ABSTRACT

CHILD PROTECTION BEYOND THE BOUNDARY: INTERAGENCY
COLLABORATION EXPERIENCED BY CHILD WELFARE SOCIAL
WORKERS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Child welfare and law enforcement professionals frequently interact due to their shared responsibility of responding to, investigating, and intervening in instances where child abuse and neglect are of concern. Although the collaboration between institutions is integral to safeguarding children, the reality of interagency teamwork is not always seamless due to differing organizational policies, procedures, forms of knowledge and distinct cultural values. Through interviews with social workers from Fresno and Tulare County Child Welfare Services (CWS) and patrol officers from Fresno Police Department, this research sought to understand the experiences Emergency Response child welfare workers and law enforcement officers have when interacting with each other while investigating child maltreatment. Additional information sought from this study was the ways in which organization of law enforcement and child welfare institutions impact the success of interagency collaboration. Themes derived from data were imbalanced power, role confusion, and misunderstanding. Participants from both groups highlighted the need for understanding of each other's role, particularly as it pertained to officers learning about the philosophies, procedures, and knowledge of child welfare workers. The data suggests that periodical, joint trainings between professionals can improve understanding of each other's roles and to build better working relationships. This article discusses the implications of successful teamwork between child welfare and law enforcement.

Keywords: child welfare worker, law enforcement officer, collaboration

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May 2022

CHILD PROTECTION BEYOND THE BOUNDARY: INTERAGENCY

COLLABORATION EXPERIENCED BY CHILD WELFARE SOCIAL

WORKERS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

by

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Child abuse and neglect are social issues considered impossible to eradicate, as beliefs regarding its causes, appropriate interventions, and solutions are complex and vary dependent on the perspective of those which attempt to address the issue (Garrett, 2004; Gillen, 2003; Wenger 2010). Child welfare services (CWS), otherwise known as children's protective services (CPS), is a governmental agency commonly associated with the removal of children from unsafe, abusive environments. When allegations of maltreatment come to the attention of child protection agencies, social workers respond to referrals and investigate situations at hand. While social workers from child welfare are responsible for becoming involved and working with families where child maltreatment is of concern, social workers are not the only profession tasked with safeguarding children–individuals who work in medicine, mental health, education and law enforcement officers also involved in the protection of children (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Cowley et al., 2018). While educators, mental health professionals and doctors must report instances of suspected abuse, law enforcement officers also respond to calls for service related to child abuse. Social workers from child welfare and officers from law enforcement are guided by federal and state laws that guide their practice. As a result of their shared responsibility of protecting life and preventing future harm, professionals from the law enforcement and child welfare fields interact with one another often. Although both vital and frequent, the collaboration between social workers in child protection and law enforcement officers is not always seamless due to differences in their professional perspectives, organizational cultures, agency protocols, and procedures. Next is a discussion of the problem this study seeks to examine.

Problem

Through their response to referrals and calls for service, professionals in child welfare and law enforcement are entrusted with protecting children from harm. While social workers in child welfare and law enforcement officers share the responsibility of child protection, the working relationship between institutions can be strained due to differing, and sometimes opposing organizational cultures, workplace perspectives, philosophies, and agency procedures and protocols (Adams & Hendry, 1996; Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Lardner, 1992; Trute et al., 1992). Across the state of California, social workers must have a court order or exigent circumstances to take a child into custody of the respective county department (Welfare & Institutions Code [WIC] 300). Oftentimes, social workers rely on law enforcement officers, who have the authority to place a WIC 300 hold –placing youth in the custody of the state–on youth who officers have reasonable cause to believe have endured abuse or neglect. In counties where social workers must depend on a WIC 300 hold to be placed by law enforcement, challenges arise when officers do not agree that a hold is necessary. When officers do not authorize a 300 hold, social workers must submit a Protective Custody Warrant to a dependency court judge to obtain custody of the youth (Welfare & Institutions Code [WIC 340]). The differences police and social workers have in their approach to investigating child abuse is apparent to the professionals who interact with one another when investigating maltreatment–differences that can lead to adversarial attitudes (Lardner, 1992; Trute et al.,1992).

The working relationship between officers and social workers in child welfare has been considered at odds, due to general beliefs individuals from both professions have regarding child abuse and how it should be dealt with (Trute et al., 1992). In particular, workers in child protection and law enforcement officers do not always see eye-to-eye regarding the severity of abuse that has taken place (Garrett 2004); may discover that

social workers strive for "treatment" or rehabilitation of children, parents, and the family unit, while law enforcement officers move toward "punishment" of the offender of a crime; and may also have differing beliefs about what kind people (i.e. deviant, outcasts of society versus every day, average individuals) are capable of offending (Saunders, 1988; Trute et al., 1992, p. 359). In regard to the smoothness of interagency collaboration between law enforcement and child protection, opposing perspectives, lack of understanding of each other's role, and beliefs about who should take the lead on a call have been identified as barriers in communication between professionals, as well as a hurdle to joint decision-making when investigations of child maltreatment take place (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Garrett, 2004; MacFarlane & Bulkey, 1982). The obstacles to collaboration between child welfare social workers and police officer can have a multitude of outcomes, such as role confusion (Thomas, 1986), fragmentation of responses to instances of child abuse, and consequent prolonged, sometimes fatal harm to youth (Garrett, 2004).

Every year in the U.S., approximately 700,000 children experience abuse and neglect (Harrison, 2021) while five hundred are murdered by their caregivers (Mariano et al., 2014). When publicized, tragic incidents in which children are either seriously injured or killed by their caregivers illicit social outrage toward the individuals who work within institutions—child protective services, law enforcement, medical professionals, educators, etc.—responsible for reporting and protecting youth from abuse (Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Garrett, 2004; Shannon & Concubhair, 2016). The unthinkable torture, abuse, and murder of 8-year-old Gabriel Fernandez in Los Angeles County, California became a national sensation when a documentary reporting the events in the case was released in 2020 on the streaming site Netflix (Harrison, 2021). Upon the release of the documentary, public shock and outrage regarding the abuses inflicted upon Gabriel were magnified as details of the number of child maltreatment referrals and law enforcement

calls for service became widespread knowledge (Harrison, 2021). There were more than 60 complaints and referrals made regarding suspected child maltreatment, yet Gabriel was never removed from his mother's care (Goff, 2017; Harrison, 2021). The failure to remove Gabriel from his home environment was a decision that proved fatal (Harrison, 2021). Following the death of Gabriel, the public called for criminal convictions of negligence to social workers assigned to his case (Harrison, 2021). Although the charges against the employees were dismissed, the social workers and supervisors assigned to Gabriel's case were all terminated by Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) (Harrison, 2021). As a result of the missteps of the department, the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors created the Blue Ribbon Commission in order to oversee and review failures, identify barriers to safety, and to provide recommendations for ways to reform how the department responded to child abuse concerns (Los Angeles County Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection, 2014). Among recommendations of the commission were prevention, integration, oversight, accountability, and interagency collaboration (Los Angeles County Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection, 2014). Unfortunately, Gabriel's story is one of many that have occurred around the world. The result of child protection failures consist of public distrust of the reliability and effectiveness of government agencies, and calls for reform regarding how government agencies work together to respond to allegations of child abuse (Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017).

