.

Nancy Chavkin and Karen Brown explained that evaluation is essential in University/agency partnerships because “the field is so dynamic that one cannot possibly predict what lies ahead. The only way to keep abreast and be able to forecast some of what the future holds is to have a built-in evaluation process for all components of the University/agency partnership” (2003 p. 63). Interestingly, Chavkin and Brown explained that child welfare agencies and universities may have differing goals. When the agency and university were asked to outline their goal for the partnership, although initially both seemingly had the same goal of preparing workers for the field, they

discovered that “agency partners saw the goal as to improve the lives of children and families in the child welfare system while the university partners saw the goal as increasing the number of social workers hired in the public child welfare system” (2003, p. 56).

Antle, Barbee and Van Zyl considered how to evaluate child welfare education in a United States based study. They considered whether individual learning readiness could be transferred to practice. The authors explained that the model was tested through an experimental-control group with 72 supervisors and 331 case workers in public child welfare. Their findings suggested that immediate learning, along with supervisor attitudes toward trainees were the strongest predictors of the ability to transfer useful skills to practice (Antle, Barbee & Van Zyl, 2008). Although this study focused on training, rather than specifically education, the findings may still be applicable to this review as they support the idea of university/agency partnerships to promote the transfer of education from social work programs into child welfare practice.

A Canadian example of a child welfare specialization can be found at King’s University College of Social Work in London Ontario, a course outline stated “[t]he practice model that will be introduced will be child focused, family centred and strengths based” (Selected Practice Issues Child Welfare, 2011). The outline described course objectives as focused on developing clear understanding of the duties and responsibilities of a child protection worker. Additionally, the course focuses on understanding authority, learning how to identify child maltreatment signs, counselling in child welfare and learning how to complete risk and safety assessments and develop intervention plans with

families (King's University, 2014). Practical applications to child welfare work appear to be included; however topics such as how oppression and social inequality are maintained within the current dominant culture are not stated in the curriculum. The outline also seems to address what to do, but not how to think about the systemic realities that impact client's lives. Important intervention skills however appear to be taught, but a focus on a broader understanding which would contribute to assessments is not highlighted in the outline.

Child Welfare Competencies & The Impact of the Risk Assessment

The high profile cases of child deaths presented by the North American media throughout the 1980s and 1990's resulted in the public's outrage and called for an increase in accountability of child welfare workers (Parton, 1998). This drive for accountability of child welfare workers continues today. For example the description of the case of 5 year old Jeffery Baldwin resurfaced again in a recent 2015 article from a Toronto newspaper,

Jeffrey died in 2002 after he was placed in the care of his maternal grandparents, Elva Bottineau and Norman Kidman, by the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto. He was kept inside a cold, locked bedroom with an older sister. The two were beaten repeatedly, rarely fed and forced to drink out of the toilet. (The Star, February 10, 2015).

In 2011 an additional article in the Toronto Star stated,

Manitoba's ombudsman says it's taking too long to investigate the growing number of cases of children dying while in the care of the province's welfare agencies. Irene Hamilton says there were 106 cases that hadn't been investigated when Manitoba's children's advocate took over reviews of child welfare deaths in 2008. That number had grown to 186 by last March. (Toronto Star, December 13, 2011).

As a response, all child protection workers in Canada are now expected to be trained and fully competent to make decisions regarding child safety, and be able to defend those decisions with evidence if required (Stokes & Schmidt 2012). Child protection has therefore increasingly engaged in more positivist evidence based accountability practices. New workers in Ontario receive training on risk assessment, case management, signs of safety, structured decision making and forensic interviewing techniques (OACAS 2015). Upon completion of new worker training, child protection workers should be able to demonstrate the skills needed to assess risk, family dysfunction and child maltreatment, and provide interventions based on best practices and family engagement strategies (OACAS, 2015).

Gerard Bellefeuille & Glen Schmidt (2006) considered how to incorporate a child welfare specialization into the Bachelor of Social Work education in British Columbia, which both satisfies Ministry competencies and promotes a critical structural perspective that encourages students to challenge social injustice within child welfare (2006). Bellefeuille & Schmidt explained how the program raised questions about the education of critical thinkers versus technicians who blindly follow directions without question, “the Ministry was looking to ensure that BSW graduates acquire the competencies and skills necessary for beginning-level child protection work” (2006 p.6). Additionally, the geographic separation of the various agency sites called for an innovative approach using an online course delivery system that is relatively new to social work education.

British authors, Featherstone & Broadhurst, (2012), caution us to remember that it is important to understand the wider social and economic climates, as how we practice is interconnected with these factors. “Thinking systematically about improving children’s safety and well-being must involve an analysis of the political commitments of successive governments to ‘welfare’ and, most importantly, to addressing inequalities” (p. 619). Without this, they explain, in combination with a tighter fiscal climate there is an intensification of inequalities. They further argue that without a focus on structural forces, there is a negative effect on social work practice in how we analyze what is considered to be good parenting. A plan of service developed to perform against timed targets, which expects parents to improve within a mandated time frame, ignores cultural interpretations of both parenting and time. (Featherstone & Broadhurst, 2012).

In Ontario, the risk assessment tool was introduced into practice in the late 1990’s in response to the public outcry resulting from child deaths. This tool, accompanied by a reduction in funding for social services, specifically resulted from the Harris government’s Common Sense revolution from 1995-2003, “In response, the government declared war on child abuse and promised to ‘reform’ the system (Donovan & Welsh, 1997 quoted in Dumbrill, 2006 p. 8). The risk assessment therefore has had a strong influence on child protection competencies. Many authors critique the use of risk assessments and argue it narrowly defines abuse and maltreatment and explain how it was intended to be a tool to understand previous behaviour and client factors, not to be the primary determinant of a child protection intervention.” (White, Hall & Peckover, 2008, Swift & Callahan 2009).

Gary Dumbrill (2006) suggested that approaches to child welfare swing like a pendulum from highly intrusive policing activities to family centred supportive practices. “At one extreme the pendulum focuses practice on family support at the expense of child safety, and at the other it focuses practice on child safety at the expense of family support” (Dumbrill, 2006 p. 6). He noted that in response to Harris’ reform agenda, which resulted in an increase of children into care, Ontario put forward the “Transformation” agenda which focuses on family strengthening and differential response. It includes exploring kin and community supports for families, rather than more traditional intrusive approaches of bringing children in care for protection. Dumbrill explained however, that although the transformation approach is potentially a positive direction for child welfare, this new swing of the pendulum may go too far, in that investigation and assessment of risk may be lost in the new process. He argued that “children cannot be protected by a system that provides ‘one thing,’ and yet policy makers tend to adopt these jingoistic, simple remedies and thereby set the stage for policy oscillation between extremes” (Dumbrill, 2006, p. 6). These policy extremities influence the support universities receive for educating professionals for child welfare, and the political ideologies then impact the way BSW programs are structured, which then in turn affects how new workers are prepared for the field.

Jan Fook argued that, “[s]ince social work is a profession practiced in context and we recognize that one of the distinctive features of our profession is that our work is situational, it is important to frame our practice in ways which represent this orientation” (2012, p.162). This can be difficult in practice as “[c]ontexts are uncertain, unpredictable

and changeable; it is not possible to identify which and whether different elements of contexts ‘cause’ or ‘determine’ other elements” (Fook, 2012, p. 162-163). As such, child welfare education is greatly influenced by the government of the day and its ideological impact on the welfare state, such as how resources are allocated and policies are developed. The context in which the welfare state exists also shapes how social work is practiced.

The problem is that in a number of child deaths (Gove, Beckford and there are a list of dozens), there were very clear signs that the children were not only “at risk”, but were being actively abused during the time social workers were visiting. In these cases the same mistakes were made – it is therefore “certain” that when a child is in such danger workers must do certain standard things to ensure the child’s safety (like regularly see and talk to the child) (Dumbrill, 2007).

Eileen Munro’s article, *Avoidable and Unavoidable Mistakes in Child Protection Work* explained how assessment will not prevent the unavoidable mistakes as it is impossible to accurately predict all human behaviour but, social workers can, through proper assessments, help to prevent the avoidable ones (1996). Munro explained

[t]he inevitability of some mistakes in this type of work has been overshadowed by cases where the errors seemed avoidable. Society’s horror and outrage at some well publicized cases where children endured horrible abuse before being killed has fueled a public expectation that social workers should be able to protect children and, if a child dies from abuse, social workers have done something wrong. The problem for social workers is how to distinguish between good and bad mistakes (1996, p. 794).

Munro (1997) further argued that the social workers need, for their own peace of mind, to have a solid achievable standard to help assess risk. Campbell & McGregor (2002) caution that the risk assessment tool as a way to objectify a service user in a manner

whereby the worker is more likely to enforce the organization's agenda, rather than focusing on the family's needs. However Campbell & McGregor (2002) also argue that the risk assessment could also aid with organization, especially under chaotic stressful conditions where workers are forced to make decisions.

The risk assessment is therefore helpful to social workers by providing a foundation to establish grounds for utilizing intrusive action against a family in order to protect children. Again this intervention may feel for social workers as in direct conflict with their social work values, therefore the standard may help justify their actions and decisions, even within their own conscience (p. 44.)

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS), Child Protection Standards define the risk assessment as "a 'point in time' evaluation and should not be confused with or be substituted for ongoing risk analysis throughout the life of a case" (MCYS 2014). The Child Protection Standards state, "[r]isk is the likelihood of long-term future harm due to child maltreatment. Actuarial risk assessments such as the Ontario Family Risk Assessment have measures that can estimate the likelihood of future occurrences of child maltreatment" (MCYS, 2014). However a "Differential Response", which incorporate interventions such as family group decision making and mediation to conflict resolution, along with a focus on "Structured Decision Making" for case planning are now more of the currently promoted child welfare interventions. The Ministry of Children and Youth explain,

Although the Ontario Risk Assessment was a "state of the art" clinical tool at the time, subsequent research has resulted in child protection being increasingly able to implement evidence-based clinical tools and interventions that research has demonstrated result in better safety and well-being outcomes for children. These developments provide an opportunity to replace the Ontario

Risk Assessment by “next generation” assessments that have improved validity and reliability (MCYS, Child Protection Standards in Ontario, 2007).

The focus on competencies and risk assessment in child welfare permeates practice and contributes to the discussion about the preparation of new workers.

New Workers’ Experiences

Csiernik, Smith and Drumgole (2010) describe a qualitative study of 20 new child protection workers finding that it takes nearly two years before a worker has developed the knowledge, skills, abilities and disposition to work independently. They point out that budget cuts, high caseloads, lack of political financial support and increase in worker turnover has resulted in most new workers’ managing a full case load on their own shortly after starting their career in child welfare. They further explained that previous studies have found that turnover rates are highest within the first three years of employment in child welfare. “Not surprising, the stressful and traumatic incidents experienced by new workers inside and outside of work had negative effects on new workers” (p. 225). Personal stress, an organizational culture of blame and managerialistic approaches to supervision are identified as negatively impacting new workers’ retention and success in the field.

Poso & Forsman (2013) conducted a study in Finland, looking at reasons why some social workers remain in the child welfare field throughout their career. They explored the positive coping mechanisms social workers embrace in order to manage stress and find value in their work. They also identified the organizational conditions that

support their work (Poso & Forsman, 2013). The key challenge faced by workers was to learn how to manage stress by finding a balance between their home and work life. They noted that utilizing supervision effectively and maintaining a focus on the best interests of children helped workers find reward in their work. “In other words when continuing in child welfare, one has to learn to balance the positive and negative aspects the work has on the person” (Poso & Forsman, 2013, p. 652). The authors argued that research indicated that the caring nature of the work itself, and a social worker’s commitment to children may overcome the stress and conflict of the work, (Poso & Forsman, 2013). Poso & Forsman also explained that new bureaucratic expectations for new workers can increase stress and impact positive outcomes for new workers.

Interestingly, implementing core competencies and decision making tools is suggested to help ease the anxiety of new workers and provide structure for their work. “For the novice, it is important to follow instructions and guidelines; norms concerning documentation for example, play an important role in everyday coping; the novice social workers find it stressful if they fail such norms” (Poso & Forsman, 2013, p. 657). Senior workers however, were found to be less concerned about following structural rules for their work, and seemed more focused on the actual client work, rather than bureaucratic record keeping expectations. “The experienced social workers, with a history of 2-10 years in child welfare, have overcome those tensions and have started focusing more on the children and their families and are therefore less troubled by bureaucratic expectations” (Poso & Forsman, 2013, p. 657). Practice wisdom of senior workers is therefore identified as a resource to new workers and the article offers solutions which

incorporate additional education, increase in competencies and mentoring of the younger workers by the more seasoned child welfare social workers (Poso & Forsman, 2013, p. 658).

Aronson & Sammon (2000) conducted a similar study with more experienced workers which compared the experiences of 14 participants, 7 who were child welfare workers and 7 healthcare social workers. Although the participants were described to have a range of experience in the social work field of between 4 to 20 years, all said they are now required to carry heavier and more complex case loads and to work at a faster pace (Aronson & Sammon, 2000, p. 171). Participants in the study also explained that they felt the organizations they were employed at were more concerned about “administrative procedures that standardized the processing of service users” (Aronson & Sammon, 2000, p. 172). Participants also described how challenging the work with clients is when they only have time to focus on the presenting needs, without time for forming a relationship with clients, “Almost all echoed that if they take on change work, it would certainly have to be on their own time” (Aronson & Sammon, 2000, p. 175). Participants viewed supervision as not generally “a source of significant nourishment or relief” (Aronson & Sammon, 2000, p. 175). Recommendations from the research was to not only forge an alliance between school and agency’s to better support social workers, but also offer “stimulation and assistance with practice challenges” (Aronson & Sammon, 2000, p. 183).

