ABSTRACT

EXPLORING INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION BETWEEN
CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES AND VICTIM SERVICE
AGENCIES IN INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE
CASES IN FRESNO COUNTY

The current study utilized qualitative research methods to explore current Fresno County Child Protective Services Social Workers' experiences collaborating with victim service agencies on cases that involve intimate partner violence. Eleven participants were asked about their experience working with these agencies to support families experiencing intimate partner violence. Participants were also asked to identify any current barriers to collaboration, as well as any strengths of the agency's current collaborative efforts. Finally, participants were asked for their insight on what could improve and strengthen collaboration with victim service agencies. The researcher drew upon thematic analysis to gain an understanding of participants' responses. Through the analysis, three overarching themes were revealed: 1) collaboration varies, 2) a positive relationship with one agency, and 3) barriers to collaboration exist. Findings suggest that there is no standard definition of or processes to guide collaboration; collaboration is working well with one victim service agency; and that there are barriers related to communication and staff availability. Fresno County CPS could benefit from cross-training, understanding victim service agencies' priorities and policies, and a needs assessment to establish goals and objectives for collaboration. Future research should aim to further explore within group differences related to the classification and unit assignment of CPS social workers.

Jessica Renee Muñoz
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CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES AND VICTIM SERVICE

AGENCIES IN INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

CASES IN FRESNO COUNTY

by

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We, the undersigned, certify that the thesis of the following student meets the required standards of scholarship, format, and style of the university and the student's graduate degree program for the awarding of the master's degree.


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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Child Protective Services (CPS) agencies (also known as Child Welfare Services) aim to provide prevention and education, intervention, and protection to children and families impacted by child abuse and neglect. When a referral alleging child abuse or neglect is received by a CPS agency, social workers are tasked with determining whether abuse or neglect has occurred or if a risk of abuse or neglect is present and how the agency will respond or intervene. While CPS agencies are responsible for investigating and responding to child abuse and neglect, many families that come in contact with these agencies are impacted by other issues, such as intimate partner violence (IPV) (also referred to as domestic violence) (Fusco, 2013). When these co-occurring victimizations are present, families often receive services from multiple agencies, including victim services. As such, effective partnerships and collaboration with these service providers are crucial to ensuring that families are provided with the services necessary to address these victimizations and prevent future ones. However, many barriers exist to effective and efficient collaboration between CPS agencies and victim services providers (Banks et al., 2009; Findlater & Kelly, 1999; Fusco, 2013; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018, 2019; NCJFCJ, 1999). Further research could provide insight on how to improve collaboration among CPS and victim service agencies serving those impacted by IPV. Additional research may address gaps in the literature and could specifically aid CPS social workers and families in Fresno County, California as it is an area that experiences high levels of IPV (Vasconcelos, 2022).

This study aimed to contribute to existing literature, address gaps in the literature, and provide recommendations for Fresno County CPS by exploring the experiences of current Fresno County CPS social workers who have collaborated with victim service agencies on referrals that involve families experiencing IPV. Situated in ecological

systems theory, the researcher sought to understand CPS' collaborative efforts at each system level and aimed to provide recommendations for improving practice and collaboration at each system level. The researcher utilized qualitative research methods to answer the research question and identify themes in participants' responses. This study is relevant to the field of social work as it addresses one of the profession's core values.

<div align="center">

**Problem**

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Although definitions of IPV vary, it is typically defined as abusive acts and behaviors perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner against another for the purpose of exerting power and control over them (Basile et al., 2022). The abusive acts and behaviors can be emotional, financial, physical, psychological, religious, or sexual in nature, and can include stalking and cyberstalking (Daigle, 2013; Payne & Gainey, 2015). IPV can be one abusive act or a series of abuse acts, with varying levels of severity (Basile et al., 2022). Rates of prevalence also vary, however, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 47.3% of women and 44.2% of men reported experiencing physical violence, sexual violence, and or stalking in their lifetimes (Basile et al., 2022). A particularly concerning aspect about IPV is how large of an impact it can have outside of the direct victim.

In addition to those being directly abused, IPV also impacts other members of the family system and the systems that serve them. Approximately 8.2 million children were exposed to some form of family violence in the last year, with one in fifteen children witnessing IPV specifically (Hamby et al., 2011). Children who witness IPV are at risk of experiencing lifelong behavioral, social, and physical impacts (Anda et al., 2006; Payne & Gainey, 2015; Shireman, 2015; Vargas et al., 2005). However, according to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2021), only about half of all states in the United States (U.S.) address exposure to IPV in their laws. Concerningly, Fusco (2013) found that 25-

70% families who are reported to CPS agencies for physical child abuse are also experiencing IPV. Families that are referred to CPS agencies are also often referred to IPV victim service providers to help address the impacts of IPV on the family. Despite this overlap in victimization, there are many documented barriers to collaboration among CPS agencies and IPV service providers (Banks et al., 2009; Findlater & Kelly, 1999; Fusco, 2013; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018, 2019; NCJFCJ, 1999).

Historically, CPS staff did not address IPV when responding to child abuse and neglect referrals, and victim services staff did not address child safety when responding to the needs of adult victims of IPV. The varying, and oftentimes conflicting, roles and goals of CPS agencies and victim services agencies have created tension among these professionals (Findlater & Kelly, 1999). However, the emergence of family preservation models encouraged CPS staff to consider the entire family system when evaluating child safety (Findlater & Kelly, 1999). This led to a common goal of safety for all family members, encouraging strategies for collaboration among CPS and victim service agencies, in the 1980s and 1990s (Findlater & Kelly, 1999). As a result, several federal entities supported efforts to establish collaboration (Findlater & Kelly, 1999; National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges [NCJFCJ], 1999).

Despite decades of effort (Banks et al., 2009; Findlater & Kelly, 1999; Fusco, 2013; Haas et al., 2011; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018, 2019; NCJFCJ, 1999), barriers to collaboration still exist. Langenderfer-Magruder and colleagues (2018) found that there are barriers related to communication, the complexity of IPV, participation in collaboration, competence, and tension (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018). To address these barriers, many recommendations have been made, some of which have been renewed, others of which are emerging. Some of the recurring recommendations include supportive leadership, training to foster trust and understanding across systems, establishment of common goals, and policy and practice changes, and colocation (Banks

et al., 2009; Findlater & Kelly, 1999; Fusco, 2013; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018; NCJFCJ, 1999). One emerging recommendation can be found in Langenderfer-Magruder and colleagues' (2019) model for frontline collaboration, called RISE (Responder InStitutional Empathy). This model emphasizes communication, rapport, appreciation for teamwork, and consistent understanding of case procedures.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine how CPS social workers collaborate with victim service providers on referrals that involve IPV in Fresno County. This study explored the strengths of current collaborative efforts, as well as any barriers, as identified by Fresno County CPS social workers. Emphasis was placed on social workers' individual experiences and their thoughts on the most effective ways to bolster and improve collaboration and partnership with victim service agencies in Fresno County. The goal is for the results of this study to provide meaningful suggestions on how to strengthen and improve collaborative efforts in Fresno County, an area that experiences high levels of IPV (Vasconcelos, 2022). Finally, the intent of this study is to also add to the existing literature, while addressing several gaps. The researcher aimed to fill these gaps by seeking participants with several years of experience, who are employed at varying levels with the agency, and by exploring possible differences based on the agency's level of involvement with families.

## Theoretical Framework

The current study was situated in ecological systems theory to understand the experiences of Fresno County CPS social workers, whose work with victims of IPV is influenced by multiple system levels. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory puts forth five systems and posits that the interactions between and among the members of these systems influences individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The five systems of the

theory are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, marcosystem, and chronosystem. Ecological systems theory is frequently used in social work practice to bring together individual-level interventions with interventions that include family systems, communities, and other service agencies (Payne, 2016). Although the components of this theory are typically applied to further the understanding of clients (Hepworth et al., 2017), this study applies it to social work staff to understand their experience collaborating with service providers.

At the microsystem level, this study examined the individual experiences of current Fresno County CPS social workers. At the mesosystem level, this study examined the interactions between CPS social workers and victim services staff. At the exosystem level, this study examined how Fresno County CPS, as an agency, interacts with victim service agencies to address IPV in families referred to their agency. This study was specific to the community of Fresno County, California, a macrosystem. Finally, the examination of historical perspectives on IPV and the evolution of CPS intervention with families experiencing IPV is the chronosystem level. Through the application of the findings of this study, there is a possibility to influence individual social work practice (microsystem), improve social worker to victim service staff collaboration (mesosystem), inform Fresno County CPS policy on interagency collaboration (exosystem), improve outcomes for families in Fresno County (macrosystem), and create lasting positive change (chronosystem).

## Methodology

This study was conducted using qualitative research methodology. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with current Fresno County CPS social workers. Participants were sampled using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Participants met inclusion criteria if they were current employees of Fresno County CPS.

Additionally, the researcher attempted to recruit participants that had several years of experience in child welfare, from varying roles (Social Worker I, II, and III, Social Work Practitioner, Social Work Supervisor, and Social Service Program Manager), and units in the agency (emergency response, voluntary family maintenance, and family reunification) to fill gaps in the literature. The individual qualitative interviews were virtually. Each participant's interview was recorded and transcribed. Demographic information was obtained from participants via a Google Forms survey. Finally, the researcher drew upon thematic analysis to identify themes across participants' responses.

## Relevance to Social Work

CPS social workers cannot comprehensively address all the varying needs of the families they work with, in the confines of their role and agency resources. As such, CPS social workers frequently refer families to various agencies to obtain services. Because multiple agencies are needed to support families, social workers must rely on other individuals and agencies to address the concerns that brought families to the attention of their agency and to provide needed information on the status and impact of these services as it relates to child safety. This study examined the relationship between Fresno County CPS and IPV victim services agencies. In emphasizing the value of collaborative relationships, the study aimed to promote one of the ethical principles of the social work profession.