In response to breakdowns in child protection, governments in both the United Kingdom and United States sought to address the gaps and fragmentation that occurred in service delivery and response to child abuse between institutions. Starting in the late 1980s, said governments started to devise plans in which collaboration between professionals in different agencies could be made smoother (Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Jeyasingham, 2016; Jeyasingham, 2017). In the early 2000s, the development of Multi-

Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs) in the UK and Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) in the US began. In these centers, professionals from law enforcement, social work, medical and mental health providers work under the same roof, attend to the same child maltreatment cases, and have a concerted effort throughout the process of a child protection, juvenile delinquency, migration, among other types of cases in which safeguarding children is central (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Shannon & Concubhair, 2016).

In Fresno County, there are two recognized CACs. The Family Healing Center services victims of child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault and family violence via counseling and a concerted effort between law enforcement, the District Attorney's office, and forensic nursing (Family Healing Center, 2019). The Guilds Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Center, which is connected with Valley Children's Hospital, provides medical evaluations, screens for drug exposure, signs of sex trafficking and sexual abuse via multidisciplinary meetings and community education (Valley Children's Healthcare, 2022). In Tulare County, the Child Abuse Response Team (CART) is a CAC that works with the District Attorney's office to reduce the amount of interviews child abuse victims endure, to coordinate investigation efforts between agencies and to address sexual abuse cases (District Attorney's Office of Tulare County, 2022). The agency also connects the youth and family to a victim center, family court and mental health services (District Attorney's Office of Tulare County, 2022). Although there are concerted efforts between agencies, it is unclear whether CACs in the Central Valley are housed together, or whether they solely coordinate from separate locations. While the creation of MASHs and CACs have cultivated benefits and supports to children, women and families, both challenges and gaps remain. The purpose of this research follows.

Purpose

This research aims to understand the status of interagency collaboration between child welfare social workers and law enforcement officers in California's Central Valley as it relates to their interactions with each other when investigating allegations of child maltreatment. In particular, the study seeks to examine the experiences of child welfare social workers in the Emergency Response task area and patrol unit law enforcement officers from agencies in Fresno and Tulare counties. The research seeks to examine the experiences–understanding of the other's role, interactions professionals have with one another, opinions of what would make the collaboration better–of social workers and officers. With deeper understanding of the experiences of professionals from both institutions, suggestions for a more cohesive working relationship can be determined.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the experiences of both child protection social workers and officers when interacting with one another, the researcher utilized grounded theory. In grounded theory, researchers interview folks directly impacted by a social phenomenon in which the researcher wants to learn about (Creswell, 1998). Additionally, researchers who utilize grounded theory operate from the belief that theories about phenomena must be discovered from data collected from participants (Creswell 1998; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher interviewed social workers in regarding their experience in the crisis task area of child welfare and patrol unit law enforcement personnel to understand the status of their collaboration with each other (Creswell 1998; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through the lens of grounded theory, the researcher collected and examined the interactions, experiences, and perceptions of professionals from child protection and law enforcement in hopes of developing new insight and knowledge of the working relationship between the institutions. With deeper understanding about not only the current status of the social work-officer relationship, but also the factors that impact

how social workers and police experience their interactions with each other, positive change is possible. With discovery of ideas for improved interaction, the researcher believes optimized collaboration, service, and increased child safety are attainable. In the next section is a discussion of the research methodology.

Methodology

Using a grounded theory approach, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with child welfare social workers from the Emergency Response task area and patrol or street unit law enforcement officers. Letters were be sent to both child protection and law enforcement agencies to request formal approval of employee participation in the study. For flexibility in times, and ease of recording and transcribing, interviews were be conducted with video-conferencing application Zoom. The groups (social workers and officers) were interviewed separately to allow for comfort in sharing information with the researcher.

Relevance to Social Work

Social workers in child welfare are commonly associated with government intervention in the lives of families amid allegations of child abuse and neglect. While child welfare agencies play a large role in the safeguarding of children and in the rehabilitation and reunification of families, they do not work alone throughout the process. Social workers interact with and rely on the assistance of law enforcement officers in the investigation of child maltreatment and throughout the course of a child welfare case. Although the professions are both tasked with protecting life and preventing abuse toward children, the professionals can have differing attitudes, general work objectives (i.e. empowerment and rehabilitation versus law and code enforcement), protocols and procedures. Even with professional differences in protocols, procedures, and attitudes, social workers depend on the assistance of law enforcement and should

attempt to maintain a positive working relationship with them. Aside from the practicality related to more developed teamwork between institutions, the study also attempts to promote ethical principles of the social work profession.

This research study is relevant to the field of social work because not only does it involve and strive to better the experiences of social workers in the child protection arena, but because it aims to uphold ethical principles outlined by the National Association of Social Work (NASW). The ethical principles, values, and professional standards of social work practice highlighted by the NASW include Service to people in need; advocating for Social Justice; acknowledging the innate Dignity and Worth of every Person; recognizing the Importance of Human Relationships; conducting oneself with Integrity; and working within one's area of professional Competence (NASW, 2021). This research intends to bolster Dignity and Worth of the Person, Importance of Human Relationships, and Competence. In social work education and as validated by the NASW, students and practitioners are encouraged to recognize the inherent value in every client, to treat people with care and respect, and to be mindful of differences in terms of culture and ethnic diversity of every individual (NASW, 2021). Although this principle is directed toward the client-social worker relationship, the same sentiment can be applied to the social worker-law enforcement officer connection. In the social work profession, relationships with others can engage people as partners in the helping process and are seen as a vehicle for positive change (NASW, 2021). Social workers in child welfare are called to serve children and families who are struggling within their respective communities. A significant aspect of working with families is identifying and/or fostering the development of support persons in the families' corner. It is not impractical to assume that when the working relationship between social workers and law enforcement improves, that interactions the institutions have together when interacting with families can also be bettered. In this study, the researcher sought to uncover the

differences in organizational culture and individual experiences of child welfare social workers and law enforcement officers experiencing interagency correspondence. Through deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the other, a more respectful dynamic and optimized collaboration can be forged, and with it, improved service delivery.