Although this literature review was limited to a small body of research, it did provide an illustration about how prepared new workers feel to engage in child welfare,

based on their education and training. Contradictions exist in the literature about whether a social work background is needed or not, in order to provide a strong foundation for practice in child welfare. How to ready a new worker for child welfare is also a debate. Incorporating new worker training and competencies-based approaches into university education is suggested, although some research argues against this approach, as core social work skills and a focus on critical thinking can be jeopardized through this positivist approach to learning. Finally how new workers' experience the child welfare field and how they felt their education had prepared them were considered. According to the studies in this review, new workers' experience high levels of stress, bureaucratic pressures and a lack of support. One study found that positivist managerialistic approaches to training in child welfare helped ease this stress for new workers (Poso & Forsman, 2013), while others (Csiernik, Smith & Drumgole 2010) suggested this factor may contribute to stress. Interestingly, retention was mentioned in almost all the articles reviewed, which perhaps suggests that one of the motivations for these studies related to the worry about worker turn-over in child welfare practice. Zlotnik provides a way to address retention concerns

Will the lessons of the past be heeded? Encouraging social workers into child welfare needs to be sustained by more than funding resources. There must be commitment on the part of the agency and the university together or the professionally trained staff will not be there. Research strategies must be developed to create evidence to demonstrate for state legislatures, agency heads, governors and the media that there is a link between well-trained staff and child and family outcomes (Zlotnik, 2003 p. 13).

The majority of the literature reviewed acknowledges the difficulty that new workers' experience in child welfare, yet contradictions about how to prepare workers for this field, along with the limited understanding of the actual thoughts and opinions of new workers who are in the process of navigating these challenges, is concerning. The goal of this study is to provide a voice to new workers and managers, with the hopes that this will inform future educational opportunities for new child welfare workers.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

In the Masters of Social Work program, we were asked to reflect deeply on what makes us the kind of social worker we are, and how this in turn influences our research. Neuman additionally describes how interpretive social science researchers, utilize "such meanings to interpret their social world and make sense of their lives" (1997 p. 70). These definitions illustrate what lies at the heart of the theoretical lens for my research question and embrace the kind of social research which fits with my own epistemology.

As a critical researcher I am intrinsically interested in how new workers' may have felt their education has or has not prepared them for work in child welfare and what the systemic and organizational barriers were to their learning. As an interpretive researcher I also value the meaning behind social interactions and behaviours and tried to see each new worker's perspective as having a unique value to my research. I was interested in exploring new workers' experiences in child welfare from their own

perspective, along with how new workers felt their education had, or had not prepared them for work in child welfare.

My own experience as a new worker greatly influenced my interest in this research topic. Soon into my career as a social worker I found myself experiencing an ethical tug of war between how I was expected to provide service to families, and how my social work values directed me to provide service. Michael C. LaSala discusses an emic (insider) approach to research. His argument, related to the value of insider research, is applicable to my own situation. I was positioned as an insider – a critical interpretive researcher who has experienced being a new child welfare worker herself and who recently worked in child protection.

LaSala (2003) takes a Critical Social Science (CSS) view which focuses on how dominant discourses, inherent within power imbalances in society, impact people in the gay and lesbian communities. Early in the article, LaSala identifies his own positioning as a gay man. In this way LaSala promotes the advantages as an emic/insider researcher having a unique and relevant perspective on the issue. A critical researcher's purpose is to "look at the underlying sources of social relations and empowering people" (Neuman, 1997, p.60). My goal was that through an emic, or insider approach to conducting research, I would be able to relate to the participants, increase their comfort and bring to bear my lived experience in reviewing and interpreting the data. Through an insider perspective to the research, specifically with interviewing, I found I was able to recognize certain participant's struggles from my own experience as a new worker and used this shared experience as a doorway for participants to relate and provide deeper explanation

of their experience. Additionally, throughout analysis, my insider perspective helped me identify themes and statements which I believe held direct representation of the themes in the data and may have only been recognized by someone who had experienced being a new worker herself. The limitation to this was that my own critical perspective could hinder the interpretive data analysis and an example of this will be discussed later in the implication section.

Methodology: Grounded Theory

When I was deciding which data analysis best fit my methodological lens, I asked myself how I could best understand and make sense of the interviews and how I could look at this data using a critical and interpretive lens. I also asked myself how I could avoid my own biases about new worker experiences while also using my own insider interpretation to find deeper meaning in the data. Grounded Theory appeared to be the best approach to addressing these concerns. Kathy Charmaz explains how Grounded Theory has distinctive characteristics from other forms of data analysis, she argues “grounded theory gives you tools to answer ‘why’ questions from an interpretive stance” (2012 p.4).

Charmaz also explains that Grounded theory, “by analyzing both your data and emerging ideas throughout inquiry, you integrate and streamline data collection and analysis” (2012 p.4). Using this technique, I was able to gather vast amounts of information through a literature review and data collection and analysis. Using this technique I accepted that I had my own ideas about participant’s experiences and about

how they were partly constructed by power imbalances within the child welfare system, while at the same time, still allow participants own voices to come through in the analysis. Data was therefore gathered through the literature review and qualitative interviews. The qualitative interviews were conducted with a small sample of 5 new BSW graduates working in child welfare in the Ontario Grand River Zone, which includes agencies located in Halton, Hamilton, Haldimand and Norfolk and Brant. New workers were defined as having worked in an intake or family worker position in child welfare for 3 or less years. I anticipated that these participants would provide the most insight into how well prepared they felt for the child welfare field. Initially, I hoped to recruit new workers who have been working for 2 or fewer years in the child welfare field only, however given the time restriction for this research study and the available participants who volunteered within the recruitment time, an adjustment to their years of experience in family and intake roles in child welfare was made. The interview questions (Appendix C) focused on how well new workers felt their BSW studies prepared them for the child welfare field. The questions explored gaps in their education and training, organizational context and how power, confidence, skills and knowledge influenced their ability to be successful in their role.

Participant data resulting from the interviews was coded to ensure confidentiality and in order to protect the identities of the participants. Interviews with participants were short, completed on average within an hour and held at a neutral location of the participants choosing. Participants were recruited through email communication (Appendix D) which included a poster with brief information about the study (Appendix

A), with a letter of information which included the purpose of the research and information about informed consent and confidentiality of the collection of data (see appendix B). Permission was received from all participants to engage in the research and a copy of the thesis once completed will be made available to participants upon request.

The data analysis for my research was completed through line by line coding, which is explained as a useful approach to Grounded Theory. Although time consuming, “line by line coding means that a researcher can actively engage with the data and begin to conceptualize them” (Charmaz 2012 p.5). Charmaz explains how line by line thematic coding provides a stronger exploration of data. Ryan and Bernard, explain that “without thematic categories, investigators have nothing to describe, nothing to compare, and nothing to explain” (2003 p. 86).

Again, to remind the reader, this research was conducted through a partnership with Julie Huynh-Lauesen, a fellow MSW student. Through a combined effort to review the literature, and then comparing and contrasting of the findings from the interviews of managers and new workers, we were able to obtain rich information about how supervisors and new workers feel university social work education prepares workers for the child welfare field. This partnership allowed us to explore this topic further and incorporate both the voices of new workers and their managers into the discussion, providing a wider analysis of the current atmosphere for recent graduates transitioning into child welfare work. This research received prior approval from the McMaster Research Board of Ethics (appendix E).

FINDINGS

Demographic Information of Participants:

Out of the five participants, all were employed in a child welfare agency within the Grand River Zone. All five had received a BSW, and 3 out of the 5 had previous degrees from other disciplines prior to completing their BSW. Years of experience in the social service field varied between fifteen years to six months in a range of settings including residential, women's services and health supports. Participants' length of experience in child welfare ranged from six months to three years, all in case worker positions in Family Services, Intake or Generic (managing both). Three of the participants identified as being under the age of 25, with one participant in their early thirties and one in their late forties. One person identified as male and four as female. Out of the five participants four identified Caucasian as their race and ethnicity, with one identifying as Indigenous. Two of the participants shared that they had experienced Child Welfare as a child themselves, which they believed helped them to empathize and relate to clients.

THEMES FOUND IN THE DATA

Transfer of Theory to Practice

When asked to describe how their BSW had prepared them for clinical work in child welfare, most of the participants identified feeling as though their BSW degrees had provided a basic social work foundation; however they felt it had not been specific enough to child protection. Basic social work skills taught in the program were explained by participants as relationship building, empathy, self-reflection and trust. These skills

were identified as helpful in their first years of work. Empathy helped them understand how structural problems within society can impact a clients' ability to manage and problem solve. One participant explained,

School helped me learn how to start where the client is at because at the end of the day, people are people and I think my personal idea is they didn't have the coping mechanism to manage appropriately in that situation.

Similarly, some participants identified their BSW as being helpful in learning how to think critically and maintain an Anti-Opressive approach. One participant described,

School taught me critical thinking, putting things into a critical perspective, how to reframe, validate clients and consider socioeconomic background. We were given at least a good understanding of concepts behind why families struggle.

Learning in their BSW about how to use reflection as a tool for understanding interactions with clients, was described by all participants as helpful in preparing them for the work. One participant when asked about her use of reflection, described how she integrates this into her daily practice,

I use this lot, once you get to know somebody, you start to talk to them, you get to hear their stories and this helps build some empathy. Driving home from that appointment I'll think, what would I do, what would I have done in their situation?

The participants reflected on how their client's experiences affected them, but did not discuss reflecting on their own experiences and the lens through which they viewed their clients. Concerns about their lack of preparation in school for practice was a

dominant theme throughout the data. Participants described how the learning of broad perspectives such as anti-oppression in their BSW was beneficial, but practicing it can be challenging. School did not prepare graduates to “do” anti-oppression. One participant described how they felt the theoretical background from the BSW, specifically from the child welfare course had been a good foundation for Social Work, but the information had been difficult to transfer into the child welfare field.

The BSW was not really helpful to prepare me. I did take a child welfare course; we covered the history of CAS, how perspectives have changed, and the theoretical approach of AOP. Knowing the theories is helpful, but the work itself has a life of its own.

Another participant described how although new workers are educated in Anti-Oppressive Social Practice, it does not lead to interventions

The greatest drive has to do with how we intervene with families. So that’s where your AOP piece comes in, how we are going to interact with and intervene with the family. So we talk a lot about poverty and you know drug addiction and mental health. But we don’t really, I don’t think we dig deep enough to pull apart, I think we can do a bit more in terms of having a greater appreciation, what brings all of this on? What brings on poverty, what brings on those challenges?

Interestingly, several of the participants identified feeling their clinical education had actually created difficulties for their integration into child welfare. They felt social workers were there to help and support, but described how the authoritative role of a child protection position does not allow for the clinical, therapeutic relationship with clients. Some participants felt because of this contrast, a BSW was not the degree that best prepared new workers for working in child welfare,

This does not really feel like social work. It doesn't feel like I am doing the skills I was taught. You need the skills and empathy from social work but there's an internal struggle, a battle between the power, policing and this doesn't feel very social work like.

To explore further I inquired if participants knew of anyone in their practice who did not have a BSW whom they could compare with, and asked "do they do a better job?" One participant replied, "Yes in that their intervention plans are easier. People who don't come from social work backgrounds don't have the instinct to empathize and do clinical piece, help people build coping skills". This statement begs the question that although the worker without a BSW may be able to intervene easier than those with a BSW, how is this then experienced by clients? Other participants discussed how they felt the work being hard was a good thing, as ultimately the power to decide if children can remain in their home is daunting, and a worker needs to critically reflect on their work with families before making such decisions.

New workers described how transferring the knowledge gained from their BSW into their practice had been difficult, given the time constraints and heavy caseloads. Learning ways to create windows for clinical social work in child welfare was suggested as an area that could improve BSW education, however it was recognized that it was also necessary to learn how to manage time and boundaries. One participant explained,

The only way to fit in the therapeutic work, if you have the time, if you make the time, if you stay and give time that you're not getting paid to do the work, then the trust between you and the family increases, and the power changes, it is incredible then the changes people can make.

Practice and ultimately time to learn “so you’re not dropped into it”, was the most prominent suggestion from new worker participants to better prepare them for the field. The child welfare course, along with the practicum was identified as somewhat helpful, but not realistic or genuine enough to adequately ready them for the work. As one participant said, there, “needs to be more hands on, more dirty, more gritty, but (in School) you have a safety net to learn before you’re in the trenches learning how to apply clinical work”.

One participant described when asked how they felt about alternating from a supportive to an authoritative approach when needed,

It can be challenging, I think that as workers’ we have skill sets that are somewhat more, could be in line with investigative work, and on the other side more supportive counselling, the relationship piece and I don’t always think it’s always easy for workers to transition from one to the other, especially if you are having to, you know, call up and be the heavy.

Similar statements among participants suggested that workers feel that they are either the supportive or authoritative kind of worker, and that it is a struggle to be both.

When asked what theoretical education could have been added to their BSW to better prepare new workers for child welfare, most participants suggested how a course specific to child development would have been beneficial. Several of the participants who did not have children told stories of their first experiences with having to investigate an allegation of abuse, and how they had felt unqualified to assess the situation based on their lack of experience with children. Most participants thought that being childless

affected relationships with parents. Some admitted to not telling clients they did not have children, while others without children explained how they would try to relate to parents by describing experiences with siblings, or as a child themselves. One participant when asked to describe particular challenges they experienced as a new worker explained, “Every client I talk to pretty much asks if I have kids. People ask if I know what they’re going through, can I put it into perspective with my own children.”

This was identified as a barrier particularity for the younger participants who described how difficult it is for parents who have children close to their worker’s age, to have that worker tell them what to do with their own kids.

Power & Feelings of Helplessness and Hopelessness

A significant theme found throughout the data was that of power and the use of authority in child welfare. A range of manifestations of power were described. From power imbalances found between the worker and clients, supervisor and worker and between child welfare staff and overall organization, scaling up to the power between the child welfare system and neoliberal political agenda. Interestingly, the issues with power did not only revolve around how new workers felt power applied to families, but how they felt the power in their work caused feelings of helplessness and hopelessness in themselves. To start, most participants felt that being comfortable with power was an important skill for a new worker. When asked what skills are needed for a new worker to be prepared, one participant explained, “In order to be good at the job, I also think well,

learning how to use your authority, because you really need to become comfortable using your authority.” Other workers described their first home visit shortly after graduation and feeling intimidated and underqualified when first having to provide a direction to parents. When asked how they felt their education had prepared or not prepared them for the use of power in child welfare, one participant explained,

School talks about being mindful of power imbalances, but I am not sure we got the specifics.. I don’t want to say we didn’t get strategies, we were told we can do the job differently, but I am not sure it was in-depth enough in terms of child protection.