The ethical principles and standards of the social work profession are established by the National Association of Social Work (National Association of Social Work [NASW], 2021). The six guiding principles are based on the six core values of the profession (NASW, 2021). This study most directly relates to the value "importance of human relationships." This value's principle centers the importance of human relationships and delineates the reasons for their importance (NASW, 2021). In practice,

this principle urges social workers to recognize that relationships can be agents of change, and that people and systems that interact with the client system should be engaged as partners (NASW, 2021). It also asserts that social workers should aim to purposefully enhance those relationships for the benefit of their clients (NASW, 2021).

This study recognized the importance of the collaborative relationship between CPS agencies and victim services, who are involved with families impacted by IPV. This relationship has the potential to effect change in clients' lives in multiple ways. Separately, these agencies have the ability to address child abuse and IPV; together, they have the ability to implement integrative practices that address both child abuse and IPV for all members of the family system. This study aimed to encourage CPS employees to engage IPV victim service agencies as partners in the helping process and sought to strengthen these relationships to promote the well-being of individuals and families in Fresno County. While this study only intended to address this value, the researcher found that the findings of the study have the potential to incorporate additional values and ethical standards, as presented in the Discussion chapter.

## Summary

Many families that are referred to CPS agencies for child abuse or neglect are also impacted by other issues, such as IPV (Fusco, 2013). When a family is working with a CPS agency and is also experiencing IPV, they are often referred to outside agencies for services. However, CPS agencies and IPV services providers often experience barriers to working collaboratively to support families. The purpose of this study was to add to the existing literature, address several gaps in the literature, and provide recommendations to Fresno County CPS. Situated in ecological systems theory, the researcher conducted qualitative interviews and drew upon thematic analysis to identify themes among Fresno County CPS social workers' experiences in working with IPV victim services providers.

This study is relevant to social work as it addresses one of the profession's core principles - importance of human relationships – at all ecological system levels.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, millions of adults are impacted IPV, annually (Basile et al., 2022). The way that society views and understands IPV, and its impacts has influenced intervention methods. As a result, historical perspectives of IPV are presented in the following chapter. Additionally, this study is situated in the ecological systems theory, so examination of historical perspectives is applicable to the chronosystem of the theory. However, IPV not only impacts the direct victim, but also other members of the family system, particularly children (Anda et al., 2006; Vargas et al., 2005; Payne & Gainey, 2015; Shireman, 2015). This frequently leads families impacted by IPV to become involved with CPS agencies. As a result, the historical perspectives on the impact of IPV on children and CPS agencies' responses are also noted. The breadth of the problem is then explored through the presentation of the number of adult IPV victims in Fresno County, and the number of children affected by IPV. The depth of the problem is demonstrated through a discussion of the impact of IPV on children and CPS agencies.

This study is situated in the ecological systems theoretical framework. This theory was developed in 1979 by Urie Bronfenbrenner and was first applied to the field of psychology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The theory maintains that individuals can be understood in the context of the various systems they belong to; these systems work independently and interdependently to influence individuals. This theory is frequently used in the field of social work to integrate individual-level interventions with interventions that involve family systems, communities, and other service agencies (Payne, 2016). As social work professions engage with individuals and families, this theory is typically applied to understand them (Hepworth et al., 2017). However, the current study utilizes the theory to examine the individual experiences of Fresno County CPS social workers.

A review of the literature illustrated the historic and current efforts of CPS agencies and victim services agencies to work collaboratively to support families impacted by IPV. Although efforts to bridge the gap between the entities, barriers to collaboration remain. Research is on-going and emerging, providing insight and recommendations that could be used to foster meaningful partnerships. However, there are several gaps in the literature, including recent studies only interviewing newly hired social workers, excluding non-case-carrying social workers, focusing on top-down approaches, and not examining for differences based on social workers' assigned units. These gaps provide a rationale for the current study, which aimed to address all.

## Introduction to the Problem

Intimate partner violence impacts millions of people and families each year (Basile et al., 2022). Rates of IPV are particularly high in Fresno County, California (Vasconcelos, 2022), the context of the present study. In addition to the direct victims of IPV, children are impacted by violence in their family system (Anda et al., 2006; Vargas et al., 2005; Payne & Gainey, 2015; Shireman, 2015) and are at increased risk of being abused in their own future intimate relationships (Vargas et al., 2005). This exposure to IPV and, in some cases, direct abuse towards children frequently causes families to become involved with CPS agencies (Fusco, 2013). Due to these overlapping victimization in family systems, families are often also referred to victim service agencies to address IPV. However, CPS employees and victim services staff experience barriers to collaboration (Findlater & Kelly, 1999; NCJFCJ, 1999; Banks et al., 2009; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018, 2019), which are presented in the literature review section of this chapter.

**Definition of the Problem**

IPV is characterized by a current or former intimate partner engaging in abusive acts and behaviors against another for the purpose of exerting power and control over them (Basile et al., 2022). IPV perpetrators can be emotionally, financially, physically, psychologically, or sexually abusive towards their victims (Daigle, 2013; Payne & Gainey, 2015). IPV can range from one abusive act or a series of abusive acts over time (Basile et al., 2022). Additionally, the severity of abuse can span from physical injuries to lasting psychological impacts. The CDC found that 47.3% of women and 44.2% of men reported experiencing physical violence, sexual violence, and or stalking in their lifetimes (Basile et al., 2022). However, IPV often goes unreported, the rate of incidence is underestimated.

*Historical Perspective*

Interpersonal violence has occurred since the beginning of time; IPV, a form of interpersonal, family violence, is likely no exception. Due to methodological limitations, the prevalence and incidence of IPV is difficult to measure, even in modern times; it is even more difficult to track the shifts in the prevalence of IPV over time (Payne & Gainey, 2015). What is more easily measured and tracked over time is society's reaction and response to IPV. According to Pleck (1989), public concern for IPV has ebbed and flowed.

In the West, the first law concerning "wife beating" was instituted in 1641 by the Puritans. Shortly after, the Plymouth Colony passed a similar law in 1672. However, during the 18th century, there was a cultural shift in how family violence was viewed. Rather than being an issue of public concern, it receded back into the home where it was a private family issue (Payne & Gainey, 2015). Contrary to earlier laws, in the 1800s, Supreme Court cases in two different states upheld a husband's "right" to physically "discipline" his wife (Pleck, 1989). However, between the mid to late 1800s and the

beginning of 1900s, interest in IPV sparked again. At this time in the U.S., 12 states and the District of Columbia passed legislation prohibiting physical spousal abuse (Payne & Gainey, 2015).

The literature varies, slightly, but the most recent surge of interest in IPV began between the 1950s-1970s. Payne and Gainey (2015) attribute it to a concern with child abuse, while Daigle (2013) attributes it to the women's rights and feminist movement. The recent interest has, once again, reframed IPV as a societal issue, rather than a private, familial issue. This has created public and academic attention and encouraged the exploration of ways to prevent, intervene, and support families experiencing IPV.

While the conversations surrounding IPV have grown, one aspect of IPV continues to require attention. IPV often impacts other individuals who do not directly experience it – namely children who witness or are exposed to it (Anda et al., 2006; Vargas et al., 2005; Payne & Gainey, 2015; Shireman, 2015). Historically, children were overlooked as victims in families impacted by IPV because they are not viewed as being directly harmed (Findlater & Kelly, 1999). This is further evidenced by the Children's Bureau not considering family violence a form of child maltreatment (Shireman, 2015). However, some CPS agencies do consider exposure to IPV, which they call domestic violence, as emotional abuse (Evident Change, 2022), and a risk factor physical abuse (Fusco, 2013). However, only 26 U.S. states address exposure to IPV in their statutes (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021). CPS agencies' involvement with families impacted by IPV will be explored further in the literature review section of this chapter.

**Breadth of the Problem**

*Local Impact of IPV*

IPV is of particular concern in Fresno County, California. According to Fresno Police Department (FPD) Sergeant Marissa Jackson, FPD officers were handling between

5-8 calls related to IPV per shift, in 2022 (Vasconcelos, 2022). As of November 2022, FPD had generated over 8,400 reports related to IPV, an increase from the 7,990 reports that were generated in 2021 (Vasconcelos, 2022). Additionally, according to data from the California Department of Justice, calls for service related to IPV have increased over the last few years; there was a 15% increase in 2020 and a 10% increase in 2021 (Vasconcelos, 2022). As a result, Fresno County ranked second in the state for the number of law enforcement calls for services due to IPV (Vasconcelos, 2022). Marjaree Mason Center (MMC), Fresno County's only IPV-dedicated service provider, serves more than 9,000 adults and children impacted by IPV, annually (Vasconcelos, 2022). Due to the high level of IPV in Fresno County and the limited availability of services, collaboration with IPV service providers and CPS social workers is especially crucial.

### *Number of Children Impacted by IPV*

Several national surveys attempt to quantify the impact of IPV on children; some of these surveys collected data directly from children, while others collected data from parents. According to the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, nearly 8.2 million children were exposed to some form of family violence in a one-year time period (Hamby et al., 2011). Of these children, one in nine children were exposed to some form of family violence, with one in fifteen children being exposed to IPV between their parents. Furthermore, 90% of children who were exposed to IPV, visually witnessed the IPV, as opposed to hearing but not seeing the IPV (Hamby et al., 2011).

A national survey of adult victims of IPV confirms the concerning number of children who witness IPV. The 2016-2017 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey reported that 15.6% of female respondents and 7.3% of male respondents shared that a child in their home had ever witnessed psychological aggression among intimate partners (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021). In this same survey, 10.7% of

female respondents and 5.3% of male respondents reported that a child in their home had ever witnessed physical violence among intimate partners. Given the elevated rates of IPV in Fresno (Vasconcelos, 2022), it is likely that an even larger proportion of children in Fresno County are exposed to IPV.