Summary

The task of safeguarding youth from abuse and neglect is a shared responsibility among professionals in social work, law enforcement, medicine, mental health, and education. When it comes to intervening in the lives of families, as well as rehabilitating and working with families to reach reunification, child welfare social workers are at the forefront of addressing the issue of child abuse and neglect. Although workers from child protection are largely responsible in safeguarding youth from abuse, law enforcement is also tasked with protecting life and preventing harm, which includes their response to calls regarding child maltreatment.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The interactions between child welfare Emergency Response (ER) workers and law enforcement officers are both inevitable and frequent when it comes to their shared responsibility of safeguarding children. While professionals from law enforcement and child protection agencies are bound to work with each other, the working relationship between institutions is not always smooth due to differing organizational cultures, professional philosophies, procedures and protocols. In this chapter, a review of literature is presented and examines which agencies are deemed responsible for child protection; the role of child welfare social workers in safeguarding children and laws that guide practice; barriers to interagency collaboration, the role of law enforcement officers; an examination of interagency collaboration between law enforcement officers and child welfare social workers; as well as the professional cultures of the groups are discussed. Following the examination of existing literature and its findings is an overview of the gaps in literature, the rationale for this research and the research question(s) this study aims to uncover.

The Responsibility of Child Protection

When it comes to child protection, there are debates regarding whose responsibility it is to safeguard children (Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Garrett, 2004; Gillen, 2003; Shannon & Conchubhair, 2016). Differing beliefs point to police as solely responsible for safeguarding children (Gillen, 2003) or child welfare social workers, while some assert child protection should be a concerted effort between several entities (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Shannon & Conchubhair, 2016). Although child protection social workers are responsible for investigating and helping to mitigate further cases of child maltreatment, individuals who work in education, medicine, mental health, and law enforcement are also involved in the protection of

children (Adams & Hendry, 1996; Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Cowley et al., 2018; Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Humphreys, 1996; Tyler et al., 2015). When considering their role in child protection, social workers and police officers have similar and dissimilar responsibilities. In the following paragraph is a brief discussion of what role child welfare services (CWS) has in child protection.

When allegations of abuse or neglect come to the attention of CWS, Emergency Response (ER) workers are responsible for investigating what could have taken place. In instances of substantiated abuse or neglect, social workers in ongoing task areas work alongside families, extended family, friends, and community supports, as well as service providers in other agencies with the goal of reaching family reunification or to maintain the family's unity (Schene, 1998). When families are unable to reunify, social workers focus on next steps for the youth to find adoption, guardianship or permanent placement—all with the child's "best interest in mind" (California Department of Social Services [CDSS], n.d.). For each task area within CWS, from Emergency Response (ER), Family Reunification (FR), Family Maintenance (FM), to Adoptions and Planned Permanent Living Arrangements (PPLA), practice is guided by California state and federal law (CDSS, n.d.).

In California, the Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 300 and the Child Abuse Reporting Act (1987) (P.C. 11164), are two of many state laws that guide practice. WIC 300 defines differing types of child abuse and neglect that would legitimize the intervention of county child welfare departments, the removal of youth from unsafe environments, and the involvement of dependency court (WIC 300). The Child Abuse Reporting Act also defines which caretaker actions are considered abusive and require a child abuse report (PC 11164). Division 31 of the Manual of Policies and Procedures for Child Welfare Services, a statewide handbook for county departments and social workers in child welfare, outlines the definitions for efforts made by social workers, how case

plans are to be made, services are given to clients, and how placement is found for children, among other other procedures (CDSS, n.d.). The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) was passed through federal Public Law (P.L.) 115–123 and pertains to federal funds given to state child welfare programs that provide preventive family services, placement, mental health programs and in-home assistance for parents (California Department of Social Services [CDSS], 2018). Following descriptions of both California and federal laws governing safeguarding children, it is evident that child welfare social workers are responsible for much more than removing youth from harmful environments. Child protection social workers are expected to work with families to prevent future maltreatment and are responsible for following laws regarding parental and guardian rights, children's rights, and laws relating to dependency and foster care (CDSS, n.d.). Following a brief understanding of child welfare social workers' role in child protection is an examination at how law enforcement agencies interact with the issue.

While CWS has a responsibility to protect children and work with families, CWS is not the only institution tasked with safeguarding youth (Adams & Hendry, 1996; Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Humphreys, 1996; Tyler et al., 2015). Social workers in child protection rely heavily on law enforcement officers throughout the system of child welfare—officers are often called or on-scene when child removal takes place, as well as information sharing in mental health crises, instances of children running away, cases of human trafficking, and delinquency (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Penal Code [PC] 11166). Across the state of California, social workers must have either exigent circumstances or a court order to take a child into temporary custody (WIC 300). In California, law enforcement officers also follow Welfare and Institutions Codes as well as Penal Codes that define various crimes. In relation to child welfare, law enforcement officers have the authority to place a Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 300

hold, authorizing temporary custody of youth who are removed (WIC 300). As described above, when a WIC 300 hold is placed, a child is taken from their caretaker's custody, becomes a dependent of juvenile court, and enters an appropriate relative's home or is placed in the foster care system (WIC 300). When investigating child abuse, social workers in most counties must obtain a 300 hold from law enforcement officers in order to detain a child (WIC 300). If officers do not find a 300 hold appropriate, social workers are tasked with writing a Protective Custody Warrant (PCW) that must be approved by a judge (WIC 340). While social workers in child welfare must work alongside law enforcement throughout different points of a CWS case, the two agencies are separate entities, with different protocols, procedures, professional perspectives, and cultural identities. The differences between the institutions can pose barriers to their collaboration with each other. In the following paragraphs, existing research on barriers to interagency collaboration is presented.

Barriers to Social Worker-Law Enforcement Collaboration

When social workers and law enforcement officers interact with the goal of protecting children there are benefits and challenges. This section focuses on the struggles police officers and social workers experience when seeking to fulfill their duty to safeguard children. Prior research highlights the difficulties professionals in law enforcement and CWS endure when striving to collaborate. Barriers to social worker and police officer teamwork can be seen in lack of understanding of who takes the lead of investigations, as well as misunderstanding of each other's role more generally (Garrett, 2004; Humphreys, 1996; Jeyasingham, 2016). Additional causes of conflict are the differing approaches to an investigation officers and social workers take when interviewing families about alleged child maltreatment (Shannon & Conchubhair, 2016). Professionals from law enforcement and child welfare also run into difficulties working

with one another when their ways of conceptualizing child abuse and particular forms of knowledge do not align (Jeyasingham, 2017; Tyler et al., 2015). Further, law enforcement and child welfare agencies possess unique professional discourse, organizational culture (Garrett, 2004) and procedures regarding intervention (Jeyasingham, 2016). Considering the role confusion, differing approaches to investigations and ways of defining/thinking about child abuse, as well as unique organizational structure and procedures, it is conceivable that professionals from law enforcement and child welfare workers could find it challenging to work together when attending to referrals for child abuse allegations. The concept of interagency practice has been explored as it relates to the collaboration of institutions that interface with one another on the job and is examined in the next paragraph.