It appears that power was a dominant theme in social work education. Students were taught about how power operates and how social workers can misuse power. But it seems from the participants’ comments that they were not provided with enough focus on the use of authority and not provided with opportunities to practice constructive use of power and authority. Most participants expressed that they thought being comfortable with power and authority can be taught in a classroom, however others stated how they thought this was more of a natural trait a new worker would possess. One participant when asked if they thought being comfortable with authority was needed for a new worker explained,

So it’s the type of candidate that is being sought. If you seek out somebody who is comfortable with power and authority then you’re going to see that trait express itself and if you seek out a supportive and compassionate type of person then those are the traits over time as well.

Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness were expressed by participants as a result of their conflict over power. Intruding, investigating, directing presented them with conflicts to their social work values. They wanted to help, rather than enforce. One participant described this conflict as,

We have so much power, but also feel powerless because we get into this job with so much empathy and want to help and save the day and then we go out and we really don't help the family, they don't even want us because they hate us. We are in a job where we don't have a lot of autonomy to do the job, it is based on what our supervisors decides.

Workers' experience conflict recognizing that they are working in an organization that has a great deal of power, yet as individual professionals they are unable to make independent decisions. They experience the power imbalance inherent in the supervisor-worker relationship. They are expected to enforce decisions that they have not created.

Another participant describes similar feelings of hopelessness when explaining her thoughts on the causes of burnout for new workers, "It's not the clients that cause burnout, not even the angry ones that burn you out, it's if the agency is not supportive, we have no voice, we feel as powerless as the clients". Based on my own experience as a child welfare worker, I initially thought this statement suggested the participant was referring to feeling powerless within the broader child welfare system, yet this statement again refers to the relationship between new workers and supervisors and the interventions new workers are expected to implement, regardless of their own thoughts and ideas. It is in the relationship with their supervisor where new workers can experience powerlessness. It is at this supervisory relationship site where the

governmental and organizational structures are enacted through the actions and words of the supervisors and other agency staff.

When asked if new workers felt they could use their power to work towards changes in the child welfare system, most participants thought this was not possible for a new worker. Feelings of helplessness in the organization as a whole were also identified,

If I try to challenge the system and I don't feel I'm being heard it makes me frustrated, which leads to worry about being insubordinate. You feel sort of trapped...then you have to worry 'is my job in jeopardy if I challenge?'

Similar feelings were presented by another participant,

There's that piece of learned helplessness that comes I think from doing frontline work. I think there's a lot of workers who do really good work who have really good ideas, but a lot of it gets lost because there are people above them who would rather their good ideas get recognized.

Another theme found in the data was that of an internal struggle, which was described by participants to encompass not only the conflict they felt between their social work values and power in their positions, but also in their own personal coping and internalization of the new worker experience. Most participants described how when they graduated from their BSW a damaging idea they had was they could change the world. However once they became immersed in their new child protection role, this social justice energy was quickly drained, "When we come out of school we are all rah rah I'm going to change things, then soon it's like, if I can help this family survive this week, if I can just survive this day." Another worker described how this energy was deflated,

“Coming out of school you’re naive and feel you can do all those things, but then you find out you’re a cog in a big machine which is really, just pumps out: kids are safe or not safe”.

Although feelings of hopelessness and helplessness related to power were expressed by all participants, the degree of this varied. For some participants feeling confident in their work, having positive relationships with supervisors, supportive team environments and positive coping skills helped them to mediate the discomfort related to power. These mediating factors will be discussed later in the findings.

Reality of Working in Child Welfare

Differences among participants related to how they came to child welfare, (e.g. student placement, previous work experience) likely influenced how workers experienced their integration into child welfare work. However, although the data varied somewhat, a pattern of responses indicated the participants did not feel the BSW had adequately prepare them for the reality of working in the child welfare field. This was perhaps the strongest thread throughout the data and seemed to correspond with the theme of power & feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

When asked how their BSW could have better prepared new workers for the reality of the field, all participants explained how more hands on, concrete skills specific to child welfare were needed. New worker training offered by the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies had been described by some participants as useful to address this gap in their education, however most participants felt the training had come too late to be

helpful to their New Worker experience. Out of the 5 participants interviewed, all but one had received their new worker training over a two-three year period, and by this time the training was mostly redundant as they had already been practicing fully in the field. Most participants described how they had already been carrying a caseload of families when they underwent their new worker training and how this had also impacted their ability to focus on the content of the course. One worker explained,

“The legal piece of my new worker training was helpful, but because it took so long to do all my training, a lot of the time I was squirming in my chair thinking this isn’t helpful, I have work to do, this is a waste of my time”.

Education specific to the legal system, and child welfare standards was identified as being helpful in new worker training and something participants would have liked to have had within their BSW.

When asked specifically about the child welfare course some participants had taken in their BSW and if it had been helpful to prepare, participants described again how more concrete skills and time to practice with clients and documentation was needed.

One participant described what had been missing from the course,

“Time for processing, like case studies in school, build a base know how of the standards so I can work through what I have to do, what are my next steps, how am I going to do it, how am I going to feel when I get out there?”

Several participants suggested that a solid understanding of the purpose and implementation of the risk assessment would have also been helpful to have within their BSW education. Hands on training with the risk assessment along with an explanation as

to why it is needed, was an idea presented as helping new workers feel confident to complete the tool appropriately. Investigative skills and time to practice was also suggested by all participants as needed in the BSW program. In addition, participants described how they worried they could harm children or families with their ignorance of standards and child protection assessment tools. One participant described how she felt her first few months on the job and how,

“I feel it’s so possible for new workers to put kids at risk if they don’t know what they are doing and they are so worried about offending families and they don’t yet have a relationship with their supervisor. Considering the authority they have that’s very possible”.

This statement ties into earlier findings about how new workers feel they need to be comfortable with power, along with the importance of strong supervision to provide confidence for new workers to be able to safely practice in the field.

Participants all suggested that a greater emphasis in their BSW on practical skills, along with opportunities to practice using power and completing documentation would have given them a greater sense of confidence when they began their jobs. Some participants described how their child welfare practicum had helped by providing an opportunity to shadow a worker before starting practice in the field. However participants who had experienced a practicum also suggested that this had not been a genuine enough experience to have fully prepared them for the work, one participant explained,

“The practicum needs to be real, if it’s just shadowing and you can’t do a lot of the work, only safe home visits, then it’s not genuine then they walk into the position thinking I’m going to love this job and then their buried”.

Another participant however described how because she had not completed a practicum in child welfare, she felt overwhelmed and far behind that of other new workers who had,

“I think it helped them make the transition smoother than me, even just being familiar with the standards and documentation, I had no idea what any of that stuff was and I had to learn it very quickly”.

Several new workers stated that they had learned the most from their mistakes however participants also felt guilty about the effect this learning had on the families they worked with. One participant described how,

“In time you realize you screwed up half the files in terms of documentation. It’s not fair to families to stick them with a brand new worker who doesn’t know anything about what they’re doing. It destroys the therapeutic relationship they may have had at any point existed, it’s not supportive and they are more nervous because an incompetent person is telling them what to do”.

Supervision and a supportive team was described by participants as a way to process and learn from their mistakes, along with an outlet to manage their feelings of guilt from making a mistake and not feeling prepared enough for the work.

Mental Toughness & How New Workers Cope

Despite a sense of powerlessness, inadequacy and fear, new workers do find ways to cope. The participants identified three ways of coping: Developing a mental strength, support from colleagues and team, along with positive supervision. When asked how participants dealt with the reality of working in this field, along with the feelings of

hopelessness and helplessness, something more than resilience was suggested, one worker defined it as “a mental toughness”. This participant explained what they meant by this mental toughness,

“It’s a mental strength, you need to be able to go from a screaming client to a new one, a whole new situation and you need the ability to just get through it, you might only have 15 minutes in between clients to get your head together”.

Another worker when asked how they know if they are coping replied,

“By my own sense of security, if it’s not impacting my own health and well-being, then I feel I am doing ok. At first I didn’t sleep, I cried at my desk all the time”.

When asked how new workers could learn this mental toughness, some participants suggested learning to use humour, along with having a safe supportive person to laugh with at work as key for participants in developing the ability to cope. Again when asked how they cope with the stress of the job, one participant explained,

“You need a relationship with another new worker or worker, someone safe you can go to to say to somebody something you would never say to anyone else like ‘I don’t like my client’”.

Supportive Colleagues

A good supportive team was suggested by all participants to help develop not only mental toughness, but also to help build the practical skills needed for the work. Additionally, support from coworkers when dealing with difficult situations with clients was described to help ease the emotional toll for new workers. Some participants did not

identify as having a supportive team and described how they felt alone and less prepared to manage the stress of the work. Again practical knowledge and concrete skills to manage burnout, compassion fatigue and secondary trauma was suggested by participants as needed to be incorporated into the BSW program, to help new workers learn this mental toughness, “teach me how to tell if it’s happening and what I can do about it”.

Supervision

The most prominent way new workers felt they could cope with the reality of the field, along with the internal struggle and develop that mental toughness, was through solid, supportive supervision. Most participants described how important they felt their supervision was for their first few months of learning the position and how this was directly related to their confidence in their work. One participant described how she used supervision to learn,

“I remember one of the first cases that I had, I walked into a home and I was like...oh my god, this place is so dirty, we need to get the kids out of here now. I remember coming back to my manager and she was like, was there anything blocking the doorway? Well no. Was there rotting food out? No. Was there feces on the ground? No. Was it unsafe in any other way? No. So basically I realized then that it was my own personal, but I needed to sort of have a shift”.

Some participants described how they had used supervision to learn ways to transfer theoretical knowledge from their education into ideas for practical use with clients. Most felt this support was needed to be available both informally and formally. One participant described how having this support “on the fly” provided an outlet to process emotions,

“It’s being able to consult with your co-workers and manager at an ad hoc basis. You should never go home feeling like oh gosh, what, did I do something or should I have done something differently?”

Again support with this processing was described to increase confidence in new workers and provide a greater sense of security of what to do the next time. Among participants there was varying experiences with supervisors, some felt they had been well supported during their new worker experience, others felt they had lacked this and described in detail how this had negatively impacted their ability to cope. One participant described how, “I go home feeling guilty when I don’t know what I am doing and I’ve made a mistake.” This participant described how they had not had enough of an opportunity to learn from their supervisor and embarrassment from mistakes is how they had learned.

When asked the question of how to tell if a new worker is ready for child welfare, all participants explained how they believed that if a worker could describe in detail a situation with a family and suggest an appropriate plan based on both their investigative and clinical skills, which their supervisor approved, then that person was ready.

“They are ready if they show confidence and can give the basics. Safety, risk, you know not just how to use the tool but also able to use own critical thinking to assess and then be able to verbalize these basic ideas”.

The importance of supervision, and that their supervisor have enough time to support new workers was woven throughout all interviews. Participants varied in their preferences of how supervision should be provided, whether “on the fly” or in a structured protected

time, but the data indicated the importance that this time be available for new workers.

One participant when asked if she preferred informal or formal supervision explained,

“Um.. but it’s nice if something just happened, a big thing and supervision isn’t until next week, then I can go to her and be like this is what’s happening and this is what I’m thinking. How does that sound? Um, but then on the other hand I do like the scheduled supervision because the door is shut and that’s my time. No one else is coming in during that time.”

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore new workers’ experience of preparedness for work in child welfare. This research process was unique in that it interfaces with a study undertaken by my co-researcher Julie Huynh-Lauesen, who conducted interviews, using similar questions with supervisors and managers of child welfare agencies. Findings therefore, have been compared and contrasted with the managers’ data and will be discussed throughout this section of the paper. The participants in this research had varying experiences as new workers, however similar themes emerged. They struggled with power and experienced feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. They had difficulty transferring theoretical knowledge from their education into practice and did not feel prepared for the reality of child welfare work. Participants described how they internalized conflict and the stress of the job. They suggested ways of coping including supportive supervision and a collaborative team environment. Increasing new workers’ confidence was also seen as key to prepare new workers for a child protection position.

These themes are not unique to this research and the literature supports most of these findings. The study by Hopkins, Mudrick & Rudolph (1999) focused on 26 professionals already engaged as child welfare workers, who returned to university to obtain their Masters of Social Work degree, then upon graduation, resumed their positions in child welfare agencies. This research found that the most prominent area of change was an increase in personal confidence, “a greater sensitivity to clients, enhanced skills, a sense of empowerment and an understanding of the larger context of child welfare” (Hopkins et al 1999 p.754). The authors argue that the personal confidence resulting from this knowledge prepares workers to be able to do the job and help develop more positive outcomes for families.

Although the Hopkins et.al study was very different than mine as it focused on experienced workers who had returned to an MSW program to upgrade, the findings indicated that an increase in critical thinking, confidence and time for reflection was seen to improve and better prepare the workers to continue a career in child welfare. It may be helpful to conceptualize the preparation of social workers for child welfare practice as a continuum where foundation theories, critical thinking and practice skills are developed in the university and the specific job training knowledge and skills are provided by the agencies. Thinking this way, prepares workers for life-long learning and hopefully, the need to continually critique one’s work and develop new skills. Therefore if a BSW program could better provide the foundation knowledge and skills to prepare new workers for the beginning of their work in child welfare, a worker may be more prepared

and able to cope and sustain the first few years of this stressful work (Csiernik, Smith & Drumgole 2010).