### Number of Children Impacted by IPV who Become Involved with CPS

When CPS agencies investigate allegations of child abuse or neglect, social workers refer to the legal definition of abuse and neglect as presented in penal codes and welfare and institutions codes (WIC). According to the WIC, intimate partner violence is defined as "...abuse committed against an adult or a minor who is a spouse, former spouse, cohabitant, former cohabitant, or person with whom the suspect has had a child or is having or has had a dating or engagement relationship" (§ 18291(a)). According to Fusco (2013), CPS social workers reported that anywhere from 25-70% of families referred to their agencies for child abuse or neglect are also impacted by IPV. However, Casanueva and colleagues (2014) found that CPS social workers under-identified IPV in 70% families in which the mother reported experiencing IPV in the last year. As such, prevalence of IPV in families reported to CPS agencies could be even higher.

## Depth of the Problem

### Impact of IPV on Children

The impact that being exposed to or witnessing IPV has on children is well researched. Studies have shown that children who are exposed to violence are more likely to struggle with substance misuse and dependence and suicide (Payne & Gainey, 2015). They are also more likely to run away, be sexually assaulted, become pregnant, and be involved in "prostitution". Exposure to violence can also impact children's psychological and brain development, including lower cognitive and verbal abilities, which can also

lead to problems in school (Payne & Gainey, 2015; Shireman, 2015). Increased odds of displaying low self-esteem, less empathy, and lower social competence are also of concern for children (Shireman, 2015). Witnessing violence is also considered an adverse childhood experience (ACE), which, in combinations with other ACEs, has been proven to have numerous lasting effects on children as they enter adulthood, such as chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance dependence (Anda et al., 2006).

Another area of concern is the intergenerational transmission of IPV. Social learning theorists assert that individuals are not born with the ability to be violent, rather they learn to be through their experiences (Siegel, 2013). Social learning theory was first postulated to explain criminality; however, it has since been used to explain victimization as well, especially regarding IPV (Daigle, 2013). Children who are exposed to IPV learn to be violent by witnessing, most often, their father being violent towards their mother and the various responses (by their mother, society, etc.) to the violence. Theorists maintain that violence is learned through differential association and behavior modeling. Differential association is characterized as spending time with or being exposed to those who exhibit criminal behaviors (e.g., abusive parents) (Daigle, 2013). Not only do children learn these behaviors, but they also learn whether they are acceptable in society. An integral principle of behavior theory is that individuals will change their behavior based on other's responses to it (Siegel, 2013). Because behavior can be influenced, the likelihood of a behavior persisting depends on the level of reward and punishment associated with it. If a child observes positive responses to violence, it is likely that the behavior will be reinforced. If a child observes negative consequences to violence, it is likely that the behavior will be discouraged (Payne & Gainey, 2015).

It has been documented that children who are exposed to IPV are more likely to experience violence and abuse in their own relationships (Vargas et al., 2005; Shireman, 2015; Payne & Gainey, 2015). Children exposed to IPV have a higher likelihood of

exhibiting internalizing behavior and externalizing behavior (Shireman, 2015). Internalized behaviors have been linked to anxiety and depression and increases the risk of being victimized. Externalized behaviors have linked to aggression and delinquency and increases the probability of criminality. Female children exposed to violence are more likely to experience internalized behaviors, while male children are more likely to experience externalized behaviors (Payne & Gainey, 2015). Male children who witness their mother being abused are ten times more likely to abuse their female intimate partners (Vargas et al., 2005).

## Theoretical Foundation

This study was situated in ecological systems theory to understand how varying systems influence individual social workers' collaborative relationship with victim service agencies.

### Definition and Development of the Theory

Ecological systems theory was first developed, for the field of psychology, in 1979 by Urie Bronfenbrenner as a framework for understanding individuals in the context of their communities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The theory posits that individuals interact with and are influenced by their communities, which are organized into five systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystem refers to individuals' immediate environment, while the mesosystem is concerned with interactions between environmental components. The exosystem considers the indirect impact of social systems on individuals and the macrosystem takes that a step further by considering the influence that cultural norms and values have on individuals. The chronosystem captures how these influences change over an individual's life course.

**Use of the Theory in Social Work**

In social work, ecological systems theory allows practitioners to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the interactions between individuals and their environmental systems (Hepworth et al., 2017). This emphasis began with the acceptance of Freudian theories in the 1920-30s and continued through the 1960-70s with the emergence of theories that asserted the importance of environmental factors. Additionally, conceptually, the theory aligns with the person-in-environment ideas that influenced social work practice through the 1970s (Hepworth et al., 2017). In practice, systems theory also provides social workers with a means to integrate individual interventions with interventions that incorporate the individual's systems (Payne, 2016).

**Application of the Theory to Current Study**

While ecological systems theory is frequently used in social work practice, it is most often applied to understand clients that social work agencies serve (Payne, 2016). However, in this study, the theory was applied to CPS social workers, who were participants, to understand their experiences in the context of the systems that influence their practice. This study examined the experiences of Fresno County CPS social workers (microsystem) and their interactions with victim services staff (mesosystem), which is influenced by Fresno County CPS' and victim service agencies' policies and procedures (exosystem). The context of this study is Fresno County, California, a macrosystem. The researcher also examined the changing perspectives on IPV and the evolution of CPS involvement with families impacted by IPV (chronosystem). From this theoretical perspective, the findings of this study could influence individual social work practice (microsystem), improve social worker and victim service staff collaboration (mesosystem), inform Fresno County CPS policy on interagency collaboration

(exosystem), improve outcomes for families in Fresno County (macrosystem), and create lasting positive change (chronosystem).

## Literature Review

### CPS Involvement in IPV Cases

IPV is of concern to CPS agencies for several reasons. First, many states, including California, address exposure to IPV in their statutes (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021), which determine that response and intervention to referrals that involve IPV are required. Additionally, IPV cooccurs in many families reported to CPS agencies for child abuse and neglect. A recent study suggests that physical child abuse occurs in 25 to 70% of families that are also experiencing IPV (Fusco, 2013). Finally, witnessing IPV can have lasting negative impacts on children (Anda et al., 2006; Payne & Gainey, 2015; Shireman, 2015).

Despite this well-documented overlap in victimization, barriers to interagency collaboration among child welfare agencies and IPV service providers still exist. Collaboration in cases involving cooccurring child abuse or neglect and IPV is important as CPS agencies cannot comprehensively address the varied and complex needs of the families they work with (NCJFCJ, 1999). These barriers are well documented (Banks et al., 2009; Findlater & Kelly, 1999; Fusco, 2013; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018, 2019; NCJFCJ, 1999) and facilitative factors to collaboration have been tested and explored over the years (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2019).

### Barriers to Collaboration

Historically, CPS agencies did not address IPV while handling referrals for child abuse and neglect and IPV victim advocates did not consider child safety when working with adult victims of IPV (Findlater & Kelly, 1999). The interaction between these two

entities has been tense. The tension was the result of difference of opinion in who the victim is (the child who witnessed the IPV or the adult, direct victim of IPV), as well as differences in the respective missions of each movement. CPS agencies did not identify victim advocates as essential to ensuring child safety as advocates primarily focused on the needs of the adult victim. Similarly, victim advocates did not find CPS workers helpful as they frequently overlooked IPV and the needs of the victims, and often participated in victim blaming. These incongruities caused mistrust on both ends (Findlater & Kelly, 1999). However, the development of family preservation and support services encouraged CPS agencies to consider the whole family when working to create safety for children (Findlater & Kelly, 1999). This began the understanding of a common goal of safety for all family members.

Understanding the importance of working together and the need to overcome these difficulties, strategies to foster collaboration began to emerge. Findlater & Kelly (1999) identified supportive leadership, trust and understanding across systems via training, establishment of common goals, and willingness to change as crucial to overcoming obstacles to successful partnerships. In the 1980s, coordinated community responses were developed to address differing attitudes on the cause of IPV and unsuccessful responses to IPV (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2019). Beginning in 1994, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provided funding to state and local communities to support collaboration; much of the funding was used to provide cross training (Findlater & Kelly, 1999). Additional efforts were made by the NCJFCJ, which also sponsored initiatives to foster collaborative efforts through policy and practice change (1999). NCJFCJ's efforts are commonly referred to as the Greenbook Initiative. This initiative found that an increase in collaborative efforts did lead to a change in CPS policies and practices; however, the changes varied by site and were dependent on the approach used in each community (Banks et al., 2009).

Although the need for collaboration has been recognized for decades (Banks et al., 2009; Findlater & Kelly, 1999; Fusco, 2013; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018, 2019; NCJFCJ, 1999), recent research indicates that barriers still exist and further research and recommendations are needed (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018). In their research with child welfare workers in Florida, Langenderfer-Magruder and colleagues (2018) found that the most frequently encountered challenges were communication, the complexity of IPV cases, participation in collaborative efforts, and competence. The reported communication-related barriers pertained to the content, frequency, and timeliness of information sharing, as well as confidentiality policies. Next, differing viewpoints and approaches created complexities for social workers, especially regarding advocacy and safety planning. The remaining two barriers were less frequently experienced by social workers but were characterized by a lack of buy-in for collaborative efforts and a lack of knowledge regarding working with those experiencing IPV.

**Ongoing and Emerging Suggestions**

In recent decades, various solutions to increasing collaborative mechanisms have been proposed. Several studies have suggested cross training for both CPS and victim services staff (Findlater & Kelly, 1999; NCJFCJ, 1999; Langenderfer-Magruder, 2018). However, a 2011 study on effectiveness of cross-training found that CPS workers' attitudes towards collaborating improved in relation to law enforcement and court personnel, while attitudes towards collaboration with victim service agencies decreased, post-training (Haas et al., 2011). Despite these findings, cross training is a recommendation that has continued to be made in recent studies (Fusco, 2013; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018). These researchers assert that cross-training has the potential to address several barriers to collaboration by helping CPS and victim service

staff understand each other's roles, policies, and priorities that influence their practice and may contribute to issues.