Interagency practice is a phenomenon known as a community of practice (CoP) that has been examined and can be applied to the working relationship between CWS workers and police officers (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2010). Wenger (1998) discusses communities of practice (CoP) and boundary work that is experienced among professionals from different institutions who interact with one another on the job. Safeguarding children is not the sole responsibility of child welfare agencies, but also of police. As such, law enforcement and child welfare workers interact with each other throughout the course of a child welfare case. While one's affiliation within enterprises such as child welfare or law enforcement is considered sanctioned by the rules and structures of the enterprise—and individual histories, ways of communicating, and repertoires—CoPs are fluid and not well-defined (Wenger, 2010). In other words, professionals from child welfare are rooted in the field of social work and their respective county agency via the core values of the profession, its goals, agency procedures, and language. Law enforcement officers also experience assimilation to their profession's values, histories, procedures, and unique language. While the two professions are well-

defined in their purpose, goals, histories, and communication, the working relationship between the institutions is not clear-cut. CoPs occur when differing enterprises interact with one another. In their interaction, child welfare workers and police can experience a boundary—which can be experienced as friction—as the professionals have differing knowledge and competencies (Wenger, 2010).

Although the competencies and knowledge bases of institutions are different, the work between social workers and law enforcement can provide learning opportunities and assets for both fields (Wenger, 1998). When boundary work fails, the result is separate, fragmented service delivery that is riddled with misunderstanding (Wenger, 2010). So while the two professions "share an interest" in safeguarding children, there may not always be "open engagement regarding the differences and common ground" the communities or professionals have, a "commitment to suspending judgment…to see the competence of a community in its terms..," nor an attempt to "translate between repertoires" in a way that "experience and competence actually interact," all of which are necessary to build bridges between the communities (Wenger, 2010, p. 126). Successes of social worker-law enforcement collaboration are examined next.

Successes in Social Worker-Officer Collaboration

Collaboration between law enforcement officers and social workers in child welfare has is successful when the right circumstances are fostered. In particular, when there was a trusting relationship between the professions (Adams & Hendry, 1996; Garrett, 2004; Humphreys, 1996;) and an understanding of and respect for each other's unique roles (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Jeyasingham, 2016), child welfare workers and law enforcement officers found their interactions to be more seamless. Additionally, when professionals acknowledged how their own professional lens may miss important information or fall short (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Crawford &

L'Hoiry, 2017), the working relationship between social workers and police have been productive. Additionally contributing to the effectiveness of collaboration between CWS workers and law enforcement are the parties' willingness to have open dialogue regarding the task at hand and the concerns of both parties (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Shannon & Conchubhair, 2016). Also seen to improve the interactions between law enforcement and social workers is when officers receive education and participate in trainings focused on more child development and signs of (sexual) abuse (Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Humphreys, 1996; Lardner, 1992). When police officers were willing to look past hierarchical structures, collaborative success was made possible (Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017). Additionally brought to light regarding productive interagency teamwork was when individuals from both professions were involved throughout different parts of the case—from introduction, to planning and receiving updates (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Cowley et al., 2018). The next section examines the existing literature regarding interagency teamwork between CWS workers and police—the necessity of social worker-law enforcement officer collaboration, what occurs when the collaboration fails, and centers created in hopes of mitigating child protection failures.

Children's Advocacy Centers and MultiAgency Safeguarding Hubs

As discussed in previous sections, the interagency collaboration between social workers and law enforcement officers has been considered vital and at times, problematic (Adams & Henry, 1996; Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Lardner, 1992). Also apparent is that while there are struggles in law enforcement and child welfare social workers ' attempts to work together, there are also opportunities (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Humphreys, 1996; Wenger, 2010). In other words, while it is the belief that social workers in child welfare should be working together with police, the reality of collaboration can be positive, but is not always a seamless process. When police and

child welfare social workers fail to remove children from unsafe environments, there can be fatal consequences (Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2020; Garret, 2004; Shannon & Conchubhair, 2016). Tragedies that have occurred in child welfare led to highly publicized media coverage and public outcry for not only institutional change, but accountability or punishment of agency officials who failed to intervene, a phenomenon known as "politics of outrage" (Parton, 2014, p.11). When tragedies occur, the divide between police and social workers in child welfare is glaring, with blame assigned to both law enforcement and child welfare services (Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Harrison, 2021; Jeyasingham, 2017; Shannon & Conchubhair, 2016). In the United States, CWS, sheriffs 'and police departments are often entirely separate entities that interface when instances of child abuse or neglect take place (Bowen & Nhan, 2020). However, starting in the 1980s, Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) were created. CACs are clinics in which police, mental health providers, social workers, and medical professionals began to work together under one roof to address allegations of child abuse and to advocate on behalf of those impacted by maltreatment (Bowen & Nhan, 2020). Not unlike the U.S., the United Kingdom (UK) also began to focus on more advanced collaboration between agencies in the 1980s following child protection failures (Garrett, 2004; Jeyasingham, 2016). The UK would eventually merge law enforcement agencies with social service agencies during the early 2000s in centers called Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs) (Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Jeyasingham, 2016; Jeyasingham, 2017). In the UK, law enforcement and social services have worked together to protect children in instances of abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, advocating for migrant children, among other causes (Shannon & Conchubhair, 2016; Jeyasingham, 2016). While CACs exist in the U.S., the primary response to child abuse and neglect continue to be CWS and law enforcement agencies. In the following section, organizational theory and how it relates to both CWS and law enforcement is considered.

Organizational Theory

In organizational theory, the ways in which institutions are structured—practices; rules and procedures; job specializations; and foundational belief systems—is examined (Manning, 2012). Organizational theory is taught in a multitude of disciplines such as sociology, business, psychology and education and seeks to understand how different organizations in society function (Manning, 2012). In the theory, businesses or enterprises are considered to have a life cycle such as "birth and early development," "institutionalization and maturity" that impact its organization (Manning, 2012, p.1). Because of their "concrete" or "fossilized" structures, mature enterprises are slow to adapt to organizational change (Manning, 2012, p.1). When considering the enterprises of child welfare and law enforcement, it is conceivable that the institutions are relatively mature and concrete in their structures. Particularly, in both child welfare services and sheriffs or police departments, the practice of employees is both mandated by law and agency protocol. Additionally, there are a multitude of different ranks, positions, and task areas in both fields. Each position or rank within the given institution is given hierarchal meaning that is further made evident through specified responsibilities (Manning, 2012). Further, both disciplines have foundational beliefs that impact their responses to both safeguarding children and working with the individuals that have harmed youth. Following a brief overview of organizational theory and how it informs law enforcement and child welfare institutions, one can further examine the individual cultures of the professions of social work and law enforcement officers.

Social Worker and Police Officer Culture

As discussed earlier, collaboration between officers and child protection social workers is vital, yet at times, strained (Adams & Hendry, 1996; Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Garrett, 2004; Humphreys, 1996). Difficulties in the working relationship can be seen in the differing philosophies, ethics, and guides for practice for the fields of social

work and law enforcement (Jeyasingham, 2016; Garrett, 2004; Lardner, 1992). As (Rittel & Webber, 1973) put it, addressing child protection is a "wicked problem," or an issue that is impossible to solve due to the complexities causing it, differing definitions, and solutions based on one's standpoint (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 161). In addition, a "wicked" social issue such as child abuse is subject to "fragmentation" in service delivery by different institutions due to the differing lenses and philosophies through which the issue is conceptualized (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 161). What social workers in child welfare consider a risk or danger factor based on their training, could lack criteria needed by law enforcement to take action or vice versa. The philosophies of social work follow.