How then can a BSW help increase confidence, suggest ways to manage power and authority, and help reduce the feelings of hopelessness and helplessness? How can a BSW program also teach practical skills and strategies to incorporate clinical work into daily practice and ultimately help prepare new workers for the reality of working in child welfare? Realistically a new worker is unlikely to feel fully competent upon graduation of the BSW, and it is important that this confidence also be accompanied with the critical ability to question one's own judgement to the degree that allows for some uncertainty. However, a BSW program could help a new worker feel confident enough to ask for help and be able to seek other perspectives about new and difficult situations with clients. Additionally, a BSW program could also help new workers live with the knowledge that they will struggle with their decisions and help them to learn more about the system before making major decisions in families lives. However this is not to say that new workers shouldn't be armed with more knowledge and skill and participants in this research have provided many ideas for what they felt would help.

Participants presented ideas to address the feeling of being uncomfortable with power. Participant explained that developing more confidence from the start may help address the feelings of helplessness from the beginning of their career. Additionally, participants suggested that if they had additional practice in an interview setting, with resistant clients or a situation where they had to manage conflict, would have helped increase this confidence. Regardless of how it is developed, confidence was identified as

key to preparing new workers for child welfare work. However a new worker, who has too much confidence with authority or intervening with families, could be dangerous with the kind of power allotted to child protection workers. Perhaps increasing confidence in new workers should be more about creating the feeling of being supported during the learning process of the child welfare position. Confidence for example, from knowing that that a new worker has time to learn, has someone to support them on their team, feels supportive in their relationship with a supervisor and confident that they are allowed to make mistakes and then positively supported to learn from those mistakes. This type of confidence would better prepare new workers for this work and with time, perhaps create skilled child protection workers who are able to balance authority with client dignity and respect.

Learning how to transfer their approaches from a theory to practice in different situations was also identified as needed. Many participants felt they had learned enough theory in their BSW to prepare them, but were not given adequate time to practice how to implement the theories, specifically in a chaotic, crisis situation. Time with families, Featherstone & Broadhurst, (2012) explain, however essential to form relationships, has been “squeezed” out of the statutory practices by the administrative tasks and distancing of services, “While workers might endeavor to work around constraints, excessive standardization coupled with political ethos of welfare conditionality has delivered short-term, less flexible methods for family work” (Featherstone & Broadhurst, 2012 p. 625). This shift embodies the neoliberal impact on all social service work, through lack of political support, and decreased financial support for programs, through an expectation of

accountability that social workers do more with less funding. New workers are therefore sure to encounter this “time squeeze” in their work.

Perhaps by incorporating more concrete practical theories into the BSW Child Welfare course, such as practice with crisis theory, crisis intervention, stages of change, solution focused and cycle of change theory would help new workers understand better how to utilize counselling and change strategies within time limited neoliberal environments. Additionally, new workers would be better prepared to manage if they understood from the beginning of their career that the reality of the current neoliberal environment is that they likely cannot meet all their client’s needs. The BSW program could also simultaneously teach students ways to strategize how to successfully enter into systems changes and advocate for more time with clients.

In order to one day advocate for system change, it is important that new workers’ have an understanding about the links between neoliberal and neo-conservative discourses and how these ideologies further perpetuate inequality and marginalization of people. Ann Porter (2012), makes an important distinction between neoliberalism and neo-conservatism and explains how they both work in conjunction to oppress and maintain social problems. Neoliberalism “emphasizes reduced government interventions, free market forces, individual responsibility and the extension of global capitalist relations” (Porter, 2012, p.20). Neo-conservatism on the other hand, is interested in social order, ensuring citizens uphold strong morality and maintaining traditional families (Porter, 2012 p. 20). This stance is in contradiction with neoliberalism’s goal to reduce state involvement in family life, yet when the two ideologies are incorporated together, as

can be seen within the current federal government it creates a dangerous climate for current social policy, including child welfare policy reform. By focusing social problems almost exclusively on the individual, political forces have the ability to justify the decrease in funding for social programs and the increase in support for market driven agendas. Through awareness of this agenda, new workers' will understand that they may not be able to ignite system change initially, but if they can hold onto this while coping for the first few years of task focused child welfare, they may be able to draw on these roots once they advance into senior and management positions, where they will have a stronger voice to advocate for change.

Participants from the manager's study were divided in whether they felt new workers received adequate systems and theoretical knowledge in the BSW, however all agreed that the ability to transfer this learning into practice was often missing from their education. This was described in the manager's study as a disconnection between the academic and the ability to practice in the field. One supervisor described how many new workers can write brilliant papers, but not put the knowledge of what they had written into practice and apply it within the mandated time frame for child welfare. Additionally, managers found that there was a need for new workers to develop a solid grounding, a springboard to understanding families and how the system impacts them, specifically in regards to Anti Oppressive Practice. Many new workers thought that they did not have enough time to incorporate an anti-oppressive perspective into their work with clients, which was described as mainly task and documentation focused. However the manager's study found that managers believed new worker competency involved combining an anti-

oppressive perspective, skills and managing paper work ‘participants spoke at length about new workers’ clinical skills, they also spoke of the importance of administrative competence, such as getting the tasks completed within the required time-frame. In discussions around performance evaluation, all the participants acknowledged that both clinical skills and the need to complete timed tasks equate to the making of a competent child protection worker’ (J Huynh-Lauesen, Final Thesis, 2015). This is a curious contrast between what new workers’ experience and manager’s expectations and likely is responsible in part, for some of the pressure and challenges experienced by new workers. Given the continual changes to accountability and inadequate funding to child welfare and the social service field as a whole, perhaps new workers today experience different challenges that are less manageable within the system, than their managers had in the past.

Lena Dominelli, almost 20 years ago warned that “social work is in a state of flux” experiencing a tug of war between neoliberal market forces and quality relationship-based social work values, which inevitably results in the demise of the autonomous reflective practitioner. As if predicting the state of practice today, she claimed that this shift creates a fragmented deprofessionalized social work field that does not have the time or resources to engage in genuine anti-oppressive practice (Dominelli, 1996 p. 153). Dominelli explained that because of managerialistic approaches to service, social workers are unable to meet the unrealistic expectations laid down by managers and funding bodies, while still providing quality services to individuals and families.

Most managers in the manager's study identified as being open to challenges by new workers on a practice issue, for example trying a different intervention plan from an anti-oppressive perspective with a family. However, when it came to a discussion of how new workers can challenge the system, there were some contrasting opinions. "According to two of the participants, their agencies' practices have been entrenched for a long time, and are 'traditional', and as such any attempts to push for system change may be faced with resistance, and very challenging for success" (J Huynh-Lauesen, Final Thesis, 2015).

Both new workers and managers identified that supportive supervision and team environment was crucial to new workers' success. Instructing new workers within the BSW on how to prepare for and positively use supervision, along with ways to find support within the team, were similar ideas presented by both participant groups. Practice having a supervision consult with perhaps a professor, or person in an authority position in the program was also suggested to help new workers feel more comfortable and able to build a trusting relationship with their supervisors. The majority of new workers however identified as feeling best supported by their colleagues and relied heavily on each other for debriefing and emotional support. This suggests that Schools of Social Work should help students with their ability to practice in a team, understand the importance of peer relationships and develop consultation skills. Additionally, Schools should help students understand both the strengths and potential dangers of peer consultation. Stirling (2009) in a study of hospital social workers found that informal conversations with peers does allow for support, however can be problematic in that peers may not challenge a

colleague on ethical or practice areas as the role is one of support not supervision/decision making.

Another idea suggested from the new worker study was that the placement be made longer, so that it encompassed the first two years of work, so new workers are not rushed into a caseload. Participants talked about the importance of child welfare placements to prepare them for practice. Enhancing the placement experience may provide new workers with a greater grounding in practice and a more reflective approach to their practice. Specific training for child welfare field instructors may allow students more real life experience. Interestingly, a similar suggestion was presented in the manager's data suggesting that in a BSW child welfare specialty, placement could be extended for the entire two years of the program, with the intent that a student transition into a child protection worker position. Through this, new workers would have an extended time to build a relationship and learn from their team and field instructor.

Developing a support network in the workplace was also identified by both supervisors and new workers as needed to cope with the reality of the work and learn the mental toughness needed to survive. The thought of a longer, more rigorous placement experience in child welfare has merit however other factors need to be considered. For example currently most BSW programs in Ontario provide two shorter placement experiences, and this provides students the opportunity to try different avenues of social work to help them structure their career goals. The risk is, therefore, that a student may not like child welfare work and then they have committed to a two year placement experience. Additionally, one needs to question how a child welfare specialization fits into

the ideology of generalist social work practice. Could a student receive the necessary social work foundation through a specialized two year program? One wonders if the learning gained from two different field placements broadens the new workers' knowledge of other substantive areas, additional services and larger systems issues. Careful consideration of how to develop such a program, along with how the recruitment process for students will impact their educational choices would be needed before such a specialization could adequately be developed.

In the managers' interviews most participants described the support they had received from coworkers and their team as being the most helpful to them in maintaining a career in child welfare. One supervisor remembered a group for placement students to help build supports. Interestingly, one of the new worker participants also suggested such a group be developed for both students and new workers, as a way to find that special person to cry on, or laugh with to recover from an emotional situation. Csiernik, Dewar, Smith & Drumgole, looked at the experiences of 20 new child protection workers who participated for 6 months in a social support group which was facilitated by senior child protection workers.

During the course of the study participants reported experiencing a range of stressful critical incidents inside and outside of work including perceptions of being verbally harassed and threatened that in turn led to a range of psychosocial issues that affected their wellness. Participants reported a small though statistically insignificant decrease in hopefulness and social supports over the course of the study. However, they also indicated that the new worker support group was a valuable additional resource to the social supports they used to deal with the workplace-generated stress they experienced (Csiernik, Dewar, Smith & Drumgole, 2010).

Topics covered within the support group ranged from “preparing and interacting in the courtroom, healthy stress management, balancing work and home life, positive interactions, self care, staff interactions, and effective use of supervision” (p 218). The group was viewed by new workers as an additional support where new workers could have a safe, protected environment to discuss their experiences and feelings stemming from their practice in child welfare.

Dickinson & Gil de Gibaja (2004), Petersen & Reilly (1997), and Folaron & Hostetter (2007) state that collaboration between university and agencies is needed to create programs to prepare new workers for child welfare. They argue that the use of a partnership model, where both the university and child welfare agencies work as equals who share goals and decision-making power, is the best approach to educate new workers. Other researchers, such as Chavkin & Brown (2003), and Petersen & Reilly (1997), talked about the struggles in clarifying what the collaboration between the child welfare agencies and the education body should look like. Struggles such as who holds the decision-making power, whose interests are best met and the difference between education and training within the partnership, would need to be determined prior to the program implementation.

Having a child development course as a core part of the BSW, along with gaining more experience and comfort with children was also put forward as an idea to help prepare new workers. These findings suggest that the transfer not only of education to practice, but the transfer of life experiences into practice is important. The data suggests that preparing new workers to respond to challenges by parents should be part of the

BSW curriculum. Interestingly, some of the participants from the manager's interviews did not feel a child development course had helped prepare new workers in the past,

“According to the participants, during the hiring process, they have repeatedly heard applicants say that they have taken a child development course as a relevant course for child welfare work, as if the majority of the work is directed towards the child only, and that “they like kids”. A couple of other participants stated new workers have expressed how they thought they were going to work with children, such as “hanging out with them”, “counseling them”, and “making their lives better”. These new workers did not realize that much of child welfare work is done with “parents, extended families, community professionals” (J Huynh-Lauesen, Final Thesis 2015).

It seems that the issue is not just about a child development course but about schools of social work preparing students for the actual work with parents, and for schools to help students to develop skills and confidence in dealing with challenges. Again we return to new workers' confidence and understanding early on that parents feel threatened by a CAS worker because of their power, and new workers need to be taught how to balance this understanding with their social work role, in order to talk to a parent about their own knowledge and skill with their child.

Bellefeuille & Schmidt explain how an approach to child welfare education which promotes more open ended learning experiences and that a deeper meaning from course content can evolve into knowledge to practice competencies for new workers in the field (2006 p.8). The online program they developed to train BSW students in child welfare in British Columbia, is described to adapt this approach by offering both direct instruction through a sequence of course modules and indirect instruction which incorporates different learning styles and “requires learners to go beyond the basic information that

they are given to make their own conclusions and generalizations” (Bellefeuille & Schmidt, 2006 p.11). The goal of this process is to encourage students to incorporate their own personal life experiences and inquisitiveness to develop critical thinking skills that can later benefit them in practice (Bellefeuille & Schmidt, 2006 p.11).

New workers and managers, both identified that they felt the BSW had not prepared new workers for the reality of child welfare. Both groups also described how graduating from the social work program often led to unrealistic expectations of the work and created the hope that new social workers could change the world. Many new social workers, myself included, came out of the BSW with this belief and I believe it is a good thing for social workers to ultimately strive for, as without this passion for change we would likely not be entering this field at all. However perhaps our education does not always help us to look at what kind of difference social workers can make and realistically when it is possible. Perhaps if within the BSW program students could have more interaction with experienced workers, as well as be given a clearer picture of the limitations of this work, some of these disappointments could be avoided. Universities could promote this understanding of the social context of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, by helping new workers feel less personally inadequate and prepare for realistic optimism of their future work in the field.

Rothbaum, et al. (1982) explain,

“People attempt to gain control by bringing the environment into line with their wishes (primary control) and by bringing themselves into line with environmental forces (secondary control). Four manifestations of secondary control are considered: (a) Attributions to severely limited ability can serve to enhance

predictive control and protect against disappointment; (b) attributions to chance can reflect illusory control, since people often construe chance as a personal characteristic akin to an ability ("luck"); (c) attributions to powerful others permit vicarious control when the individual identifies with these others; and (d) the preceding attributions may foster interpretive control, in which the individual seeks to understand and derive meaning from otherwise uncontrollable events in order to accept them" (Rauthbaum, 1982).

Therefore, creating a deeper understanding how change with both clients and the system as a whole is a slow process could help create a more realistic picture of working with families in child welfare .

New worker participants advocated throughout the interviews for a need to increase practical concrete training in the BSW; more information about the child welfare legal system, the Ministry of Children and Families Standards along with realistic opportunities to practice with risk and safety assessment and documentation. This echoes similar findings from the Cash, Mathiesen, Barbanell, Smith & Graham, (2006) study discussed earlier in our literature review. Again the time to learn in a safe environment was also suggested by participants in order for new workers to become comfortable with these skills. Participants also suggested more real-life practice interview settings with angry and difficult clients in crisis situations (children and animals running around, scattered disorganized environment) and practice answering those difficult questions such as, "Do you have any children? Who are you to tell me what to do with my kids?"