Another recurring suggestion is colocation of CPS and victim services staff. This was examined in the 1990s in Massachusetts and Oregon. Researchers found that it helped maintain the goal of addressing IPV in the CPS system and bridged the CPS and victim advocacy systems (Findlater & Kelly). The recommendation for colocation has been renewed by Langenderfer-Magruder and colleagues (2018) to promote partnerships and institutional empathy. However, this recommendation was made along with an acknowledgement that additional efforts are needed to smooth out collaborative relationships between CPS and victim service agencies. They suggest that co-decision-making, a balance of power, and an exchange of ideas are also needed to create collaborative partnerships.

An emerging recommendation is made by Langenderfer-Magruder and colleagues (2019), who have presented a conceptual model for collaboration to increase institutional empathy. In their research, with newly hired child welfare workers in Florida, they examined workers' perceptions of facilitative factors to collaborating with other professionals in IPV cases and identified four themes – communication, rapport, appreciation for teamwork, and consistent understanding of case processes. These themes build on each other to create a framework to successful collaboration by addressing many of the commonly cited barriers to partnership. The first step in their model is consistent communication, which leads to rapport building, which fosters appreciation for collaboration, all of which ultimately lead to an understanding of case processes. However, this framework, which Langenderfer-Magruder and colleagues (2019) call the RISE model, had not been tested at the time of this study.

**Gaps in Literature**

Although the literature on collaboration among CPS agencies and victim service providers dates back several decades, there are gaps. For example, recent studies have only interviewed newly hired CPS workers (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2019) and have excluded non-case carrying CPS staff, which includes supervisors (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2019). These studies failed to obtain input from experienced CPS workers as well as those in leadership positions, who could have vastly different perspectives, given their experience and roles. Despite this, many of the interventions proposed are top-down, as Langenderfer-Magruder et al. (2019) notes. More research is needed on ways in which line staff can promote collaborative efforts. Finally, the recent literature does not examine within group differences among CPS worker's responses (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2018; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2019). Considering the CPS workers assigned units (emergency response, voluntary family maintenance, family maintenance, etc.) could yield insightful differences in experiences and efforts made towards collaboration.

**Rationale for the Study**

This study seeks to continue adding to the extant literature regarding best practices for collaboration among CPS agencies and IPV victim service providers. It also aims to fill gaps in the existing by gathering input from experienced CPS social workers, in both ground-level and management positions, from multiple classifications (also known as job title), and by exploring possible differences in experiences and perspectives on collaboration based on the CPS social worker's assigned unit. CPS social workers' assigned unit is directly tied to their agency's level of involvement with families and could, theoretically, impact the amount or ways in which they collaborate with victim service providers. The study also seeks to identify and present suggestions for bottom-up approaches to collaboration. Finally, this study hopes to provide best practice suggestions

to Fresno County, specifically, as it is plagued by high levels of IPV (Vasconcelos, 2022).

## Summary

A review of the literature demonstrated the need for additional research related to CPS and victim service collaboration. Although the need to increase collaboration has been recognized, the efforts that have been made have not been enough to smooth out tensions between the agencies and overcome several consistently identified barriers. This study seeks to understand the Fresno County CPS social workers' experiences collaborating with victim service agencies on referrals that involve intimate partner violence. In doing so, the researcher aims to address several gaps in the literature by interviewing case-carrying social workers, with several years of experience, and from varying classifications and units.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

To answer the research question, the researcher conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with Fresno County CPS social workers, from a constructivist worldview. Initial participants were recruited via purposive sampling, while the remaining participants were recruited via snowball sampling. Participants were required to be current employees of Fresno County CPS. To fill gaps in the literature, the researcher attempted to recruit participants who had several years of experience in CPS, who were employed under varying classifications (ground-level and supervisory/management), and who were assigned to varying units. Once participants were recruited and agreed to participate in the study, the interviews, aided by an interview guide, were conducted individually, virtually, and were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Demographic information was then obtained via a Google Forms survey. Thematic analysis was drawn upon to identify themes among participants' responses. Risks to participants were managed by several means. Several strategies were utilized to assess rigor in the study, including reflexivity.

**Design & Rationale**

This study was conducted from a constructivist worldview, a qualitative research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Constructivism asserts that individuals aim to understand the world and do so by giving meaning to their experiences; these meanings are influenced by an individuals' social interactions and historical and cultural environments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because these meanings are subjective, they are often complex and varied, leading researchers to rely heavily on participants' experiences to understand what is being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research design encourages the use of broad, general, open-ended questions to allow participants to share their experiences and meanings related to what is being studied

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study sought to examine the experiences of Fresno County CPS social workers who have collaborated with victim service agencies on referrals that involved IPV. The constructivist, qualitative approach allowed the researcher to provide participants the space and opportunity to share and explain their experiences.

In line with the constructivist, qualitative methodology to research (Braun & Clarke, 2006), this study drew upon Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a means for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher was able to understand, organize, and present Fresno County CPS social workers' experiences related to collaborating with victim services providers in a systematic way due to the selection of thematic analysis as the data analysis method. As a constructivist method, thematic analysis also allowed the researcher to consider the ways in which participants' experiences may be impacted by societal discourses on IPV (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Research Question

The question that guided the current study was: What are the experiences of Fresno County CPS social workers, who have worked with families impacted by IPV, in collaborating with IPV victim service providers?

## Setting

The participants in this study were current employees of Fresno County CPS. Fresno County, located in California's central valley, is home to approximately 1,012,000 individuals, 28.2% of which are children (U.S. Census Bureau). According to Webster et al. (2022), 279,298 children resided in Fresno County in 2021 and allegations of child abuse or neglect were made regarding 19,048 of these children, a prevalence rate 68.2 of per 1,000 children. In contrast to the state average of 44.6 per 1,000 children, Fresno

County receives a high volume of child maltreatment reports (Webster et al., 2022). Of those reported to Fresno County CPS in 2021, the agency conducted investigations at a rate of 55.4 children per 1,000. The state average for referral investigation is 33.2 per 1,000 children (Webster et al., 2022). In addition to receiving an above average number of reports, Fresno County CPS initiates a higher number of investigations.

To support families impacted by child maltreatment, Fresno County's Department of Social Services (DSS) employs approximately 300 social workers, who investigate and respond to allegations of child abuse and neglect (V. Gutierrez, personal communication, March 21, 2023). These CPS social workers are assigned to specific "units" that provide specialized services to families in response to varying levels of agency involvement. These units include emergency response, voluntary family maintenance, family reunification, resource family approval, court services, permanency planning living arrangement, adoptions/assessments, and independent living plan (V. Gutierrez, personal communication, March 21, 2023).

## Participants

A total of 11 participants were interviewed. Eight of the 11 participants were also current college students. The classification of the 11 participants ranged from Social Worker I (1 participant), Social Worker II (1 participant), Social Worker III (6 participants), Social Work Practitioner (1 participant), Social Work Supervisor (1 participant), and Social Services Program Manager (1 participant). The participants had anywhere from six months to 23 years of experience in CPS; however, most participants had been employed by Fresno County CPS for three years or longer. The participants were assigned to various units, such as emergency response, voluntary family maintenance, family reunification, court services, resource family approval, and meeting

facilitation, at the time of their interviews. However, most participants had prior experience in other units.

## Sampling Approach

The researcher aimed to interview 10-12 participants for this study and recruited participants via purposive and snowball sampling. The first five participants were recruited via purposive sampling as they were known to the researcher to meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Upon completion of their participation in the study, these five participants were asked if they were aware of any other current Fresno County CPS employees who would be interested and available to participate in the study. One participant identified five potential participants and provided the researcher with their names.

The researcher attempted to recruit these five individuals as participants via email. Of the five individuals who were contacted, two responded and agreed to participate in this study. One individual responded, stating they were unsure if their interview would be helpful to the researcher, but would consider and discuss it with the researcher; however, this individual did not respond to the researcher's offer to meet and discuss the study. The same participant who identified these five individuals provided the researcher with the names and contact information of three additional Fresno County CPS social workers who were willing to participate in this study.

One final participant was recruited by the researcher via purposive sampling as the researcher knew the individual, professionally, prior to the study, and knew they met the study's inclusion and exclusion criteria.

## Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To provide recommendations to Fresno County CPS on how to improve collaboration with victim service agencies, only Fresno County CPS social workers were

recruited. The researcher did not seek participation from social workers employed in other counties. Additionally, to understand the current collaborative efforts of Fresno County CPS, the researcher recruited only current Fresno County CPS employees and excluded past employees.

To address gaps in the literature, the researcher attempted to recruit participants who met certain criteria. The researcher attempted to recruit CPS social workers with several years of experience. Additionally, the researcher also attempted to recruit CPS social workers from different classifications (Social Worker, Social Work Practitioner, Social Work Supervisor, and Social Service Program Manager). Finally, the researcher attempted to recruit CPS social workers from various units (emergency response, voluntary family maintenance, and family reunification). However, prior to participation in the study, the participants were not asked how long they had worked for Fresno County CPS, what their classification was, or which unit they were assigned to.

## Data Collection

### Collection Procedures

The participants were contacted via email or text message, at their preference, to schedule their virtual interview. Once their interview was scheduled, participants were emailed the informed consent form (see Appendix A) and asked to review it. Prior to the interview, participants were also emailed a link, meeting ID, and password for a virtual meeting via Zoom, an online communication platform. To ensure confidentiality in the interview, the researcher provided participants with the meeting invitation and password, which were required to join.

All participant interviews were conducted individually and virtually in February 2023. Each interview was video and audio recorded, and transcripts were auto-generated by Zoom. The transcripts were later reviewed to ensure accuracy. Semi-structured

interviews were conducted primarily using open-ended questions from an interview guide (see Appendix B). However, the researcher asked clarifying and follow-up questions, as needed, throughout each interview. Participants were asked to recall their experiences collaborating with victim service agencies on referrals that involved IPV. The participant interviews lasted from approximately 16 to 38 minutes, with an average interview duration of approximately 22 minutes.