When considering the field of social work, one cannot overstate the profession's core values that acknowledge the dignity and worth of every person, the bolstering of social justice, a desire to combat systemic oppression, and a commitment to look through an intersectional lens to understand clients 'culture and circumstances in order to work with them effectively (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021). In social work practice, practitioners seek to advocate for and empower marginalized groups through connection to resources and ongoing collaboration between the social worker and client(s) (NASW, 2021). With the *Code of Ethics,* as well as state and federal laws governing child welfare procedures and expectations in mind, it is unsurprising that social workers 'aim is not only to understand clients 'experiences and background, but to strengthen families and communities through working alongside them and through providing supportive services to them throughout a CWS case. Social work practice draws on theories from multiple disciplines and practitioners can have a multitude of ways of understanding their clients'point of view (Garrett, 2004; Lardner, 1992). Following a brief overview of social work culture is a short description of law enforcement culture.

While an integral principle of law enforcement is to protect life, law enforcement philosophies can be seen to be focused around retribution and punishment (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Humphreys, 1996). Additionally, officers may draw from rational choice theory and social learning theory (Allen & Jacques, 2014; Jeyasingham, 2016). Rational choice theory asserts the idea that individuals think through pros and cons prior to choosing their behavior (Jeyasingham, 2016). In relation to police work, the rational choice theory claims that one who commits a crime does so after weighing costs and benefits of committing the crime (Jeyasingham, 2016). Social learning theory purports that individuals adopt attitudes, behaviors, and ways of thinking about the world from their social and physical environment (Allen & Jacques, 2014; Jeyasingham, 2016). From the perspectives of those who work in law enforcement, an individual surrounded by people who are committing crimes will eventually give into peer pressure or into the pressure of their environment and begin to commit crimes as well (Jeyasingham, 2016).

What the brief descriptions of social work and law enforcement cultures highlight are basic differences in how the two professions think about the work they do, and the people they engage with on the job. Additionally, how the professions address issues was also discussed. Gaps in research and the rationale for this study follow.

Gaps in Research and Rationale for the Study

Although existing research discusses the responsibility of child protection, interagency collaboration, organizational theory, the phenomenon of boundary work experienced by communities of practice (CoPs), barriers and strengths of interdisciplinary working relationships between police and social workers, the majority of research discussed in this paper originates from the United Kingdom. Other localities represented include Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the United States.

Existing research focuses heavily on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) work setting and how collaboration between child welfare social workers and police in those settings can flourish or struggle. Although there are CACs in California, and while CWS social workers already collaborate with outside service providers, county child welfare agencies are still both majorly separate and dominant in the handling of child abuse investigations, detentions, and case management in instances of child abuse and neglect. While some literature on the subject looks at the difference between patrol officers and detectives, a decent amount of literature focuses on specialized child abuse units within law enforcement when examining the working relationship between social workers and officers. This study seeks to gain a better understanding of how child welfare social workers and patrol law enforcement officers experience their interactions with each other throughout the process of investigating abuse for a CWS case in the state of California. Additionally, this paper seeks to understand whether the experiences of child protection workers and officers can explain anything about the organizational structure of child welfare services and law enforcement enterprises.

Summary

In this chapter was a review of literature regarding the shared responsibility law enforcement and child welfare social workers have when it comes to safeguarding children, the barriers faced by these professionals when collaboration is necessary, as well as the factors that increase successful interagency teamwork. The creation of Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) and Multiagency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs) that were a response to fragmented interventions to child maltreatment and which are intended to facilitate inter-institutional teamwork under one roof was also briefly discussed. Organizational theory and its implications for collaboration across fossilized

institutions with distinct rules, philosophies and memberships such as child welfare and law enforcement were also examined. Following the description of organizational theory was a brief overview of the cultures of social work and law enforcement that inform their approaches to practice. While the social work profession aims to address the family within the context of their environment, law enforcement focuses on addressing crimes that have occurred. This research seeks to understand what professional attitudes or beliefs impact the ways in which professionals from the institutions interact with one another when on the job as well as how the professionals experience their interactions with each other. The questions this research seeks to answer are:

(1)What are the experiences of patrol officers and Emergency Response social workers in their interactions with each other when protecting children?

(2) What can the experiences of Emergency Response workers and patrol law enforcement officers explain about the current organizational structures of child welfare and law enforcement institutions and the organizational structures' impact on interagency collaboration?

The following chapter consists of the methodology of research design and data collection.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Child welfare social workers and law enforcement officers are tasked with protecting children from abuse and preventing future harm. Inevitably, the agencies interact at differing intersections of a youth's involvement in the foster care system. While social workers and police follow similar federal and state laws, they are guided by different philosophies, workplace culture, protocols, and procedures. Understanding the working relationship between child welfare social workers and law enforcement officers is vital to discovering where the organizations may have strengths and areas of improvement. In this chapter is an explanation of the method used to answer the research questions, the research design including subject criteria, data collection, the data analysis plan, the protection of human subjects and a summary.

Research Design

In order to uncover the dynamics of the working relationship between child welfare social workers and law enforcement, the study will employ methodology from grounded theory. Grounded Theory was co-founded by sociologists Barney Glasser and Ansel Strauss in the late 1960s (Creswell, 1998, Creswell & Poth, 2018). The theorists believe that theory should be "grounded" in data from the field (Creswell, 1998, Creswell & Poth, 2018). Grounded theory is a qualitative research method in which the researcher seeks to "generate or discover a theory" from data collected (Creswell, 1998, Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through grounded theory research, the researcher selects participants who are experiencing a social phenomenon. Participants share their insights regarding the phenomenon with the researcher; through the process of interviewing participants, the researcher learns how participants "interact, take actions, or engage in a process in response to a phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p.56). Additionally, the researcher will conduct multiple interviews to gain a deeper understanding of participants 'experiences.

Over time the researcher will analyze observations made through the process of interviewing and identify themes and categories (Creswell, 1998). Through repeated interviews, the researcher will analyze data collected from the interviews in a method termed "open coding," in which the researcher identifies initial categories from the information being shared about the phenomenon in the interviews (Creswell, 1998, p. 57). As categories take shape, the researcher may identify subcategories and seek more information as a way of "dimensionalizing" the data (Creswell, 1998, p.57). Following the "open coding" process, the researcher will utilize "axial coding" in which data gets assembled to describe conditions that impact the phenomenon—actions or interactions that take place as a result of the phenomenon, context, areas of intersecting conditions related to the phenomenon and consequences of different actions and interactions (Creswell, 1998, p.57). The concepts that frame the study follow.