These suggestions raise the question as to what should be included in university education, and what should be offered in Child Protection Worker training. The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) currently offer much of the training on

Ministry of Children and Youth standards, risk assessments and documentation, and are likely in the best position to do so as they are familiar with current Ministry standards and best practices being used in agencies across the province. OACAS does “training” which focuses on teaching particular skills and work-related information while universities attempt to teach a “critical analysis” of theories and skills. Although there is some overlap, training is designed to prepare workers for doing the job as prescribed by ministry guidelines whereas university social work education is designed to prepare critical thinkers who question why there are guidelines and who consider broader practice issues.

Universities, do however, as suggested above, have the opportunity to better prepare students for child welfare practice by incorporating more simulations of the real practice world, helping students consider the complexities of child welfare work, preparing them to cope with challenges and providing them with knowledge related to organizational change and advocacy. Additionally, in order to avoid new workers becoming deflated and overwhelmed by the reality of the field, universities could teach students to critically reflect on why the training that they will receive has been developed within a neo-liberal context and how risk and strengths are defined, by whom, and for what agenda. Additionally, students could learn how to critically look at risk assessments that, in fact, ignore societal forces that caused dire circumstances for families.

Alternatively, university education can help students to also understand how assessing risk can actually help prevent child abuse and neglect, especially if intervention plans incorporate families own voice and strengths into the plan.

Finally universities could help students understand what risk may be unavoidable, as Munroe (1996) suggests and help potential new workers become comfortable with taking a risk and trusting in parent's own judgement at times. This critical analysis developed through social work education, followed by Child Protection Worker training, may help new workers avoid internalizing mistakes and mitigate their feelings of helplessness. It may help them be better prepared for the highly complex, challenging but rewarding child welfare work.

IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Research

One of the limitations to this study was that only a small sample of participants was interviewed, given the time constraints of this MSW research paper. Additionally, given the limited time frame, internal agency email was the only recruitment method used and likely impacted the sample of participants who volunteered for the study. It is possible that participants felt some degree of obligation to volunteer if their manager had forwarded the recruitment email. Alternatively, some new workers who perhaps did not have a positive relationship with their managers may have felt the study as an opportunity to elaborate on their experience specifically. However most participants expressed a genuine interest in the topic and desired to contribute to the research to better prepare new workers for child welfare.

Another consideration prompted by this study was the strength and limitation of being a child welfare “insider”. Although having an insider perspective helped deepen the interviews and provided a unique perspective for analysis, I found that at times, my own lens to the data affected my ability to understand what participants had actually meant. An example of this is where participants expressed feelings of hopelessness within their relationships with managers, which I initially perceived to be about the power imbalances seen within organizational structures. My own social justice stance identified the theme of power within the statement and saw it as an example which validated systemic issues I believe need to change, rather than understanding the genuine meaning behind the

statement, which although equally concerning, was focused on power located at a more micro level between manager and worker. However through reflection and thinking through the data further, I believe I was able to address this and unearth rich interpretive meaning from the data.

The findings suggested areas that need to be added or strengthened in the BSW curriculum to better prepare students for child welfare work. A larger study, conducted with more new workers would perhaps illustrate if the themes and ideas identified by participants are representative of the new worker's experience in most child welfare agencies. Additionally, to gain a clearer picture of a new worker experience and how this changes over time with ongoing work, it would be beneficial to conduct a similar study with both new and experienced workers. Further research with managers, supervisors and senior administrators focusing on what constitutes preparedness from different vantage points would be helpful. Most importantly, research with service users asking for their impressions of how new workers might support or challenge the biases and impressions held by the new workers themselves. Service users could also contribute by identifying what they think new workers should know. By incorporating all these voices, a solid curriculum could be developed in order to best prepare new workers for child welfare.

Another question emerging from the data is: what is possible for BSW programs to actually provide to prepare new child welfare workers given their resource limitations and generalist focus? This prompts more questions about social work education. Further research into what is actually learned in a classroom setting and what should be learned in

university social work program would be valuable. Exploring what is learned through education and what is learned through experience is important to the central question of what constitutes a prepared child welfare worker. Lastly, this study leads one to ask about the notion of new worker confidence: what is confidence? Can it be taught? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a confident new worker? The contribution this study has made to research is to strengthen what has already been found in previous research on new workers' preparedness for child welfare.

Implications for Practice

The research presented in this study has the potential to help develop a more concrete, realistic way to educate and prepare new workers for the child welfare field. The ideas presented by participants are relevant in developing a BSW course which can result in more prepared, more resilient, and more confident new child protection workers.

Ultimately the goal of this in practice would be to create new workers who can manage the child welfare system in a way that benefits both their own health and well-being that of their clients, and perhaps even find ways to challenge and change the system from within when needed. In order to achieve this, the importance of better collaboration between university and child welfare agencies is needed for ongoing education of new workers. Additionally, field instructors for students in a child welfare specialization will need ongoing training on how to best prepare and support students for transitioning into the field. This could be done by helping field instructors learn how to help students understand the specific challenges and stress unique to a child protection position. Field instructors can engage in questioning to help develop critical thinking and provide, and

supports and strategies to cope with stress. Although beyond the scope of this study to define, ideally, a child welfare curriculum could be developed for both field instructors and students through a partnership between agencies and universities, which considers topics such as; theoretical perspectives, critical thinking and neoliberal impact. The partnership could explore new worker training, looking at what to include and what is redundant. It is clear from the data that preparedness has to do with organizational factors such as hiring, controlling new worker caseloads, better supervision and peer support.

It is important to acknowledge that readying new workers is not just the responsibility of agency or university, but that through partnership and collaboration, a well-rounded specialization could be developed that does in fact better prepare new workers for the field. Awareness from both agencies and universities on their limitations and areas of improvement will be needed to move forward with this goal. For example, agencies need to know how to translate education to practice and universities will need to learn how to better educate students to translate theory to practice.

Implications for Education

The purpose of this study was to explore what was necessary to prepare new social workers for a career in child welfare. The findings have the greatest implication for social work education. Within the findings we saw some concern that a social work degree is not the right degree to prepare new workers for child welfare, yet empathy and reflection, both skills normally taught in a BSW were identified as important. Many workers' opinions, echoed by managers/supervisors, stated that universities should provide the theoretical foundation for the work. Perhaps a more specialized BSW education that

helped students grapple more with power in child welfare and helped new workers focus on why the power exists and how to navigate power and powerlessness. Additionally, a BSW curriculum developed specifically for child welfare work, which focuses on learning ways to transfer knowledge and theory into practice by providing realistic, concrete opportunities to learn would be exciting. New workers would graduate from this program ideally with a solid understanding of child welfare work and their place within the system as a whole. Students would develop ways to identify burnout and understand how important it is to have a strong supportive person or group to be successful with coping. Students would gain a good understanding of oppression and how this impacts the people they will work with and have some ideas about how to intervene with service users based on an anti-oppression analysis. Students would also understand the limitations of new workers to address systemic problems directly upon graduation. New workers would understand through their education that they may at times feel hopeless and helpless and experience being uncomfortable with their power and that is ok, it takes time to learn to manage these feelings. New workers would learn through their placement not only basic child protection standards and organizational structures, but perhaps by extending the placement, more realistic interactions with clients while being supported by an experienced worker/field instructor. Additionally by extending placement, students would have longer to develop those positive supports and trusting relationships with supervisor and teams, which were identified through the research as so important to workers' survival.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A CHILD WELFARE CURRICULUM BY NEW WORKERS & SUPERVISORS

- Case scenarios in an Anti-Oppressive course focusing on how to address conflict
- Practice interviewing skills including role playing with realistic angry simulators and chaotic situations
- Practice in realistic interview and meeting situations transferring theory to practice
- Case studies utilizing risk assessments as an assignment for critical analysis
- Opportunities to discuss how to use supervision and ways to address challenges
- Lengthy discussions around difficulty with change and the need to establish creditability before challenging systems
- Opportunity and understanding of how to build solid peer and team supports
- Extended placement or Internship which includes more genuine field experience
- Protected time to practice using reflection as a method to process daily interactions in child welfare
- Field instructors also receiving specialized training to support students transitioning to new workers
- Learning strategies for time management in nearly unmanageable scenarios
- Practice responding to difficult questions from parents
- More knowledge of the Ministry of Children and Families Child Welfare Standards

- More education about the Child Welfare legal system and practice with legal documentation
- Reassurance that it is ok to make mistakes and time to process these mistakes in order to learn from them

CONCLUSION

I set out at the beginning of this research to find out how new workers could be better prepared for child welfare work. This stemmed from my own initial experience as a new worker and how I did not feel I had been fully prepared for the experience. I found myself easily relating too many of the thoughts expressed by participants in this study, however I was surprised by multiple requests for concrete, task focused strategies and training. I felt the child welfare course I had taken in my BSW had provided a fairly solid background for practice, however it did not prepare me for a critical analysis of how the neoliberal system impacts child welfare and the reality of work in the field. This is one of the reasons why I believe the first few years of child protection work had been so hard for me, so I was surprised to hear the request for more critical thinking and anti-oppressive focus to come more from managers than new workers.

The theme of confidence being paramount in this study however did not surprise me as I can easily relate to the feeling in my first year as a new worker. Both new workers and managers stressed the importance of needing confidence for successful work in child welfare. However again I ask, how is confidence achieved? I continue to wonder if confidence is really only about developing skills and knowledge and an ability to transfer theory to practice, or more about helping new workers appreciate the complexity of the work and arming them with the knowledge that it will take time to learn all they need and this is acceptable and allowed. Protected time to learn was a theme that struck me deeply, I believe like the participants in this study, as a new worker I needed time to develop critical thinking skills, time to practice how to assess complex family situations,

time to practice engaging with involuntary clients and time to develop knowledge of Ministry standards and what they mean in real life for families.

What I also found validating through the voices of both child welfare managers and new workers was that the work is always hard, and has always been challenging. Regardless of how hard it is to work in this field, like the participants in this study, I also found glimmers of rewards from this work, brief moments when I had time to reflect and acknowledge that I *had* actually helped a family, or kept a child safe, or given a mother a small piece of hope that her situation will improve. This is, I believe, how real confidence for new workers is created and I believe that if a curriculum which included a balance between theoretical education and concrete skills training to increase confidence and a critical analysis of the current political system can be created, new workers could in fact be better prepared for the field. I also strongly feel that new workers, who received this increase in confidence and better preparedness, would have small, yet significant ripple effects of positive outcomes for families. Perhaps given time, this new way to educate new workers for child welfare could even create enough waves to change the way the system operates as a whole, for the better.

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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANTS NEEDED
FOR RESEARCH INTO
HOW PREPARED NEW BSW GRADUATES ARE
FOR WORK AS INTAKE OR FAMILY SERVICE WORKERS
AT CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES?

We are looking for 2 types of volunteers to take part in this study:

CAS Managers or Supervisors with responsibility for Intake or Family Services,
&
Intake or Family Services Workers with a BSW

Your participation would involve one interview lasting 60-90 minutes and you may also be offered the option of a second interview

CAS Managers or supervisors wanting to find out more about taking part please contact **Julie Huynh** at huynhjdk@mcmaster.ca and/or (289) 668-7805.

CAS Intake or Family Service Workers wanting to find out more about taking part please contact **Jennifer Maxwell** at Jennifermaxwell_29@rogers.com and/or (226) 387-3930.

This project is being supervised and led by Gary Dumbrill & Sheila Sammon
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e-mail dumbrill@mcmaster.ca or sammon@mcmaster.ca. *This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.*

APPENDIX B

Information Letter, Consent & optional media consent



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INFORMATION LETTER & CONSENT FORM

Project Title: What is social worker "readiness" to work in child protection social work

and how is this achieved?

Faculty Supervisors: Gary Dumbrill & Sheila Sammon

Student Researchers: Julie Huynh & Jen Maxwell

Why we are doing this study?

We are conducting a study into how well prepared social workers newly graduating with a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree are for Family Services and Intake work at Children's Aid Societies. The purpose of the research is to understand if there is a need for better preparation and if so how this how might be achieved.

What will happen in the study?

If you take part in this study you will be asked to meet with the researcher for a 60 – 90 minute one-on-one interview at a location of your choosing.

In this interview you will be asked to read and sign this Letter of Information/Consent form (attached) to indicate your willingness to take part. You will then be asked some questions about yourself such as age, race, gender, social work qualifications etc. You will then be asked questions such as:

What do you think "readiness" or "preparedness" for child protection social work is?

What do social workers need to learn to do child protection work well?

What skills, attitudes and knowledge do child protection social workers need to do their job?

What could be done to better prepare social work students for child protection social work?

I will take notes in the interview, and with your permission, I will audio-record the interview so that I do not miss anything that you say. You can ask at any time for recording to stop, and I will turn off the recorder immediately. You can also choose to stop this interview or withdraw and stop interviews at any time. After your first interview, you may be invited to take part in a follow-up interview.

Will the research identify me?

No—you taking part and the things you say will be private.

What good things could happen if I take part in this study?

You will receive no direct benefits from taking part in this study, although we hope that the things you share will help improve social work education and child protection services.

Will anything bad happen in this study?

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal: You may have opinions that you do not want others to know, in which case you do not have to share those opinions, and if you do share them your privacy is protected in this study.

Who will know what I said in the study?

I will make every effort to protect confidentiality and privacy of what you tell me. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified in connection with what you tell me. We are, however, sometimes identifiable through the stories we tell, and you should keep this in mind when deciding what to say.

The notes and tapes from interviews will be locked in a cabinet at McMaster University and any electronic data will be kept on password-protected computers, encrypted portable drives, or on a server with similar encryption and security as online banking. Because the ideas that come from this research may be important for some time, and because we may need to look back and remind ourselves of what participants said, we will keep study data for 3 years after which all the original data will be securely destroyed.