As an added layer of confidentiality, participants were asked for their demographic information separate from the recorded interview. Participants were emailed a link to Google Forms, an online survey instrument, to provide demographic data (see Appendix C). All surveys requesting demographic information were completed by participants in March 2023.

**Interview Guide**

The researcher utilized an interview guide during each of the participant interviews. Through open-ended questions, participants were asked to reflect on and share their experiences working on referrals that involved IPV. The participants were asked to reflect on the following: 1) their experience working with families referred to their agency, who were impacted by IPV; 2) if they had ever collaborated with victim services agencies on these referrals, and if so, with which agencies and what that was like; 3) what about the collaboration went well, if there were any barriers, and what, if anything, could be improved; 4) if they felt supported by their supervisor or the agency in making efforts to collaborate with IPV victim service agencies; and 5) if they felt that the ways in which or the amount that the collaborating with victim services was tied to their unit. In closing, participants were asked for their insight on ways to enhance their agency's current collaborative efforts. As the interviews were semi-structured, the

researcher also asked clarifying questions and follow up questions, which were not part of the interview guide.

**Survey**

The researcher also utilized a Google Forms survey to gather demographic information of the participants. The participants were asked for their gender, race, and age. All survey questions allowed "short answer" responses, so participants were able to provide unique answers they felt most accurately described them. This demographic information was collected separately from the interviews to provide participants with additional confidentiality as their potential identifying information would not be connected to their interview. However, some demographic questions were asked during the interview, such as how long the participants had worked for CPS, their current classification, what unit they were currently assigned to, and what other units they had previously been assigned to.

**Informed Consent**

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher asked each participant to confirm that they received the informed consent form which was emailed to them. All participants confirmed having received and reviewed the informed consent form. Each participant was also asked if they understood the consent form and if they had any questions or concerns. All participants indicated that they understood the information provided on the form and did not have any questions or concerns. The researcher asked each participant for their verbal consent to participate in the study. All participants provided their verbal consent, which was audio recorded.

**Data Analysis**

The formal data analysis was conducted after data collection concluded; however, because the researcher collected the data themself, they began data analysis with initial analytic interests and continued to develop and define the codes and themes throughout the entire analytical process. The researcher took a theoretical approach to thematic analysis, allowing the overall research question to guide coding, and provided detailed accounts of specific themes at the latent level. This study was guided by Braun and Clark's (2006) six-phase process to thematic analysis. The researcher's first step in the analysis of the data was familiarizing themself with the data by reviewing each participant interview transcript and engaging in active reading through the entire data set, noting initial ideas to be revisited in subsequent phases. Second, the researcher generated initial codes by identifying patterns in participant responses, noting inconsistencies within and across the data. This was done with the research question in mind, coding around it, and at the latent level, interpreting some underlying meanings in participant responses. Third, the researcher organized the initial codes into potential overarching themes by reviewing all initial codes and mapping them. Fourth, the researcher reviewed the themes, ensuring that the codes under each theme were meaningfully coherent and that there were detectable distinctions between themes. Fifth, the researcher refined and named the themes for presentation of the overall data analysis. This included identifying the significance of each theme and what element of the data each demonstrated. Finally, the researcher prepared the themes for presentation, which is in the succeeding chapter, under "Themes". The thematic analysis report incorporated excerpts from participant interviews that illustrated the presented themes and provided an argument related to the research question, which is presented in the Discussion chapter.

**Management of Risk**

The researcher completed a Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher training course from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative to prepare for the execution of this study (see Appendix D). The researcher obtained approval from the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at CSU Fresno for this research on November 9, 2022. The Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects identified this study as posing minimal risk to participants. Participants were not at any greater risk of harm than they are in their daily lives. Additionally, participants were not members of a vulnerable population in the context of the study. Participants' decision whether to participate in this study did not impact their relationship with CSU Fresno, the institution that approved the research.

Participation in the study was voluntary and no deception of participants was present. Through the informed consent form, participants were made aware of the risk level associated with their participation, the lack of direct benefits related to their participation, their ability to withdraw from the study at any time, and that their information would be kept confidential. Participants were also informed of their ability to decline to answer any of the demographic questions they did not wish to answer.

All email, phone, and text communications regarding the interview and survey were deleted upon participants' completion of both. For the duration of the study, the interview recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected computer that only the researcher had access to. All interview recordings and transcriptions and survey responses will be deleted upon conclusion of this study. Participants' names and potentially identifying information were not listed in the presentation of the study's themes, including in the use of direct quotes from participants.

**Rigor**

To ensure the quality of this study, the researcher adopted several strategies for enhancing credibility. First, the researcher demonstrated credibility through the presentation of a clear rationale for the research design and a description of the context of the study. Next, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing with the study's principal investigator, thoroughly discussing the codes and themes presented, to ensure they were in line with the data. The researcher also conducted an audit trail of the research process. Although member checking was not utilized in this study, the researcher did check for understanding and provide opportunities for clarification during participant interviews. Additionally, to ensure validity of the data collected, participant interviews were recorded, and the auto-generated transcripts were reviewed for accuracy. Finally, to ensure that biases were not imposed on the analysis and presentation of the data, the researcher engaged in ongoing reflexivity. Rather than attempting to obtain objective distance from the data, reflexivity seeks to recognize and value the researcher's participation in influencing the data and analysis (Angen, 2000).

**Reflexivity**

The researcher became interested in the topic of this study as an employee of the Fresno County Probation Department's Crime Victim Assistance Center, which provides services to victims and witnesses of crime. The researcher has been employed by this agency for six years and has primarily worked in roles that support victims of IPV, including children. Through this employment, the researcher witnessed, first-hand, the disconnect between CPS and victim services agencies, and recognized the potential to bridge this gap to better support families impacted by IPV. The researcher also interned at a CPS agency, in emergency response, and has had the opportunity to examine the disconnect between these two entities from a child welfare perspective. Fueled by a passion for service and desire to implement best practices, the researcher saw an

opportunity to examine Fresno County's collaborative efforts and provide recommendations for improving service to families experiencing IPV. This study was completed as the researcher's culminating experience for CSU Fresno's Master of Social Work program.

While the researcher recognizes the value of their closeness to the research, to minimize bias, the researcher engaged in ongoing self-reflection about how their prior experiences and assumptions related to the topic had the potential to influence the presentation of the data. This was mitigated by engaging in peer debriefing, as mentioned above.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

Guided by the constructivist worldview, the researcher conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with 11 current Fresno County CPS employees to answer the study's research question. The participants were recruited via purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Most participants had worked for several years of experience in CPS, were assigned to varying units, and were employed under varying classifications. The individual interviews were conducted via Zoom, with the assistance of an interview guide, and were recorded and transcribed. Demographic information was collected apart from the interview via a Google Forms survey. Data analysis was guided by Braun and Clark's (2006) approach to thematic analysis. Risks to participants were managed by abiding by established ethical research standards. Rigor was assessed by establishing credibility of the study, engaging in peer debriefing, and researcher reflexivity.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

To answer the study's research question, the researcher interviewed 11 current Fresno County CPS social workers, examining their experiences collaborating with victim service agencies on referrals that involved IPV. Participants' demographic information was collected through a Google Forms survey and is presented in the first section of this chapter. Professional characteristics of participants were collected during their interviews and are also presented in the next section. To analyze the data gathered from participant interviews, the researcher drew upon Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis and identified three overarching themes among participants' responses. The identified themes were collaboration varies, positive relationship with one agency, and barriers to collaboration exist. These themes illustrate the experiences of Fresno County CPS social workers and are presented in detail below.

**Demographics**

Demographic information was collected from participants via Google Forms survey. The survey asked participants for their gender, race, and age, allowing short-answer responses. Eight participants identified as female, and three participants identified as male. Three participants identified as White, seven identified as "Hispanic" (including one who replied Latina/Hispanic, and one who replied Mexican), and one identified as biracial. Two participants were between the ages 20-29, three participants were between the ages 30-39, four participants were between the ages 40-49, and two participants were between the ages 50-59. The average age of participants was 40.82, with a median age of 40.

Participants were asked their classification, how long they had worked for Fresno County CPS, and what unit they were assigned to at the time of their interview. One participant was a Social Worker I. One participant was a Social Worker II. Six

participants were Social Worker IIIs. One participant was a Social Work Practitioner. One participant was a Social Work Supervisor. One participant was a Social Services Program Manager. One participant had worked for less than 1 year. Four participants had worked for 5 years or less, but more than 1 year. Three participants had worked for more than 5 years, but less than 10. One participant had worked for more than 15 years, but less than 20. Two participants had worked more than 20 years, but less than 25. The average number of years participants had been employed by Fresno County CPS was 9.4 years, with a median number of years employed of 8. One participant was assigned to Emergency Response. Five participants were assigned to Voluntary Family Maintenance. Three participants were assigned to Family Reunification, one of which also oversaw court services. One participant was assigned to Resource Family Approval. One participant's primary assignment was to facilitate meetings for the agency. However, 9 out of 11 participants also had experience in more than one unit, so some participants drew from their experiences in previously assigned units.

## Context for the Presentation of Results

To provide a backdrop for the presentation of the data, some context regarding the relationship between Fresno County CPS and service agencies is provided. This information was gathered from participants' interviews and from the researcher's personal communication with a current Fresno County CPS employee. Parents' who have been referred to CPS for suspected child abuse or neglect are referred to contracted service providers to have an assessment, called Domestic Violence Inventory, completed. This assessment examines multiple forms of domestic violence, including IPV and child abuse. The purpose of this assessment is to connect parents to services that could ostensibly help them identify and overcome issues that have led them to be referred to CPS (C. Torres, personal communication, March 21, 2023).