Concepts

In the case of this research study, there is an examination of experiences of both child welfare social workers and law enforcement officers regarding their shared professional involvement in child maltreatment referrals. The research calls for one-on-one interviews with child welfare social workers and officers. Through interviews, the researcher seeks to gain understanding of the experiences of both crisis response professionals: patrol law enforcement officers and Emergency Response (ER) child welfare social workers. Next, the role of ER workers in the child welfare system is examined.

There are several task areas within child welfare and a case will be assigned to multiple social workers as the case progresses through the system. Emergency Response (ER) workers are the initial contact a family has with the child protection agency. In short, social workers in the ER task area respond to referrals and investigate allegations

of abuse. The time in which ER workers locate families, making in-person contact to investigate abuse allegations, and document interactions is mandated by the state and is dependent on the seriousness of the alleged abuse (California Department of Social Services [CDSS], 2014). Once the ER worker determines whether youth are safe in their home environment, the department will either open a case or close the referral (CDSS, 2014).

In particular, the research aims to discover the experience of law enforcement officers when interacting with child protection workers and vice versa. For example, the study will explore the understanding both professions have of each other's role; their attitudes or opinions of the other professional; impressions of the other professional's conduct; the other professional's demeanor toward the individual or willingness to communicate about the situation at hand; perceptions of the other professional's handling of responding to a maltreatment referral; what the professionals liked and disliked about their interactions with the employee from the other institution; and what, if anything, they would like to see change about the interaction between agencies.

Research Questions

(1) What are the experiences of patrol officers and Emergency Response social workers in their interactions with each other when protecting children?

(2) What can the experiences of Emergency Response workers and patrol law enforcement officers explain about the current organizational structures of child welfare and law enforcement institutions and the organizational structures' impact on interagency collaboration?

Subjects

Participants for the study include both county child welfare social workers who have experiences in the Emergency Response (ER) task area and patrol law enforcement

officers from either a city police department or county sheriff's office. In order to recruit professionals from both sectors, the researcher sent out emails to personnel within law enforcement and child welfare departments to obtain formal approval for interviewing staff. In the emails, the researcher attached a letter requesting participation that included an interview guide. Additionally, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, the timeline for interviews, how many staff the researcher intended to speak with, and answered questions personnel had regarding the study. The researcher hoped to interview approximately 40 participants, half social workers and half law enforcement officers. With forty participants, the researcher is more likely to achieve saturation of data—in which no new insight is discovered—from the professionals (Creswell, 1998). However, not all agencies contacted agreed to participate in the study. The researcher interviewed 24 people but had to omit one interview due to the participant drawing solely from experiences not relevant to the subject. Ultimately, the researcher interviewed 8 law enforcement officers and 15 child welfare social workers.

Emergency Response (ER) social workers from governmental child protection agencies known as Children's Protective Services, Child Welfare Services, or Department of Family and Children's Services are the first contact the department has with a family upon receiving a referral regarding child maltreatment. Social workers in the ER task area investigate referrals and where appropriate, open a case with the department and juvenile dependency court. Law enforcement patrol units are often called either by ER social workers or dispatchers to investigate referrals, as crimes may have occurred that would require police investigation and/or detainment. Sometimes officers arrive on-scene before ER workers and request their presence. In local Fresno and Tulare counties, social workers rely on law enforcement to place a Welfare and Institution Code [WIC] 300 hold—which would give the child welfare agency custody—of youth in a

dangerous environment (Welfare & Institutions Code [WIC 300]). Additionally, law enforcement may be requested due to personal safety concerns social workers have.

Because this research focuses on the interaction of social workers and law enforcement officers at the beginning of a child abuse case, this study will exclude social work situations that relate to units other than Emergency Response. Although other social work units in the child welfare system may interact with law enforcement throughout different points of a case, interactions may be with more specialized detectives or for issues not regarding abuse of minors. For instance, a social worker in an ongoing unit may contact law enforcement to inform them of a minor who has run away or due to a mental health crisis. Additionally, social work supervisors and program managers will be excluded from the study, as to understand the interactions of police and social workers in the field. Similar to the rationale for selecting ER social workers, members of law enforcement who are on patrol will be recruited for this study, and detectives or officers in specialized units will be excluded or asked to draw solely from their experiences on patrol. While supervisors in child welfare are less likely to go into the field with ER workers to investigate referrals, in law enforcement, supervisors can and often do respond to calls for service with their officers. The researcher aimed to interview primarily officers without higher ranks but was open to interviewing corporals and/or sergeants in the case that volunteer numbers were low. To avoid power dynamics that could make sharing uncomfortable, the researcher interviewed higher ranked officers separately from officers that are considered subordinates. Initially, this study sought professionals from both institutions who have at least 2 years of experience. While practitioners can witness and learn quite a lot within one year on the job, within two years, one may have more grasp on procedures, protocols and paperwork regarding their job and feel more comfortable. However, to cast a wider net for participants, the researcher adjusted their parameters. Human subjects follows.

Human Subjects

This study was approved by the Committee for Human Subjects on December 21, 2021, with no concerns of risk. The professionals interviewed are not vulnerable populations, but instead part of institutions that have authority. The researcher acquired information such as the name of the department the participants work for as well as the number of years the participants have been in their position. Additionally collected was the age, and ethnic and racial identity of participants. The researcher received written consent to join the study, to take part in interviews, to have interviews recorded, and for the researcher to report on demographic information as well as ideas shared. While the researcher collected demographic information, the researcher will not identify people by name in the paper. The researcher provided participants with five-dollar gift cards to Starbucks, a small but reasonable incentive. Methodology for instrumentation and data collection are explained below.

Instrumentation & Data Collection

Data collection includes recorded one-on-one interviews. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, and in accordance with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines on safety, the interviews took place on video-conferencing application, Zoom (Center for Disease Control, 2021). Zoom can make attending an interview more accessible to participants, as one can join the video call from home or anywhere one has phone service or Internet connection (Archibald et al., 2019). The application can also be preferred to in-person interviews due to the flexibility and ability to interview people from different geographic locations at once (Archibald et al., 2019). Additionally, utilizing Zoom can be advantageous to the researcher because there is an option to record the call's session to revisit the recording. Utilizing Zoom can have drawbacks, such as connectivity, audio and video problems (Archibald et al., 2019). The researcher must consider the accessibility of use for participants, who might not be acquainted with the

application. For the study, the researcher enlisted the support of committee members to assist with participant recruitment ideas, as well as formulation of interview questions. The participants include members of law enforcement officers who have patrol experience and child welfare social workers who have worked in the ER task area. The rationale for separating professionals is so the groups may speak freely and openly about their experiences working with each other in a judgement-free zone.