Warning: when I have to break confidentiality:

I will keep all information confidential to the full extent of the law. There are circumstances, however, in which I cannot keep information confidential. If I am told that a child under 16 is being or is at risk of being physically harmed or

sexually abused, or if I become aware that a person plans to harm themselves or someone else, I am bound by law to report this to the appropriate authorities.

What if I change my mind about taking part?

It is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study. You can decide to stop talking at any time, even after signing the consent form or part way through the study. If you decide to stop taking part there will be no consequences to you. If you withdraw and want your comments deleted, we will remove them from our records, if however, approximately three weeks have passed since you took part, we would have begun analysis and removal may not be possible.

How do I find out what was learned in this study?

If you wish, we will provide you with information about the results of this study. Please see the consent portion of this letter where you can tell us where you'd like us to send it. .

Rights of Research Participants:

If you have questions or require more information about the study itself, please contact Gary Dumbrill or Sheila Sammon. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

c/o Office of Research Services E-mail:

ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

PARTICIPATION CONSENT

Consent to take part in this study:

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Julie Huynh & Jen Maxwell of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study, and to receive any additional details I wanted to know about the study.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time up to approximately 3 weeks that have passed since I took part, at which point the researchers will have begun their analysis, ,
- I agree to participate in this study.

- I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date
---------------------	--------------------------	------

Consent to Audio Record

I agree that the interview can be audio/ recorded [] Yes [] No

...Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to me at this email address _____

Or to this mailing address: _____

... No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

Follow- up Interview Opportunity:

I agree to be contacted about a follow-up interview, and understand that I can always decline the request.

... Please contact me at: _____

...

No. I'm not interested in be contacted about a follow-up interview

APPENDIX C

Demographics Questionnaire

Data will be gathered for this form by the researcher when speaking to participants and explaining the concept contained within.

Please feel free to not answer any question you do not feel like answering

1/ Please indicate whether you are a:

- ☐ CAS manager
- ☐ CAS supervisor
- ☐ CAS **Intake or Family Service** worker

Please provide more information about your role & experience

2/ How do you describe your gender?

Male ☐ Female ☐ Other/prefer not to say ☐

3/ What is your age ____

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| under 25 <input type="checkbox"/> | 46-50 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 26-30 <input type="checkbox"/> | 51-55 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 31-35 <input type="checkbox"/> | 56-60 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 36-40 <input type="checkbox"/> | 61-65 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 41-45 <input type="checkbox"/> | |

4/ How do you describe your race and ethnicity?_____

5/ What is your education?

- ☐ BSW
- ☐ MSW
- ☐ Other _____

6/ How long have you had your degree?

7/ Do you have other social work experience? If so, what are they?

Interview Guide

1/ What do you think new worker "readiness" for child protection social work is?

Prompts

Explore reasons why for each answer given

Explore areas new workers are not ready

Explore areas new workers are ready

Explore how ready/prepared new workers are to work from an anti-oppressive perspective:

1. How well do new workers understand issues such as poverty in relation to child neglect?
2. How well do new workers deal with their power?
3. Do new workers show empathy to parents who have abused children? Do they display traits characteristics of compassion, respect and caring? Are there other traits?

2/ What specific skills, knowledge and attitudes do child protection workers need?

Prompts

Explore reasons why

Explore skills, attitudes separately, get answers and whys for each & the extent experienced as opposed to new workers having these

Explore especially new worker attitudes and extent the respondent that such attitudes are innate or can be learned

Can you give me some examples when you saw new graduates displaying these traits?

3/ What do social workers need to learn to do child protection work well?

Prompts

What could be done to better prepare social work students for child protection social work?

What courses?

What life experiences?

What things do they need to come with that can't be learned? Can you give me some examples when you saw new graduates displaying these traits?

4/ How can you tell when someone is ready?

Prompts

What will they be doing that demonstrates readiness?

How can the skills be measured?

How can the knowledge be measured?

How can the attitudes be measured?

What do you think we could do to help workers who appear to not be ready?

Prompts:

Can you think of instances when this happened and how you or members of your team broached the subject and worked with a new staff person to bring her/him up to desirable readiness level?

How successful were those remediation efforts?

5/ If a new worker was to enter the field, and right away you thought to yourself "now this worker is not only going to be good at their job, but they have the potential to go on and change the entire child welfare system for the better in the future." What would they have to be doing to make you think that?

Follow up or alternate way of asking same question:

Can you think of someone who is currently a leader in child welfare, and especially leads from a progressive social justice and anti-oppressive perspective, what do you think new graduates need to come to the child welfare system if they are to have a long term CAS career and make a similar contribution?

Prompts

Explore reasons for answer

6/ What makes someone a good new worker?

Prompts

Someone who follows the rules or someone who questions or thinks creatively?

Someone who can think on their feet?

What about someone who engages in critical thinking?

7/ Aside from formal education, are there other characteristics of the person that makes them more ready for child welfare?

Prompts

Can this attitude be learned? How do you think a New Worker could learn this?

APPENDIX D

Script for Follow-up Interview E-mail:

“Hello, I just wanted to let you know that we have analyzed the data gathered from our interviews with New Workers and Supervisor/Managers for our study on Child Welfare.

Are you still interested in participating in a follow up interview?

The follow up interview would include such topics as what is “readiness” and “preparedness” means for New Workers in Child Welfare and would also provide us an opportunity to clarify any questions from the data obtained in the earlier interview.

The follow up interview would be short, approximately 20 minutes and can be done in person or over the telephone if easier for you. What is the best way to contact you if you are interested?

Thank you again for your participation in this study and please find attached the original letter of consent provided for the study.”

APPENDIX E

Email Recruitment Script Sent on Behalf of the Researcher

by CAS Service Director or Equivalent the Holder of the Participants' Contact Information

Dear Family Service and Intake Workers:

Jennifer Maxwell or Julie Huynh, McMaster MSW students, is undertaking a study that explores how well prepared newly graduated BSW social workers are for Family Services or Intake work at Children's Aid Societies. If you are an Intake or Family Services Worker with a BSW, and you are interested in getting more information about taking part, please contact either Jen or Julie directly at Jennifermaxwell_29@rogers.com and/or (226) 387-3930, or Julie directly at huynhldk@mcmaster.ca and/or (289) 668-7805.

This research will be used for partial fulfillment of MSW degree (theses), and writing of journal articles.

Participation is confidential; Jennifer will not tell me or anyone at this agency who participated or not. If you do take part, Jen will ask you to meet with her at a location of your choice for an interview lasting about 60-90 minutes and Jen may also offer you an opportunity for a follow-up interview which you can always decline.

Participation is confidential; Jennifer or Julie will not tell me or anyone at this agency who participated or not. If you do take part, Jennifer will ask you to meet with her at a location of your choice for an interview lasting about 60-90 minutes. Jen may also offer you a follow-up interview. Jennifer will be asking questions such as:

What do you think "readiness" or "preparedness" for child protection social work is?
What do social workers need to learn to do child protection work well?
What skills, attitudes and knowledge do child protection social workers need to do their job?
What could be done to better prepare social work students for child protection social work?

Jennifer or Julie has explained that you can stop being in the study at any time during the interview or not answer questions, she has asked me to attach a copy of her information letter to this email, which gives you full details about her study.

In addition, she has explained that this study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
Gilmour Hall – Room 305 (ROADS)
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Sincerely,

Name
Director of XYZ Services
Hamilton, Ontario



APPENDIX F

McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)

FACULTY/GRADUATE/UNDERGRADUATE/STAFF

APPLICATION TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

[Behavioural / Non-Medical]

Date: April 7, 2015	Application Status: New: [x] Change Request: []	Protocol #:
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Helpful Hints Mouse over bold blue hypertext links for help with completing this form.

- Use the most recent version of this form.
- Refer to the McMaster University [< Research Ethics Guidelines and Researcher's Handbook >](#), prior to completing and submitting this application.
- For [<help>](#) with completing this form or the ethics review process, contact the Ethics Secretariat at ext. 23142, or 26117 or ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca
- To change a previously cleared protocol, please submit the "[< Change Request >](#)" form.

PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION PLUS SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (scanned PDF signature) BY E-MAIL.

You can also send the signed signature page to: Ethics Secretariat, Research Office for Administration, Development and Support (ROADS), Room 305 Gilmour Hall, ext. 23142, ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca.

SECTION A – GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Study Titles: (Insert in space below)

Title: What is "readiness" to work in child protection social work and how is this achieved?
1a: Grant Title: <i>(Required for funded research. Click this link > to determine your "grant title").</i>

2. Investigator Information: **This form is not to be completed by** [< Faculty of Health Science researchers >](#) .

***Faculty and staff information should be inserted above the black bar in this table.**

Student researcher and faculty supervisor information should be inserted below the black bar in the table below.

	Full Name	Department <i>& or name of university if different from McMaster</i>	Telephone Number(s) & Extension(s)	E-mail Address <i>(Address you regularly use)</i>
Principal Investigator*				
Co-Investigator(s)				
Research Assistants or Proj.Coordinators*				
Student Investigator(s)*	Dinh (Julie) Huynh	School of Social Work	(289) 668-7805	huynhldk@mcmaster.ca
	Jennifer Maxwell		(226) 387-3930	Jennifermaxwell_29@rogers.com
Faculty Supervisor(s)*	Gary Dumbrill	School of Social Work	23791	dumbrill@mcmaster.ca
	Sheila Sammon		23780	sammon@mcmaster.ca

3. Study Timelines: (Contact the Ethics Secretariat at X 23142 or ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca for urgent requests.)

(a) What is the date you plan to begin recruiting participants or obtain their permission to review their private documents (Provide a specific date)? **May 5, 2015**

(b) What is the estimated last date for data collection with human participants? **September 2015**

4. **Location of Research:** List the location(s) where research will be conducted. Move your mouse over this [< Helpful Hint >](#) for more information on foreign country or school board reviews and contact the Ethics Office at X 23142 or 26117 for information on possible additional requirements:

(a) McMaster University ☐ []

(b) Community ☒ [x] Specify Site(s) (children's aid societies in southern Ontario also known as "Grand River Zone" local to McMaster)

(c) Hospital ☐ [] Specify Site(s)

(d) Outside of Canada ☐ [] Specify Site(s)

(e) School Boards ☐ [] Specify Site(s)

(f) Other ☐ [] Specify Site(s)

5. Other Research Ethics Board Clearance

(a) Are researchers from outside McMaster also conducting this research? If **yes**, please provide their information in Section 2 above.

☐ [] Yes ☒ [x] No

(b) Has any other institutional Research Ethics Board already cleared this project? ☐ [] Yes ☒ [x] No

(c) If **Yes** to (5b), complete this application and provide a copy of the ethics clearance certificate /approval letter.

(d) Please provide the following information:

Title of the project cleared elsewhere:

Name of the other institution:

Name of the other board:

Date of the other ethics review board's decision:

Contact name & phone number for the other board:

(e) Will any other Research Ethics Board(s) or equivalent be asked for clearance? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes, please provide the name and location of board(s).

N/A

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS AND HELPFUL TIPS (Please read first):

Please be as **clear** and **concise** as possible and **avoid technical jargon**. Keep in mind that your protocol could be read by reviewers who may not be specialists in your field. Feel free to use headings, bolding and bullets to organize your information. Content boxes on this application expand.

6. Research Involving Canadian Aboriginal Peoples i.e., First Nations, Inuit and Métis (Check all that apply)

(a) Will the research be conducted on Canadian Aboriginal lands? ☐ Yes ☒ No

(b) Will recruitment criteria include Canadian Aboriginal identity as either a factor for the entire study or for a subgroup in the study? ☐ Yes ☒ No

(c) Will the research seek input from participants regarding a Canadian Aboriginal community's cultural heritage, artifacts, traditional knowledge or unique characteristics? ☐ Yes ☒ No

(d) Will research in which Canadian Aboriginal identity or membership in an Aboriginal community be used as a variable for the purpose of analysis of the research data? ☐ Yes ☒ No

(e) Will interpretation of research results refer to Canadian Aboriginal communities, peoples, language, history or culture?

☐ Yes ☒ No

If “Yes” was selected for any questions 6.a-6.e above, please note that the TCPS (Chapter 9) requires that researchers shall offer the option of engagement with Canadian Aboriginal communities involved in the research. <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter9-chapitre9/>. For advice regarding TCPS guidelines for conducting research with Canadian Aboriginal peoples, please contact Karen Szala-Meneok at X 26117 or szalak@mcmaster.ca

(f) Please describe the nature and extent of your engagement with the Aboriginal community(s) being researched. The nature of community engagement should be appropriate to the unique characteristics of the community(s) and the research. The extent of community engagement should be determined jointly by the researchers and the relevant communities. Include any information/advice received from or about the Aboriginal community under study. ***The TCPS notes; “although researchers shall offer the option of engagement, a community may choose to engage nominally or not at all, despite being willing to allow the research to proceed”. If conducted research with several Aboriginal communities or sub-groups, please use headings to organize your information.***

ATTACHMENTS: Provide copies of all documents that indicate how community engagement has been or will be established (e.g., letters of support), where appropriate.

N/A

(g) Has or will a research agreement be created between the researcher and the Aboriginal community? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If **Yes**, please provide details about the agreement below (e.g., written or verbal agreement etc.).

ATTACHMENTS: Submit a copy of any written research agreements, if applicable. See the MREB website for a sample customizable research agreement <https://reo.mcmaster.ca/educational-resources> or visit the CIHR website <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29134.html>

N/A

(h) Are you seeking a waiver of the community engagement requirement? (A waiver may be granted if the REB is satisfied that, Aboriginal participants will not be identified with a community or that the welfare of relevant communities will not be affected by the research.)

☐ Yes ☒ No

If **yes**, please provide the rationale for this waiver request in the space below.