Fresno County CPS' contracts with several providers who complete the Domestic Violence Inventory assessment; these agencies are: Marjaree Mason Center, Family Behavioral Interventions, and Comprehensive Counseling Services (C. Torres, personal communication, March 21, 2023). However, the results of this assessment can lead these agencies to recommend that a parent participate in a variety of services, not just services that are directly related to IPV. Some of the recommended services can include anger management, batterer's intervention, child abuse intervention, mental health counseling, sex offender programs, substance dependence services, as well as other services. Fresno County CPS also contracts with other agencies to provide these services to families; these agencies include Centro La Familia, Exceptional Parenting Unlimited, North Star Wellness, Universal Health, and several others (C. Torres, personal communication, March 21, 2023). Of these agencies, MMC and Centro La Familia are the only agencies that typically provide services to victims of IPV outside of their contact with CPS, while the other agencies' services are not specific to crime victims.

## Themes

The researcher aimed to answer the research question: What are the experiences of Fresno County CPS social workers, who have worked with families impacted by IPV, in collaborating with IPV victim service providers? Upon completion of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis, the researcher identified three overarching themes across participant responses, some of which have their own subthemes. The first theme identified is that collaboration varies. The second theme is that Fresno County CPS has a positive collaborative relationship with one agency. The third theme is that barriers to collaboration between Fresno County CPS and victim services agencies exist.

**Collaboration Varies**

This theme has several subcategories that reinforce the overarching theme, including that collaboration varies due to differing definitions of collaboration, and that it's dependent on the parents' willingness to engage in services and the agency's level of involvement with the family, which translated to the participants assigned unit, in this study.

*Differing Definitions of Collaboration*

Although all participants shared their experiences collaborating with victim service agencies, there was variation in what "collaboration" meant to participants. Some participants described collaboration as referring parents to service providers, who then provide their agency with updates on the status of those parents' services. This definition of collaboration seemed to stem from the underlying value of receiving information from agencies. Other participants described collaboration as "working hand-in-hand" or as a partnership with service providers.

Of the participants who classified collaboration as information sharing, one social worker said:

> And so, they were really good to be able to come to the table and share what they can do for the victim, and just the services that they provide. And so those collaborative efforts are really good. And like, I said, when we do get the parent to authorize us to speak to them, they're able to provide a lot of really good information of how they're gonna be able to be protective. I've had a parent who, I was getting very close to having to law enforcement to have the children removed because of some pretty bad domestic violence, but she told me that Marjaree Mason Center was involved, and so she called them and allowed them to speak to me, and it kind of reduced the risk factor when I was out there, knowing how much they were involved. So, and then, I didn't call law enforcement at that point.

The quote illustrates the experiences of the group of participants that felt that receiving information from service providers equates to collaboration. This information is valuable to social workers because it allows them to make a more accurate and complete assessment of parents, which influences the agency's options for intervening with families. In these instances, service providers are agencies that receive referrals from CPS and provide updates on parents, rather than partners in serving families impacted by IPV.

In contrast, some participants described interactions with service providers as information sharing, mutual understanding of agency roles, uniform goals, and co-case planning. One participant described this in their account of collaborating with service providers:

> I think just the communication itself. Them checking in with me how she was doing. Me checking in with them, how she was doing over there. Inviting them to our meetings, as well, so they knew what it was that CPS was looking for, in terms of her reunifying with her children. What some of, you know, the reported needs that she was saying to us, like, what can we do to brainstorm together to help this family?

Not only did this group of participants highlight the value of receiving information, but also recognized the opportunity to and importance of working together. These participants felt that understanding each other's roles in helping families contributed to their ability to collaborate. Additionally, they felt that doing so helped them establish mutual goals to support families, which led to co-case planning. Co-case planning was characterized by sharing information on what services each agency could provide, their role with the family, and their goals for the family.

***Depends on Parents***

In addition to the definition of collaboration varying, participants shared that collaboration depends on parents' ability to understand the agency's concerns related to IPV and their willingness to engage in services. Of the participants who felt that collaboration depends on parents, one said:

> …it depended on the client themselves. It never got that far because, unfortunately, my other domestic violence cases, they left the shelter. So, there wasn't that capability to case manage or come together to the extent like that one client I'm specifically talking about. I know, when they were first there we would make communication—me and the counselor. Yes, here these are the services, release of information, things like that. Yes, she has the open, you know, CPS case. Things like that. These are the goals. But we never accomplished that, or even got to that point, because that person would leave and more than likely go back to the perpetrator.

In this instance, the participant is explaining that they were unable to collaborate with the service provider like that had with other clients because this parent did not follow through with receiving intensive services from the provider. Another participant echoed this in their interview:

> But most of the clients that I personally have had are still very in denial about that aspect of their relationship, or like what has happened with their families…

These social workers feel that collaborative efforts can be determined by parents' willingness and readiness to acknowledge that their relationship is abusive and that it may be impacting their children. When parents are not ready to do so, social workers have found themselves unable to collaborate with victim service agencies as these agencies are not working with the parents either.

*Depends on CPS' Level of Involvement with Families*

Eight of the 11 participants felt like that the way in which and the number of collaborative efforts they made depended on the unit they were assigned to. For context, a social worker's unit translates to the agency's level of involvement with the family. Participants illustrated the stark contrasts in collaborating when a parent is initially being investigated for child abuse and neglect (emergency response unit) and when allegations have been corroborated and the agency is further involved with families (voluntary family maintenance and family reunification units). One participant said:

> …like I said, in emergency response, everything is so quick…it's definitely more challenging to collaborate in emergency response than on ongoing case management, because with ongoing case management, we've already found safety for the kids and the family. So, it's really about just working with the family and, and the agencies at that point.

Another participant's experience further demonstrates this:

> …When it's voluntary, when the parents are voluntarily going into it, I think there's no interaction. So, I think it kind of falls on them to address whatever their concerns or whatever their issues are with the service providers. But if it's court ordered, I feel like there is more of a collaborative process.

These differing experiences articulate participants' beliefs regarding the collaborative efforts they make based on the agency's level of involvement with families. Social workers in the emergency response unit felt that there was not enough time to make meaningful collaborative efforts with providers. Social workers that have on-going involvement with families, such as those in voluntary family maintenance and family reunification, felt that they had more time and opportunities to collaborate with victim service agencies.

**Positive Relationship with One Agency**

When asked about their experiences collaborating with victim service agencies, all 11 participants talked about Marjaree Mason Center (MMC). Many participants characterized Fresno County CPS' relationship with MMC as positive. MMC (n.d.) is the only dedicated IPV victim service provider and shelter in Fresno County. MMC (n.d.) provides safe housing, legal advocacy, mental health counseling, crisis support, and education and training to those impacted by IPV. In their work with Fresno County CPS, MMC is a contracted service provider that conducts Domestic Violence Inventory assessments on parents involved with CPS who have a history of IPV. MMC then provides court-mandated services, such as parenting and batterer's intervention, to some of these parents (V. Gutierrez, personal communication, March 21, 2023).

In addition to recognizing MMC as a valuable service provider, participants classified CPS' relationship with MMC as positive for two reasons: 1) the services MMC provides families can mitigate some of the risks associated with IPV; 2) MMC's involvement elevates some of the barriers to parent engagement. As a result of their services and the information MMC staff shares about the parents' involvement and progress in those services, CPS can utilize less restrictive interventions. One participant demonstrated this by saying:

> I've seen—there's times when we can, you know, stay, refrained from, you know, filing to remove the kids and offer less restrictive, you know, assistance because parents have been connected, and they've been able to get into the shelter and get connected with like safe resources to prevent us from having to step in and make a plan on our own. So, it definitely opens the, it opens the conversation up to less restrictive plans.

Another participant echoed this in saying:

But mom, before the meeting, she had already made the calls and everything to get herself services from Marjaree Mason. So, I think, one of the positive things about that is that we… if we don't have to be involved and cause any removals for the kids or any trauma for the kids, I think it's very positive that Marjaree Mason is able to provide resources and we don't have to get involved. And it's just positive. I think to cause less trauma for, even the parents 'cause we always talk about how removing kids is trauma for both the kids and the parents. And that way we're able to say, "Okay, well, they're getting services Marjaree Mason." We confirm everything. And I know we kind of require documentation if we do get involved. And if the parents are, or mom and the kids are going and getting these services, and we're made aware of that, then we don't have to be too involved, which I think can be positive.

The participants shared that a victimized parent's involvement with MMC allows them to consider different, less invasive, and restrictive levels of intervention and involvement with families. Social workers can present this as a mitigating risk factor, which demonstrates protective capacity on the part of the victimized parent, to the agency or court, who determine the level of involvement the agency will have with the family.

Another participant shared that MMC's involvement is instrumental in helping parents understand CPS' concerns and that parents are typically more open to hearing concerns from other agencies. Having the involvement of an agency that parents trusted gave CPS credibility to families as a helping agency. Of this, she said:

I think that they're able to help the parents understand why we're concerned about domestic violence. I think a lot of times parents… Well, Marjaree Mason Center and, you know, agencies like that, they can be a buffer for us, because a lot of times parents think that we're just there to take their kids and that we don't want to see them be a family. But having an outside agency that's not, you know,

affiliated with us, and is not involved in, you know, making decisions for the safety of the kids, it helps parents, like, really take what they're saying seriously rather than just us saying, "we have this concern." They—just it seems like they have this idea in their head that we're not being genuine about our concern, that we just have intentions to remove their kids. So, definitely a buffer. It can make a difference, you know, in making case decisions because it helps the parents gain insight.

Another participant explained that it can be difficult to engage with families, help them understand their concerns, and get parents to be invested in creating a safer environment for their children.

We do our best to engage and show them that, you know, we're on their side, and we really want to help them, and we're part of their team. But that's really hard when you're government.