The researcher aimed to have 8 to 10 participants from professionals from each agency who participated in the study. The initial goal was to involve Fresno, Madera and Tulare County CWS, as well as the corresponding law enforcement entities such as Fresno Police Department, Fresno Sheriffs' Office, Madera Police Department, Madera Sheriffs' Office, Visalia Police Department and Tulare County Sheriffs' Office. The researcher anticipated conducting approximately 40 interviews total during a two-month period, from January 2022 to the end of February 2022. Through the utilization of grounded theory methodology, the researcher attempted to reach "saturation" of data, in which the researcher becomes aware of continued themes or patterns that portray the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998, p.57). As discussed previously, not all agencies agreed to participate in the study. Ultimately, the researcher interviewed 8 social workers from Fresno County CPS, 7 workers from Tulare County CWS and 8 law enforcement officers from Fresno Police Department.

Summary

Child welfare workers and law enforcement professionals inevitably interact with each other in their shared responsibility of protecting children from abuse and neglect. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between ER workers and patrol officers, this researcher interviewed professionals from both institutions. Utilizing grounded theory methodology, data was collected from the individual interviews.

Interviews were transcribed and researcher began to make note of patterns and themes from the data. In the following chapter, is an overview of the findings of this research.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In a quest to understand the relationship dynamic between law enforcement officers and ER social workers, interviews were conducted via Zoom from the months of January and February 2022. This chapter includes an explanation of the procedures taken to find participants, the processes implemented to collect data, results of social worker and law enforcement interviews, rationale behind the data analysis, the method of coding and second-level coding, themes and rationale for themes uncovered. This qualitative study asked two research questions: 1) What are the experiences of patrol officers and Emergency Response social workers in their interactions with each other when protecting children? and 2) What can the experiences of Emergency Response workers and patrol law enforcement officers explain about the current organizational structures of child welfare and law enforcement institutions and the organizational structures' impact on interagency collaboration?

Recruiting Participants

The researcher began the process of searching for local agencies to include in the study in late December 2021 and early January 2022. Fresno County CPS, Tulare County CWS, Madera County CWS, Visalia Police Department, Tulare County Sheriffs' Office, Fresno Police Department and Fresno Sheriffs' Department, Madera Police Department and Madera Sheriffs' Office were contacted via email and by phone. Emails sent to prospective participant departments included explanation of the research, the modality of conducting interviews, and number of participants desired. The researcher utilized connections from professional, personal, and academic experiences to obtain contact information for respective agencies. Out of the departments contacted, Fresno Police Department, Fresno County CWS and Tulare County CWS granted approval for the

research. Other department agencies either declined to participate or did not reply to the request for approval.

Initially, the researcher created parameters for potential participants. Specifically, the researcher wanted to recruit individuals who were currently in the positions of patrol and ER worker with at least 2 years of experience. The rationale for seeking professionals with at least 2 years of experience in their current role was to ensure the participants were familiar not only with their own role and the laws that govern their response to child maltreatment, but also to avoid participants from drawing from other positions they may have filled previously within their agency.

When recruiting police officers from Fresno Police Department, the researcher was allowed to have a department-wide email sent on the researcher's behalf by the Deputy Chief of patrol units. Initially, there was minimal response and only 3 volunteers. The researcher was allowed to attend a briefing in the Central District to inform patrol officers of the research and in hopes of recruiting more participants. Following the briefing, more volunteers came forward. The researcher was able to interview 9 officers, however, had to void one of the interviews due to the officer drawing from work experiences other than patrol.

Regarding Fresno County CWS, the researcher was introduced to employees in supervisory roles via email by a professor. The researcher was granted permission to interview social workers and was given contact information of Program Manager assistants. From the assistants, the researcher was provided with ER supervisor phone numbers. The researcher was not able to connect with all supervisors but left voicemails for any supervisor who did not answer the researcher's call. Through both email and text message, the researcher contacted ER workers and attempted to obtain more participants. Initially, only 4 social workers in the ER task area volunteered. In order to secure more participants, the researcher had to adjust their parameters surrounding the amount of

experience social workers needed to have working with their agency, as well as whether participants were currently assigned to the ER task area. The researcher began to allow workers with prior ER experience to also be interviewed. Ultimately, the researcher obtained 8 participants from Fresno County CWS.

In Tulare County, the researcher had the advantage of being a student intern, which facilitated more direct access to employees and their contact information. With the emergent and adaptive changes to the research design (Creswell, 2018), the researcher was able to cast a larger net when recruiting participants. The researcher found volunteers via county email contact information. The researcher interviewed 7 social workers from Tulare County. Next is a description of participant demographics.

Demographics for social workers and law enforcement officers interviewed in this study include biological sex, racial identity, and age. There were 6 males and 9 females interviewed from child welfare. The social workers' ages ranged from 25 to 50 years old, with the median age being 34 years old. Ten participants identified as Hispanic, three Caucasian, and two Biracial. Out of officers interviewed, 6 were male and 2 were female. The age of law enforcement officers ranged from 26 to 40 years old, with the median age being 28 years old. Five participants identified as Caucasian, two Hispanic, and one Biracial. In the following section is a brief description of data collection.

Data Collection

The researcher interviewed ER workers and patrol unit officers primarily via the video-conferencing application, Zoom. During one interview connectivity issues arose, and the researcher called the participant on the phone and recorded the interview on their laptop. Prior to all interviews, all participants were provided informed consent forms in which they were notified interviews would be recorded for transcription purposes. Following the interviews, each participant received an electronic 5 dollar gift card to

Starbucks. All interview recordings, informed consent forms and transcriptions were labeled not by participant name but by code names. For law enforcement officers, code names such as "LEO1" through "LEO8" were used to maintain privacy of participants. Likewise, social workers were coded by markers such as "SW1" through "SW15." The researcher did not organize data according to the county department the social workers were affiliated with. For assistance with transcribing interviews, the researcher made and paid for an account on transcription website Otter. To ensure the transcriptions were accurate, the researcher listened to each recording and edited transcript along the way. In addition to the recordings, the researcher took notes during each interview. Completed transcriptions were separated into individual word documents with participant responses to each interview question. After organizing the data, the researcher began to do the coding and analysis. The interview questions of the study are described next.

The interviews included a total of ten questions, five of which were demographic questions and five topic-based inquiries. The questions asked mirrored each other and were made relevant to the professional being interviewed. For instance, one question asked social workers to talk about their experiences working with law enforcement officers. Officers were also asked to speak about their interactions with child welfare social workers when responding to calls for child abuse and neglect. When coding data and in consideration of time left to complete the research, the researcher first separated the professional groups and chose to focus 4 out of 5 of the interview/topic questions that would best get at the research questions of the study. It should be noted that question 6, which analysis is not discussed in this paper, asked participants to explain their understanding of the other professional's role. All participants from both professions seemed to understand the basic roles of the other. Social workers were aware that law enforcement had sole authority to place a 300 hold and that officers were primarily investigating whether a crime was committed. Law enforcement officers knew child

welfare workers prioritize children's safety and investigate referrals to determine whether children can stay with their care providers. Question 7 asked participants to discuss their experiences interacting with members of the other profession when responding to child abuse and neglect referrals. The researcher probed for both positive and negative experiences the participants had working with each other. Question 8 inquired what would improve interactions with professionals from the other profession. In question 9, the researcher investigated the participants' familiarity with the laws and policies that govern responding to child maltreatment. The final question examined, question 10, asked participants to share how effective laws governing the response to child abuse are. Following the explanation of data collection is the process of data analysis.