7. Level of the Project (Check all that apply)

☐ Faculty Research ☐ Post-Doctoral ☐ Ph.D. ☐ Staff/Administration

☐ Master's (Major Research Paper - MRP) ☒ Master's (Thesis)

☐ Undergraduate (Honour's Thesis) ☐ Undergraduate (Independent Research)

☐ Other (specify)

8. Funding of the Project

(a) Is this project currently being funded? ☐ Yes ☒ No

(b) If **No**, is funding being sought? ☐ Yes (funding sources not yet identified) ☒ No

(c) Period of Funding: **From:** [] **To:** []

(mm/dd/yyyy) (mm/dd/yyyy)

(d) Funding agency (funded or applied to) & agency number (i.e., number assigned by agency), if applicable.

Click this < [link](#) > to determine your "**agency number**". (This is not your PIN number).

[] NSERC & agency #

[] ARB

[] CFI & agency #

[] Post Graduate Scholarship & Agency #

☐ Other agency & # (Specify)

☐ Yes ☒ No

(a) Do any researchers conducting this study, have multiple roles with potential participants (e.g., acting as both researcher and as a therapist, health care provider, family member, caregiver, teacher, advisor, consultant, supervisor, student/student peer, or employer/employee or other dual role) that may create real, potential, or perceived conflicts, undue influences, power imbalances or coercion, that could affect relationships with others and affect decision-making processes such as consent to participate?

(i) If **yes**, please describe the multiple roles between the researcher(s) and any participants.

(ii) Describe how any conflicts of interest identified above will be avoided, minimized or managed.

(b) Will the researcher(s), members of the research team, and/or their partners or immediate family members:

(i) receive any personal benefits (for example a financial benefit such as remuneration, intellectual property rights, rights of employment, consultancies, board membership, share ownership, stock options etc.) as a result of or being connected to this study? ☐ Yes ☒ No

(ii) If **yes**, please describe the benefits below. (Do not include conference and travel expense coverage, possible academic promotion, or other benefits which are integral to the conduct of research generally).

N/A

(c) Describe any restrictions regarding access to or disclosure of information (during or at the end of the study) that the sponsor has placed on the investigator(s), if applicable.

N/A

SECTION B – SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

10. Rationale

For the proposed research, please describe the background and the purpose concisely and in lay terms, as well as any overarching research questions or hypotheses to be examined.

Please do not cut and paste full sections from your research proposal.

Background to this study:

Children's Aid Societies (CASS) in the Grand River Zone (local to McMaster) and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (a province wide organization) have recently initiated an initiative with McMaster School of Social Work to "better prepare" undergraduate students for "readiness" to work in the child welfare. Intrigued by this initiative, two current MSW students are asking, "what does 'prepared' for child welfare practice mean and how can BSW programs better achieve this?"

Although a single study, this research will form two separate MSW theses; one that examines the question from the perspective of supervisors and managers, the other from the perspective of frontline workers.

Purpose:

This study examines “readiness” and “preparedness” of BSW graduates for CAS work, and what can be done to better prepare BSW graduates for this work. In this study one MSW student will ask this question of CAS managers and supervisors, the other MSW student will ask the question of CAS frontline workers. The study will use qualitative methods and in-depth interviews. The broad opening question participants will be asked is, “From your perspective, what does social worker “readiness” for CAS work look like and how might BSW programs better prepare students for such work?”

11. Participants

Please use the space below to describe the:

- (a) approximate number of participants required for this study
- (b) salient participant characteristics (e.g., age, gender, location, affiliation, etc.)

If researching several sub-populations, use headings to organize details for items (a) and (b).

(a) Approximate number of participants

- (i) 5-10 **CAS managers or supervisors**
- (ii) 5-10 **CAS frontline family service or intake workers**

(b) Salient participant characteristics

- (i) **Managers or supervisors** with a social work degree with responsibility for the work of frontline family service or intake workers in the Grand River Zone
- (ii) **Frontline CAS family service or intake workers** with a BSW degree in the Grand River Zone

12. Recruitment

Please describe in the space below:

- (a) how each type of participant will be recruited,
- (b) who will recruit each type of participant,
- (c) relationships (if any) between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student; manager-employee, family member, student peers, fellow club members, no relationship etc.),
- (d) permission you have or plan to obtain, for your mode of recruitment for each type of participant, if applicable.

If researching several sub-populations, use headings to organize details for items (a) – (d). Click [“Tips and Samples”](#) to find the “How to Unpack the Recruitment Details” worksheet and other samples.

***ATTACHMENTS:* Provide copies of all recruitment posters, advertisements letters, flyers, and/or email scripts etc. and label these as appendices (e.g., Appendix A or 1).**

(a) How each type of participant will be recruited

(i) **CAS managers and supervisors** will be recruited by e-mail sent by CAS Directors of Services inviting them to consider taking part in this study (**Appendix A**). CAS Directors of Services will be asked to assist in this manner by Dr. Gary Dumbrell in his next meeting with them, or by him telephoning them (they have already indicated that should any research of this nature take place they will be happy to assist). Directors of Service will ask those interested in taking part to contact the researcher by e-mail or phone.

CAS managers and supervisors will also be recruited by flyer (**Appendix C**) distributed by the researcher using snowball methods (via people working in the child welfare field).

When the potential participant contacts the researcher, they will review the description of the study as explained in the letter of information (**Appendix D part 1**). If the participant wishes to take

part, a meeting will be arranged at a place chosen by the participant. At the start of the meeting, the information letter will be reviewed again and an informed consent obtained (**Appendix D part 2**).

(ii) **CAS family service and intake workers** will be recruited by e-mail sent by CAS Directors of Services inviting them to consider taking part in this study (**Appendix B**). CAS Directors of Services will be asked to assist in this manner by Dr. Gary Dumbrill in his next meeting with them or by him telephoning them (they have already indicated that should any research of this nature take place they will be happy to assist). Directors of Service will ask those interested in taking part to contact the researcher by e-mail or phone.

When the potential participant contacts the researcher, they will review the description of the study as explained in the letter of information (**Appendix D part 1**). If the participant wishes to take part, a meeting will be arranged at a place chosen by the participant. At the start of the meeting, the information letter will be reviewed again and an informed consent obtained (**Appendix D part 2**).

(b) Who will recruit each type of participant

(i) **CAS managers and supervisors** will be recruited by e-mail a CAS Director of Services, and by the researcher distributing flyers to contacts in the field.

(ii) **CAS family service and intake workers** will be recruited by a CAS Director of Service, and by the researcher distributing flyers to contacts in the field.

(c) Relationships

(i) The researchers will have no working or personal relationships with CAS manager or supervisor participants at the time of the study

(ii) The researchers will have no working or personal relationship with CAS intake or family service

participants at the time of the study

(d) Permission

None needed

13. Methods

Describe sequentially, and in detail all data collection procedures in which the research participants will be involved (e.g., paper and pencil tasks, interviews, focus groups, lab experiments, participant observation, surveys, physical assessments etc. — *this is not an exhaustive list*). Include information about who will conduct the research, how long it will take, where data collection will take place, and the ways in which data will be collected (e.g., computer responses, handwritten notes, audio/video/photo recordings etc.).

If your research will be conducted with several sub-populations or progress in successive phases; use sub-headings to organize your description of methodological techniques.

ATTACHMENTS: Provide copies of all questionnaires, interview questions, test or data collection instruments etc. Label supporting documents as appendices (e.g., Appendix A or 1) and submit them as separate documents - not pasted into this application.

Click "[Tips and Samples](#)" to find the "How to Unpack the Methods" worksheet and other samples.

(i) CAS managers and supervisors:

- (a) Julie or Jen conduct interviews with participants. Participants choose the location of the interview, such as their workplace, coffee shop or park. The interview is estimated to be approximately 60-90 minutes, with 6 main questions, and prompt questions.
- (b) Following signing of an informed consent, the participant will be asked to complete a demographics questionnaire (**Appendix E**). Demographic data are needed because qualitative study sample characteristics are required for readers of the research to be able to determine the extent findings can be transferred (a qualitative concept similar to the quantitative concept of generalization). As well, participant's view of "readiness" may depend on a number of demographic factors. Participants can

- decline to complete the demographics form or any question on the form.
- (c) Following completion of the demographics form, the participant will be asked if they consent to the interview being tape-recorded, if they agree, the recorder will be turned on. The participant will be told that the recorder can be turned off at any time they request.
 - (d) The questions, covering topics such as readiness, and characteristics of readiness in the interview guide are asked (**Appendix F**)
The interview is concluded.
 - (e) The participant will be asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow up interview, and if they are willing a follow up interview will be arranged, no additional consent will be required for that interview but the participant will be reminded of the content contained in the information letter. The participants have the opportunity to refuse this. The purpose is to check for accuracy of data, and opportunity to reflect on preliminary findings or interpretations.
 - (f) The participant will be asked if they would like to receive a copy of study findings, and in which format they would like to receive them.

(ii) CAS intake and family service workers:

- a) Julie or Jen conduct interviews with participants. Participants choose the location of the interview, such as their workplace, coffee shop or park. The interview is estimated to be approximately 60-90 minutes, with 6 main questions, and prompt questions.
- b) Following signing of an informed consent, the participant will be asked to complete a demographics questionnaire (**Appendix E**). Demographic data are needed because qualitative study sample characteristics are required for readers of the research to be able to determine the extent findings can be transferred (a qualitative concept similar to the quantitative concept of generalization). As well, participant's view of "readiness" may depend on a number of demographic factors. Participants can decline to complete the demographics form or any question on the form.
- c) Following completion of the demographics form, the participant will be asked if they consent to the interview being tape-recorded, if they agree, the recorder will be turned on. The participant will be told that the recorder can be turned off at any time they request.
- d) The questions, covering topics such as readiness, and characteristics of readiness in the interview guide are asked (**Appendix F**)
- e) The interview is concluded.
- f) The participant will be asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow up interview, and if they are willing a follow up interview will be arranged, no additional consent will be required for that interview but the participant will be reminded of the content contained in the information letter. The participants have the opportunity to refuse this. The purpose is to check for accuracy of data, and opportunity to reflect on preliminary findings or interpretations.
- g) The participant will be asked if they would like to receive a copy of study findings, and in which format they would like to receive them.

14. Secondary Use of Identifiable Data (*e.g. the use of personally identifiable data of participants contained in records that have been collected for a purpose other than your current research project*):

(a) Do you plan on using identifiable data of participants in your research for which the original purpose that data was collected is different than the purpose of your current research project?
☐ Yes ☒ No

If **yes**, please answer the next set of questions:

(b) Do you plan to link this identifiable data to other data sets? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If **yes**, please describe in the space below:

N/A

(c) What type of identifiable data from this data set are you planning to access and use?

- ☐ Student records (please specify in the space below)
- ☐ Health records/clinic/office files (please specify in the space below)
- ☐ Other personal records (please specify in the space below)

N/A

(d) What personally identifiable data (e.g., name, student number, telephone number, date of birth etc.) from this data set do you plan on using in your research? Please explain why you need to collect this identifiable data and justify why each item is required to conduct your research.

N/A

(e) Describe the details of any agreement you have, or will have, in place with the owner of this data to allow you to use this data for your research. **ATTACHMENTS: Submit a copy of any data access agreements.**

N/A

(f) When participants first contributed their data to this data set, were there any known preferences expressed by participants at that time about how their information would be used in the future? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

If **yes**, please explain in the space below.

N/A

(g) What is the likelihood of adverse effects happening to the participants to whom this secondary use of data relates? Please explain.

N/A

(h) Will participants whose information is stored in this data set (which you plan to use for secondary purposes) consent to your use of this data? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

Please explain in the space below.

N/A

15. Research Database

Does your research involve the creation and/or modification of a research database (databank) containing human participant information? A research database is a collection of data maintained for use in **future** research. The human participant information stored in the research database can be identifiable or anonymous ☐ **Yes** ☒ **No**

If “Yes” was answered to the above question, you will need to fill out and submit MREB’s “Supplementary Form for Creating or Modifying a Research Database Containing Human Participant Information” along with this application.

NOTE: If you intend to collect or store personally-identifying health information, now or at a later stage in your research, your protocol must be cleared by Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board (HiREB) rather than MREB. For further advice contact MREB at x 23142 or X 26117 or HiREB x 905 521-2100 X 44574.

16. Experience

What is your experience with this kind of research? Include information on the experience of all **individual(s)** who will have contact with the research participants or their data. ***For example, you could mention your familiarity with the proposed methods, the study population(s) and/or the research topic.***

The researchers do not have experience in research interviews, but as trained social workers have experience with interview processes.

Julie:

Julie entered child welfare in 1998, as a new BSW graduate. From 1998 to 2014, Julie has occupied different frontline child protection roles such as Intake Worker, Family Services Worker and Children’s Services Worker. While in those roles, Julie has conducted numerous interviews with families and community professionals.

Jen: Has obtained her BSW degree and worked in the field of Social Work in various roles for over 10 years. Throughout her career, Jen has developed her interview skills through work in counselling, social advocacy and approximately 5 years in Child Welfare as a Family Services Worker. In these roles Jen has experienced the Social Work field as a New Worker and is currently employed as the Supervisor of Crisis Services at Haldimand and Norfolk REACH.

17. Compensation**Yes No**(a) Will participants receive compensation for participation? ☐ ☒Financial ☐ ☒Other (specify) ☐ ☒

(b) If yes was answered for any of the above choices, please provide details. See <[Helpful Hints](#)> for funded research projects.

N/A

(c) If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with their compensation?

N/A

SECTION C – DESCRIPTION OF THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH**18. Possible Risks**

(a) Indicate if the participants might experience any of the following risks:

i.) Physical risk (including any bodily contact or administration of any substance)?

☐ Yes ☒ No

ii.) Psychological risks (including feeling demeaned, embarrassed worried or upset)?

☐ Yes ☒ No

iii.) Social risks (including possible loss of status, privacy and / or reputation as well as economic risks)?

☒ Yes ☐ No

iv.) Are any possible risks to participants greater than those the participants might encounter in their everyday life?

[☐] Yes [x] No

(b) If you checked **yes** for any of questions **i – iv** above, please describe the risk(s) in the space below.