But, you know, we have the court behind us, and so it's really hard to get the collaboration of families when it's child welfare knocking on your door, you know, versus community services, versus, you know, somebody from the church, you know, someone that they were referred from the doctor. They're more willing, I would say, to take services that way, than from us.

This participant believed that being a government agency, and specifically CPS, can be a barrier to engaging with parents, who may not have a good impression of the agency. When other, more community-based agencies are involved, parents might be more open to working with CPS.

**Barriers to Collaboration Exist**

The final overarching theme is that barriers to collaboration among Fresno County CPS and victim services agencies exist. During the interviews, the researcher did

specifically ask participants if they ever experienced barriers to collaborating; however, most participants discussed barriers when sharing their experiences, prior to the researcher explicitly asking about barriers. The barriers articulated by participants were numbered; however, the most frequently mentioned barriers could be organized into two categories - barriers related to communication and barriers resulting from staff limitations.

### *Communication-Related Barriers*

The barriers related to communication were characterized as either a lack of information sharing or issues stemming from confidentiality policies. The lack of information sharing was described as service providers not providing information that CPS staff identify as crucial to their assessments and creating case plans with families. These accounts differ from communication breakdowns related to confidentiality policies as the participants explained that the lack of information sharing resulted from there not being a standardized process for sharing information, including what information to share, when to share it, and how frequently it needs to be shared. One participant illustrated this in saying:

> Yeah, I know one of the things that they do is they provide us reports. So, we have to reach out sometimes, and say, "Hey, can you give us this report?" Because we have to report to court like, how, like, how many classes have they done? What is?... What are they learning? Things like that. Are they participating in the class? Because a lot of people can just go to class and get a certificate. But what we're really looking at is having those behavior changes.

This was reiterated in another participant statement:

> Sometimes it is difficult to get…I guess, I don't know if it's just the paperwork that they're trying to get to us, because we don't have that direct one on one

contact with the agencies. If we do, it would just be like, "Hey, how's this client doing? How's this parent doing?" But when we do need the reports, it's sometimes, it has to go through one person, then it has to go through another person, and then it finally comes to the worker, so that's sometimes a little bit difficult...

The researcher gathered that the information the social workers need to receive from these agencies is required for various purposes. For example, as the first participant mentioned, they need information about how parents are progressing through service to be able to demonstrate their ability (or lack thereof) to safely care for their children.

Hindrances to communication resulting from confidentiality constraints stem from either CPS or victim service agency policies that prevent the sharing of information. Of this, one participant said:

A lot of times we want to be able to speak to the victim about that and speak to the kids. But, you know, they, a lot of times, will refuse confirming or denying whether they're working with the client, and they keep their address hidden, so it gets very difficult to do our job kind of with that. And we have to really try to find a client on our own and make sure that they sign their ROIs and everything, so that we can talk. And once those ROIs are signed, then we're able to kind of have that free flow of information. But that's the main hindrance.

Another participant echoed this:

And then, as far as like ongoing case management, like VFM, it's—I think, the challenges that exist are just, you know, everybody, every agency has a very strict confidentiality, and sometimes they can be difficult if parents haven't signed a release of information or, you know, they kind of drag their feet on that sometimes. So, that would get in the way. So having, you know, appropriate

release of information is definitely crucial to collaborating, or else, like neither of

us can really share information.

Although confidentiality was a barrier for many participants, they also said that if a

parent signed a release of information (ROI) document, communication issues related to

confidentiality no longer existed.

### *Staff Availability*

Participants also identified staff availability as a huge barrier to collaboration.

Participants expressed that either they, the service providers, or both do not have enough

time to make meaningful connections and collaborate much further than making an initial

referral and quickly sharing brief information. Some participants attributed this to the

faced-paced nature of CPS, while others attributed it to high caseloads. One participant

explained:

I think, specifically, for emergency response, it's time. Time is the big thing,

because everything moves so quickly.

Another participant shared this sentiment:

I think CPS, especially when it's certain types of referral investigations, we're

under a lot of, I guess I don't know, like time limits. So, we have to… At CPS, we

have to identify risk and safety to the child immediately—at times immediately.

So, especially if we need to go out there right away, I think that we're balancing

risk and safety and a victim service agency is looking… I feel like their ideology

is looking at like the victim as whoever's being abused, or whoever law

enforcement has identified as the victim. Whereas we're looking at the children;

the risk and safety of the children, I mean. So, we're looking at ensuring the

protection of children and agencies like victim services are looking at the abused

person, and then the secondary victims are like the children, if they're not

> involved in the actual of the intimate partner violence. So, I think that's something that I guess we struggle with. Just the time constraints or time limits to identify risk and safety to the children.

Both participants were assigned to the emergency response unit, which handles the investigation and assessment of referrals received by CPS. These participants may feel less able to collaborate with agencies than participants assigned to other units.

> Other participants shared that the size of their caseload impacts their ability to connect with service providers.

> So, some of that might be the amount of time that… So the caseloads—you have such big caseloads. Following up and collaborating on what's going on with the client with the service provider, there's not a lot of maybe time to do that.

Another said:

> Time management for everyone. Everyone on both sides of that are always very busy and heavily impacted with cases and so being able to get a hold of someone when you need them.

These participants shared that the size of their caseload is a barrier as they have too many open cases to make collaborative efforts for their families. These participants were assigned to the voluntary family maintenance and family reunification units, which are typically involved with families more long-term.

## Summary

Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis provided the researcher with the tools to identify and present patterns among participants' experiences collaborating with victim services agencies. The researcher identified three overarching themes in the data. First, participants articulated that, in their experience, collaboration depends on the social worker's definition of collaboration, parents' willingness to be

involved with their agency and victim services, and on the agency's level of involvement with families. Next, despite this variance, almost all participants agreed that their collaborative relationship with one agency – MMC – was positive. Finally, participants shared that they've experienced several barriers to effective collaboration with victim service agencies. These barriers were related to communication and staff limitations. In conjunction with the literature previously presented, the researcher utilized these findings to make recommendations. These recommendations are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to explore the experiences of current Fresno County CPS social workers who have collaborated with victim service providers on referrals that involve IPV. The three overarching themes were: collaboration varies, positive relationship with one agency, and barriers to collaboration. Collaboration varying among participants stemmed from differing definitions of collaboration and from parents' willingness to engage in services, as well as the agency's level of involvement with families. CPS' relationship with MMC was characterized as positive because their services mitigate some risks related to IPV and their involvement improves parent engagement. The barriers identified were related to communication and staff limitations. The researcher connected these findings to the existing literature, presented below. This enabled the researchers to make recommendations on how to improve collaboration between Fresno County CPS and victim service agencies. However, this study did have limitations, which, in concert with the findings, influenced the researcher's recommendations for further research.

**Discussion of Major Findings**

This study yielded important findings that can be used to inform practice. Despite their differences in roles, both CPS and victim service agencies strive to address the various and complex needs of adults and children impacted by IPV. These needs could be better addressed through more collaborative partnerships and integrated interventions between CPS and victim service agencies.

**Collaboration Varies**

Participants in this study had different understandings of what it means to collaborate with victim service agencies. Some participants felt that utilizing victim service agencies to meet families' needs and then, obtaining information on the impact of

these services is what collaboration is. On the other hand, a group of participants saw collaboration as an opportunity to work together. These participants talked about understanding each other's roles in serving families, establishing mutual goals for safety, and co-case planning. It should be noted, however, that two of the social workers in this group were employed as a supervisor and a program manager at the time of their interviews. While these individuals may have more experience and insight on collaborative relationships, they are not currently employed in roles that allow them to act on these ideals. The lack of a uniform definition of collaboration creates missed opportunities to have meaningful partnerships with victim service agencies, who specialize in serving victims of crime. Social workers are called to make referrals to other agencies when those agencies' specialized expertise could more effectively address a client's needs (NASW, 2021). Additionally, although almost all participants in this study said they feel supported by their supervisor or the agency in making collaborative efforts, the researcher is not confident in this assertion given the lack of a standard definition and process for collaboration.

Next, participants also felt that their collaborative efforts are impacted by a parents' readiness to acknowledge the abuse occurring in their relationship and to receive assistance. In the greater context of the full interviews, this "resistance" in parents is often displayed as them not making themselves available or not signing a release of information to allow CPS to communicate with service providers. Barriers to engagement are always going to be present and cannot always be eradicated with all individuals or families. Social workers are called to see the dignity and worth of every person by enhancing their capacity to change (NASW, 2021). Despite a clients' readiness to acknowledge the impact their abusive relationship can have on their children, social workers need to make continuous efforts to engage families in the helping process.

The final variation in collaboration pertained to CPS' level of involvement with families. Participants shared that collaboration was more likely in voluntary family maintenance and family reunification units than in the emergency response unit. This was attributed to the time constraints of emergency response, as well as the court ordering parents to complete services in the other two units. Although there are understandable limitations to working with families at the initial stages of involvement (emergency response), the Fresno County DSS (2011) has issued Policy and Procedure Guidelines (PPG) that delineate investigating social workers' responsibilities to families impacted by IPV. PPG 38 informs emergency response social workers of their duty to safety plan with victims and children of IPV and to make appropriate referrals for services (DSS, 2011).

**Positive Relationship with One Agency**

The participants in this study identified MMC's involvement with families as positive. The researcher identified two underlying characteristics of this positive relationship: 1) MMC's services addressing some of the risks associated with IPV; and 2) MMC's presence easing parent engagement. While this relationship seems to work well for CPS, the agency is potentially missing opportunities to better support families by not engaging with specialized service providers as experts in what they do. Social workers are called to refer families to specialized services, as needed, and to engage service providers as "partners" in the helping process (NASW, 2021). Although the social work code of ethics does not provide a definition of partner, what participants described as collaboration was, often, not a partnership. Additionally, a barrier frequently cited by participants was a lack of services to address families' needs. This lack of services could be addressed by referring families to other agencies that provide services to victims of crimes; not just MMC, who is a contracted service provider. Fresno County Superior Court's website lists a plethora of agencies that can address various needs of families

impacted by IPV. Some of the local agencies include Catholic Charities, Centro La Familia, and the Crime Victim Assistance Center (*Domestic Violence*, n.d.).

**Barriers to Collaboration Exist**

Participants identified two primary barriers to collaboration: 1) communication-related barriers; and 2) staff availability. The communication-related barriers resulted from a lack of information sharing and confidentiality limitations. The issues related to the agencies not sharing information stemmed from the lack of standardized practice for gathering and sharing information between agencies. Participants illustrated this issue by saying that receiving information depends on the agency they're working with and takes time as requests for information often go through several different staff members in each agency. In some cases, the barrier to receiving information is solely dependent on confidentiality policies. If CPS and service provider staff were able to articulate the value of sharing information to families, it is possible that parents would be more willing to sign release of information documents sooner. The other concern participants cited was staff availability. Participants indicated the fast-paced nature of CPS involvement and high caseloads cause them to not have enough time to engage with service providers. A standardized process for sharing information could streamline the efforts it takes to obtain information from service providers, making it easier for social workers to do so with limited time.

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**Application to Literature**

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Some of the findings of this study are consistent with the previous literature. The communication-related barriers to collaboration cited by participants were also cited in a recent study Langenderfer-Magruder et al. (2018). Participants in the present study shared that communication-related barriers resulted from a lack of information sharing and confidentiality policies. The participants in Langenderfer-Magruder and colleagues'

(2018) study also shared frustrations with the quality, quantity, and timeliness of receiving information and attributed it to time constraints. Another barrier to collaboration found in this study resulted from staff availability, specifically referring to a lack of time to make collaborative efforts. In addition, the confidentiality barriers in this study were also found in Langenderfer-Magruder and colleagues' (2018) study. Their participants explained how confidentiality policies not only prevented them from obtaining information, but that this lack of information also inhibited their ability to carry out their job duties. Participants in the present study expressed the same sentiments regarding confidentiality issues. Some participants in the present study also cited additional barriers that were also mentioned in the literature; however, saturation was not met related to these responses.

## Limitations

Although this study provided insight on social workers' experiences collaborating with victim service agencies in cases that involve IPV, there were several limitations. First, the findings of this study are not generalizable to other contexts. Despite this, the study could be utilized to inform future studies in similar contexts. Additionally, this study was intentionally contained to Fresno County to provide specific recommendations to its CPS agency. Second, there were limitations related to the study's sample. Although the researcher intentionally sought to interview social workers with several years of experience in CPS, there is a large gap in the experience level of the participants. Eight of the participants were employed for 8.5 years or less and the other three participants were employed between 19 and 23 years. The researcher aimed to gain insight from both ground-level social workers and social work employees in leadership roles; however, the researcher only interviewed one supervisor and one program manager. Third, the duration of participant interviews is of concern. The average interview duration was 22 minutes

which may not have provided participants with adequate time to fully articulate their experiences. To address this, however, participants were given the opportunity to provide additional information and commentary at the end of their interview; some participants chose to share additional information, while others did not. Fourth, there is a possibility that social desirability bias influenced some participants' responses as the researcher knew, to varying degrees, six of the participants, prior to their participation in the study. Finally, the researcher aimed to explore the current collaborative efforts of Fresno County CPS and IPV victim service agencies; however, victim services staff were not included in the study. To fully understand the current state of CPS and victim service agencies' collaborative relationships, victim services staff perspectives are needed. Moreover, these perspectives could provide pertinent information needed to make more informed recommendations.

## Implications for Social Work Practice

Despite these limitations, the researcher offers several recommendations for social work practice and Fresno County DSS PPGs. First, Fresno County CPS social workers could benefit from receiving cross-training with victim service agencies. This is cited in Haas et al. (2011) and Langenderfer-Magruder et al. (2018) and was mentioned by several participants when asked for their expertise on possible ways for their agency to improve collaboration. Second, the researcher echoes Langenderfer-Magruder and colleagues' (2018) recommendation for educating CPS social workers and victim services staff on each other's policies and priorities. This has the potential to address barriers to communication, including information sharing. Third, consistent with recommendations made by Banks et al. (2008) and Langenderfer-Magruder et al. (2018), the researcher believes Fresno County CPS' collaborative efforts could be bolstered by a needs assessment that aims to define the goals and objectives of collaboration. The

findings of this assessment could then be used to update Fresno County DSS' PPGs to reflect a standard definition of collaboration, highlight the value and objective outcomes to engaging in collaboration, and present a standard process for collaborating.

## Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations are intended to address limitations of the present study, fill gaps in the literature that this study did not address, and further explore the findings of this researcher. In order to address some of the limitations of this study, the researcher recommends that future studies seek a more representative sample, conduct more in-depth interviews, include victim service providers in the sample, and provide participants with definitions of key concepts of the study. The sampling issues of this study could be addressed by having a more even distribution in the experience level and classification of participants, and not utilizing purposive or convenience sampling techniques. Next, in-depth interviews with even more open-ended questions could yield more crucial information on the subject. Third, interviewing both CPS staff and victim service agencies staff would allow the researcher to explore the subject from both perspectives and gain a more meaningful understanding of the collaborative relationship. Additionally, this study did not provide participants with a definition "victim service agency" and "collaboration" prior to data collection. This could influence the results as participants may have been describing their experiences collaborating with agencies that are not victim service agencies, based on very different concepts of collaboration.

Finally, while the findings of this study were insightful and provided a basis for policy and practice recommendation, further exploration of within group differences is needed to confirm and add to these findings. This study aimed to examine if there were any differences among participants based on their role (Social Worker I- III, Social Work Practitioner, Social Work Supervisor, and Program Manager) and on their assigned unit.

While the researcher did not collect data from enough participants in managerial or leadership roles (as noted above), the researcher did find that social workers in emergency response experienced more barriers to collaboration than social workers assigned to voluntary family maintenance and family reunification. This within group difference needs further examination to confirm and expand on the findings and potential recommendations. Future studies should also make more concerted efforts to recruit social workers in leadership positions.

## Summary

Families experiencing multiple forms of family violence often find themselves working with CPS and victim service agencies to address concerns related to IPV and child safety. However, these entities have historically struggled to effectively collaborate with one another. This study sought to add to and expand on the established body of literature on CPS and victim service collaboration. Through qualitative interviews with 11 current Fresno County CPS social workers, the researcher found that 1) collaboration varies among these social workers; 2) there is a positive relationship between CPS and one victim service agency; and 3) barriers to collaboration exist. These findings are consistent with existing research, but also address some of the existing gaps. These findings, in conjunction with the findings of previous studies, were utilized to make recommendations aimed at improving Fresno County CPS' collaborative relationships with victim service agencies.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Informed Consent**

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Jessica Muñoz, graduate student of the Master of Social Work program at California State University, Fresno. We hope to explore Fresno County Child Protective Services' (CPS) collaborative efforts with victim service agencies in cases that involve intimate partner violence (IPV). You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a current employee of Fresno County CPS and have experience working with families involved with CPS who have been impacted by IPV.

If you decide to participate, we will conduct an interview with you via Zoom, at your preference. The risk level related to your participation is minimal; you will likely experience no more discomfort than you do during the regular course of your employment with CPS. There are not any direct benefits related to your participation. We hope to use the information gathered to improve collaborative efforts to better support families; you may feel some sense of joy knowing you contributed to this and the benefit it could bring to your clients and our community. We cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from this study.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. If you give us your permission by signing this document, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. However, the recording and transcription will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with California State University, Fresno. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. The Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at California State University, Fresno has reviewed and approved the present research.

If you have any questions, please ask us. If you have any additional questions later, Dr. Reuben Addo will be happy to answer them; he can be reached at (720) 269-9887 or raddo@mail.fresnostate.edu.  Questions regarding the rights of research subjects may be directed to Dr. Jennifer Randles, Chair, CSU Fresno Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects, (559) 278-2448.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE, HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which CPS and victim service

agencies collaborate and to seek out ways to improve the collaborative process.

**Informational**
- How long have you worked for Fresno County Child Protective Services?
- What is your current job title? (SW I, II, III, SSP, etc.)

**Open-Ended**
- Can you tell me about your experience working on referrals/cases that involve intimate partner violence?
- Have you ever collaborated with victim services on these cases?
    - If so, what was your experience?
- Which agencies do you collaborate with in IPV referrals/cases?
- Which family members are referred to these agencies?
    - Do you feel the referral process is the same for all family members?
- Did you have any barriers when working? What went well, what could be improved upon?
    - If you did not collaborate with VS, do you feel like collaborating would have been beneficial? Do you know what the barriers were to that collaboration?
- Did you feel supported by your supervisor in all of the above?
- What task areas have you worked in and for how long?
    - Do you feel that the ways in which or the amount of collaboration is tied to your task area?

**Concluding Questions**
- Are there ways to improve/change the way in which CPS collaborates to support the non-offending parent/victim?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add?

APPENDIX C: SURVEY

**Demographic Information Survey**

Thank you for participating in my study! I would greatly appreciate it if you could complete this brief survey regarding demographic information. If you wish not to answer a certain question, please indicate that in the response box. Your email is being collected to track who has responded to the survey. Thank you!

What is your gender?

What is your race?

What is your age?

APPENDIX D: CITI TRAINING CERTIFICATE

**CITI PROGRAM**

Completion Date 01-Sep-2020
Expiration Date 01-Sep-2023
Record ID 38139754

This is to certify that:

**Jessica Munoz**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher** (Curriculum Group)
**Social & Behavioral Research** (Course Learner Group)
**1 - Basic Course** (Stage)

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Under requirements set by:

**California State University, Fresno**

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?we375e7ab-e33c-4a07-97ea-a5efdba0277a-38139754