Participants are all professional social workers and will be discussing a topic that is routinely discussed in the field. Discussing these matters from the field with a researcher presents no greater risk than discussing these issues elsewhere in their work or other settings. There could be, however, instances where a participant may wish to express an opinion that they do not want others in the field to know.

(c) Management of Risks: Describe how each of the risks identified above will be managed or minimized. Please, include an explanation regarding why alternative approaches cannot be used.

Risks will be managed by protection participant confidentiality as set out in section 25. Any other indirect identifying information will not be used such as agency names, pseudo-names or immediate local area. .

(d) Deception: Is there any deception involved in this research? [☐] Yes [x] No

i.) If deception is to be used in your methods, describe the details of the deception (including what information will be withheld from participants) and justify the use of deception.

N/A

ii.) Please describe when participants will be given an explanation about why deception was used and how they will be debriefed about the study (for example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research).

ATTACHMENTS: Please provide a copy of the written debriefing form or script, if applicable.

N/A

19. Possible Benefits

Discuss any potential benefits to the participants and or scientific community/society that justify involvement of participants in this study. (***Please note: benefits should not be confused with compensation or reimbursement for taking part in the study.***)

While there are no direct benefits to the participants by taking part in the study, the research results will contribute to improvement of undergraduate social work education.

SECTION D – THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

20. The Consent Process

(a) Please describe how consent will be documented. Provide a copy of the Letter of Information / Consent Form (if applicable). If a written consent form will not be used to document consent, please explain why and describe the alternative means that will be used. While oral consent may be acceptable in certain circumstances, it may still be appropriate to provide participants with a Letter of Information to participants about the study.

Click "[Tips and Samples](#)" for the McMaster REB recommended sample "Letter of Information / Consent Form", to be written at the appropriate reading level. The "Guide to Converting Documents into Plain Language" is also found under "[Tips and Samples](#)".

ATTACHMENTS: Provide a copy of the Letter of Information and Consent form(s) or oral or telephone script(s) to be used in the consent process for each of your study populations, where applicable.

(a) Supervisors and managers: Consent will be documented by obtaining written consent

(b) Intake and family service workers: Consent will be documented by obtaining written consent.

(b): Please describe the process the investigator(s) will use to obtain informed consent, including who will be obtaining informed consent. Describe plans for on-going consent, if applicable.

The same process will be used for both study sub-populations.

- The researcher conducting the interview will obtain informed consent. A Letter of information/ consent form Appendix D will be provided to participants
- The researcher will go over the LOI/CF with the participant and will ask her/im if they have any questions
- Participant questions will be answered by the researcher
- The participant will be asked if s/he would like to begin the interview
- The participant will be asked to sign and completed the consent portion of the Letter of Information/Consent form.
- A second information letter and signed informed consent will not be needed for a second member-checking interview. During arrangement of following up interview, verbal consent will be obtained and a letter of information will be send by email as well as reviewed during the interview. Should a participant agree to the follow up interview, Jen or Julie will remind participant of the study via email, highlight the items covered in the letter of information and ask them if they have any questions and if they are willing to go forward with the interview.

21. Consent by an authorized person

If participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternate consent process. **ATTACHMENTS: Attach the Letter of Information and Consent form(s) to be provided to the person(s) providing the alternate consent. Click “[Tips and Samples](#)” to find samples.**

N/A

22. Alternatives to prior individual consent

If obtaining written or oral documentation of an individual participant's consent prior to start of the research project is not appropriate for this research, please explain and provide details for a proposed alternative consent process. **ATTACHMENTS:**
Please provide any Letters of Information and or Consent Forms.

N/A

23. Providing participants with study results

How will participants be able to learn about the study results (e.g., mailed/emailed brief summary of results in plain language; posting on website or other appropriate means for this population)?

Participants will be provided with a summary in the format they request.

24. Participant withdrawal

a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project. Describe the procedures which will be followed to allow the participants to exercise this right.

Participants will be informed verbally and in the information letter/informed consent about their right to withdraw and also the limitations on removing their data from the study as set out in the information letter.

b) Indicate what will be done with the participant's data and any consequences which withdrawal might have on the participant, including any effect that withdrawal may have on the participant's compensation or continuation of services (if applicable).

Participant's data will be removed from the study unless they indicate otherwise. Participants can ask for specific comments they have made to be struck from the record even if they are not withdrawing from the study. Participants will not be able to have their data removed after analysis has taken place, which will be 3-weeks after the interview, participants will be informed of this restriction as a part of the informed consent process.

c) If the participants will not have the right to withdraw from the research, please explain.

N/A

25. SECTION E – CONFIDENTIALITY & ANONYMITY

Confidentiality concerns the protection, privacy and security of research data. Consult the Data Security Checklist at <http://reo.mcmaster.ca/educational-resources> for best practices to secure electronic and hard copy versions of data and study documents.

(a) Will the data you collect be kept protected, private and secure from non-research team members?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No**

If **No**, then explain why not, and describe what steps you be put in place to advise participants that data will not be kept protected, private and secure from non-research team members.

N/A

(b) Describe the procedures to be used to ensure that the data you collect in your research will be kept protected, private, and secure from non-research team members. In your description, explain who will have access to the data and what data security measures will be put in place during data transfer and data storage.

Hard copy data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at McMaster, participant names will not be on transcripts, electronic data will be stored either on a password protected computer, an encrypted external drive, or stored on a server that encrypts data and securely transfers data and uses at least Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) and AES-256 bit encryption. Only members of the research team will have access to data.

(c) Will the research data be kept indefinitely or will it be deleted after a certain time period? Please explain. In your answer, describe why you plan to keep data indefinitely or not. If deleting data after a certain time period, explain why you chose the time period you did. Describe how participants will be informed whether their data will be deleted or not.

Data will be retained for 3-years

Anonymity concerns whether participant identities are made known or not. The anonymity promised to participants can be different during different stages of research (i.e., during recruitment, during data collection, during data storage, and during the dissemination of research findings).

(d) Describe the extent to which participant identities will be made known in each of the following activities: during recruitment, during data collection, during data storage, and during the dissemination of research findings. In your description, explain what steps or procedures you plan to put in place to keep participant identities unknown in each of those activities.

Recruitment

Potential participants can ask for information about the study without revealing their identity.

Data collection

Participants will be offered an individual interview in a location of their choosing, which will ensure high levels of anonymity.

Data storage

Hard copy data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at McMaster, participant names will not be on transcripts, and electronic data will be stored either on a password protected computer, an encrypted external drive, or stored on a server that encrypts data and securely transfers data and uses at least Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) and AES-256 bit encryption.

Dissemination

Because people can sometimes be identified by the stories they tell there is a risk that participants can be inadvertently identified in dissemination. Participants will be cautioned about this risk when telling stories in the data gathering stage. In addition, the researchers will be careful to report data and stories in ways that attempts to protect participants from this risk.

SECTION F -- MONITORING ONGOING RESEARCH

26. Adverse Events, Change Requests and Annual Renewal/Project Status Report

- a) **Adverse events** (Unanticipated negative consequences or results affecting participants) must be reported by faculty researcher or supervisor to the REB Secretariat (Ethics Office – Ext. 23142) and the MREB Chair, as soon as possible and in any event, no more than 3 days after they occur.

See: https://reo.mcmaster.ca/policies/copy_of_guidelines#12-0-adverse-events

- b) **Changes to cleared research:** To obtain clearance for a change to a protocol that has already received ethics clearance, please complete the “< [Change Request](#) >” form available on the MREB website or by clicking this link. Proposed changes may not begin before they receive ethics clearance.

- c) **Annual Renewal/Project Status Report** Ethics clearance is for only one year.

The minimum requirement for renewing clearance is the completion of a “Annual Renewal/Project Status Report” in advance of the (1 year) anniversary of the original ethics clearance date.”

PLEASE NOTE:

It is the investigator’s responsibility to complete the Annual Project Status Report that is sent each year by email 8 weeks in advance of the anniversary of the original ethics clearance to comply with the Research Integrity Policy. If ethics clearance expires the Research Ethics Board is obliged to notify Research Finance who in accordance with university and funding agency regulations will put a hold on funds.

27. **Additional Information:** Use this section or additional page(s) to complete any part of this form, or for any other information relevant to this project which you wish to provide to the Research Ethics Board.

28. POSTING OF APPROVED PROTOCOLS ON THE RESEARCH ETHICS WEBSITE

- a) It is the policy of MREB to post a list of cleared protocols on the Research Ethics website. Posted information usually includes: title, names of principal investigators, principal investigator department, type of project (i.e. Faculty; PhD; Masters, Undergraduate etc.)
- b) You may request that the title be deleted from the posted information.
- c) Do you request that the title be eliminated from the posted information? [] Yes [x] No
- d) The ethics board will honour your request if you answer **Yes** to the above question 27 c) but we ask you to provide a reason for making this request for the information of the Board. You may also use the space for any other special requests.
- e) < [List of MREB Cleared Protocols](#) > < [List of Undergraduate SREC Cleared Protocols](#) >

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Supporting Materials Checklist:

Instructions:

Complete this checklist to identify and describe your supporting materials to ensure your application form is complete

- When supplying supporting materials, ensure that they are properly labeled (e.g., “Appendix C: Interview Guide for Teachers”) and referenced in your protocol (e.g., “The interview guide for teachers – see Appendix C – is...”).
- Do not cut and paste supporting materials directly into the application form; submit each as a separate appendix.
- If you have multiple supporting materials of the same type (e.g., multiple letters of information that target different populations), list each supporting material on a separate row in this checklist. Add a new row to the table if necessary.

Supporting Materials Checklist	I will use this type of material in my study (Insert X below)	I have attached a copy of this material in my protocol (Insert X below)	This is how I labeled and titled this material in my protocol (e.g., Appendix A – “Email Recruitment Script for Organizational Workers”)
Recruitment Materials			
Study Information Brochure			

Video/audio recording that explains study details			
Participant Screening Form			
Recruitment Advertisements			
Recruitment Poster	X	X	Appendix C
Recruitment Script – Verbal/Telephone			
Recruitment Script – Email (direct to participant)			
Recruitment Script – Email (From holder of participant’s contact information)	X	X	Appendix A & B
Recruitment for follow-up interview	X	X	Appendix G
Snowball Recruitment script			
Reminder/thank you/ card/script/email			
Appreciation Letter/certificate – For Participants			
Other			
Informed Consent Materials			
Consent Log (to record oral consent)			
Oral/Telephone Consent Script			
Letter of Information & Consent Form – Participants	X	X	Appendix D
Letter of Information & Consent Form – Parent			

Letter of Information & Consent Form - Guardian or Substitute Decision Maker			
Letter of Information & Assent Form – Minors			
Online survey brief information/consent and implied consent buttons			
Letter of Support for Study			
Research Agreement			
Other			
Data Collection Materials			
Information Sharing/Data Access/Transfer Agreement (for secondary use of data)			
Demographic form - Participant's	X	X	Appendix E
Instructions for participants			
Interview Guide – (Questions for face to face, telephone, Internet/email interview)	X	X	Appendix F
Interview Guide – Questions for Focus Groups			
Questionnaire or Survey questions & instructions (Paper and pencil or online formats)			
Rating Scales/inventories/Assessment Instruments			

Role-play/simulation scripts			
Stimuli used to elicit responses			
Images (photos, diagrams etc.) depicting instruments, equipment, exercises etc.			
Other			
Debriefing Materials			
Debriefing Form			
Deception Study - Debriefing Letter & post debriefing consent form			
Deception Study- Debriefing script – verbal			
Other			
Confidentiality Materials			
Confidentiality Oath/ Agreement	X	X	Appendix D
Confidential Study Code Key Log			
Other			
Materials for previous review by other REBs			
Application form –Other REBs (Original)			
Application form –Other REBs (Revised)			

Communication between REB & researcher (letters, emails, faxes etc.)			
Clearance Certificate (Other REBs)			
Other			
Other Supporting Materials			
Compensation Log			
List of support services for participants			
Participant Appreciation - letter, script, email or certificate etc.			
Researcher Training Certificates			
Scientific Licenses			
Other			

29. Researcher Assurance: [< SECTION G – SIGNATURES >](#)

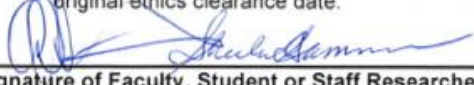
[X] I confirm that I have read the McMaster University Research Integrity Policy <http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/faculty/Research/Research%20Integrity%20Policy.pdf>, and I agree to comply with this and other university policies, guidelines and the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) and of my profession or discipline regarding the ethical conduct of research involving humans.

[X] In addition, I understand that the following *all constitute violations of the McMaster University's Research Integrity Policy*:

- failure to obtain research ethics clearance;

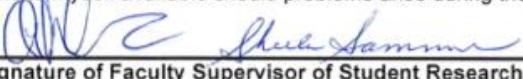
- carrying out research in a manner that was not cleared by one of the university's REBs;
- failure to submit a **Change Request** to obtain ethics clearance prior to implementing changes to a cleared study;
- failure to report an **Adverse Event** (i.e., an unanticipated negative consequence or result affecting participants) by the investigator or faculty supervisor of student research to the MREB secretariat and the MREB chair, as soon as possible and in any event, no more than 3 days after the event occurs;

- failure to submit an **Annual Renewal/Project Status Report** in advance of the 1 year anniversary of the original ethics clearance date.


 Gary Dumbrill & Sheila Sammon April 7, 2015
 Signature of Faculty, Student or Staff Researcher PLEASE PRINT NAME HERE Date
 (Add lines for additional researchers.)

Supervisor Assurance for Graduate or Undergraduate Student Research:

[X] "I am the supervisor for this proposed student research and have read this ethics application and supporting documents and deem the project to be valid and worthwhile, and I will provide the necessary supervision of the student(s) researcher(s) throughout the project including ensuring that the project will be conducted as cleared and to make myself available should problems arise during the course of the research."


 Gary Dumbrill & Sheila Sammon April 7, 2015
 Signature of Faculty Supervisor of Student Research PLEASE PRINT NAME HERE Date
 (Add lines for additional supervisors.)

The signature page may also be emailed as a scanned PDF or be sent by campus mail to GH-305.