Data Analysis

Social Worker Responses

The researcher went through social worker interviews first and sifted through responses question by question. Notes were taken by hand for each response and the researcher recorded the phrases and concepts that each participant shared in their replies. Next, the researcher went back through the responses to each question and took tallies for the key phrases and expressions that stood out. Additionally, the researcher was able to filter out responses that did not apply to the topic or question at hand. From the responses, patterns became evident.

In question 7, social workers were asked to talk about their experiences interacting with law enforcement. It should be noted that 6 of 15 participants stated they had both positive and less pleasant experiences interacting with law enforcement officers. The most frequent positive experience of social workers had working with officers was in situations in which officers interacted with families in ways workers deemed positive (6/15). For example, workers expressed some officers were "nice," "welcoming," and

"nonjudgmental" in their approaches with children and families. Additionally, workers appreciated when officers had strong interviewing skills and were able to build rapport and obtain information from clients. Further, officers were perceived to interact with families in a positive manner when they were "willing to work" with the family to avoid unnecessary detention. Officers were also appreciated by workers when they were seen as supportive or helpful (6/15) and collaborative (6/15).

Less frequently discussed by social workers were experiences when officers were willing to listen to the worker's input (4/15), make "joint decisions" (3/15) and working as though they are "on the same team" (4/15). Workers also like when officers allow social workers to run their investigation and lead the interview with families (4/15). Some workers also spoke about enjoying getting to work with the same officers over longer periods of time (3/15) and building rapport with them (4/15). Social workers also stated enjoyment of doing interviews together with law enforcement (2/15) and in witnessing officers' handling of sexual abuse cases (2/15). Social workers also stated they felt a sense of safety knowing law enforcement would come standby (4/15).

When speaking about the experiences they did not like working with law enforcement, there were a mixture of responses. The most common response was social workers' perception that officers were "standoffish" and appeared "annoyed" or as though they "did not want to be there" when called out to child abuse and neglect situations (9/15). According to one of the participants:

> "Sometimes you get officers and deputies you can tell by the look on their face and tone of their voice that they don't want to deal with anything that has to do with child abuse or child welfare in general…their physical appearance, the way they treat the referral or investigation…it's quite obvious they wish they weren't there. They wish they didn't get the call."

Workers stated their perception of some officers having a "my way or the highway" type of attitude toward workers when it came to deciding how to proceed following an investigation and seemed to consider themselves the sole authority (7/15). For instance, social workers stated officers would expect social workers to accept the officer's point of view regarding whether a child should be removed or kept in a home. If an officer wanted to place a 300 hold, but the social worker felt removal was unnecessary due to the family's support system, officers would try to "boss" the social worker. Conversely, if workers found the home environment unsafe for children and officers did not agree with the risk, workers felt they had to beg or "sell" the case to the officer to no avail.

In less patterned responses, social workers also spoke of times when officers were "unsupportive," were unwilling to consider the professional perspective of workers (3/15) and made comments such as "go get your PCW", which stands for Protective Custody Warrant (5/15). Two workers spoke of experiences in which officers undermined them in front of families, which made the situation more tense (2/15). Other workers shared instances where law enforcement was "impatient" with worker arrival time and interviewing process, with participants stating officers called multiple times asking for an estimated time of arrival (4/15). Also mentioned were long "wait times" (3/15) and "lack of communication," (4/15) such as unwillingness to engage with the worker on the scene, as well as difficulties reaching officers by phone. Other barriers include "differing definitions of imminent risk" (4/15). Some officers were perceived as lazy by workers in terms of not wanting to "get into stuff on a Friday" or wanting to avoid writing a report (2/15). Some workers disliked situations in which they felt officers were interacting with families in negative ways such as using "excessive force," (1/4) escalating intense situations (2/4), being accusatory toward families (3/4), and being unwilling to make safety plans (4/4).

Question 8 asked social workers what they believed would improve interactions with law enforcement. Among the most repeated responses was "better understanding of our role" (9/15). Social workers stated their wish for law enforcement to understand the policies, methods, process, and philosophies of child welfare. In particular, social workers believed officers would benefit from training on Safety Organized Practice and trauma-informed care. When discussing their reasoning for wanting officers to better understand the role of child welfare workers, one participant stated:

"I think officers or deputies forget we do the same job as far as investigation…we have the same knowledge and skills...a lot of times they don't listen to what we say or why we're advising something."

Other workers stated their belief that yearly "joint trainings" (6/15) could bridge the gap of understanding between the professions by informing officers of the perspective of workers and by discussing strengths, issues, and next steps.

Less frequently offered as a solution was "better communication" (4/15) between law enforcement and child welfare workers. Workers believed an officer stationed in their office with ER (2/15) could be beneficial, while others asserted having officers or detectives specifically trained in child abuse and neglect respond to child welfare calls (3/15) could also improve the working relationship between institutions. Meet-n-greets (2/15), quarterly meetings or briefings (3/15), and a ride-along program for law enforcement to experience the child welfare in plain clothes (2/15) were also mentioned as potential options. Question 9 is examined in the following paragraph.

In question 9 asked social workers to describe their understanding of the laws and policies that govern responding to child maltreatment. Most workers (12/15) interviewed stated they felt "pretty familiar" of laws guiding their response to child abuse and neglect, while other workers felt they were "still learning" (3/15). Laws mentioned by interviewees include WIC 300, Penal Codes, individual county Policy and Procedure

Guidelines (PPGs) and PCWs. Social workers often said they were more familiar with their own responsibilities regarding their agency's response to child abuse but were not certain about the processes of law enforcement.

Question 10 served as a follow up to the previous question. When asked how effective they felt laws and policies are, most workers (9/15) reported their belief that the laws guiding response to child maltreatment are "pretty effective," and others stated laws are "effective with proper support" (3/15). Some workers felt the WIC 300 definitions are clear regarding physical and sexual abuse but are more unclear regarding emotional abuse and neglect (3/15). Two workers felt that laws are ineffective at maintaining families (2/15). Another participant was of the belief that policies appear to change like a "pendulum" as societal opinions, attitudes, and events take place.

The following section discusses the responses of law enforcement participants.

Law Enforcement Responses

The researcher utilized the same analysis method for social workers and law enforcement officers. In this section are the officer responses to questions 7 through 10.

In question 7, in which officers were asked about their positive and negative experiences interacting with ER workers while attending to child abuse and neglect calls for service. It should be noted that officers (5/8) stated although most of their interactions with child welfare workers are positive, the more unpleasant experiences are memorable. Officers also stated the quality of their experience seemed to depend on the individual social worker who responded with them (4/8). Regarding positive experiences, (4/8) officers stated when CWS workers operated with the understanding that they were on the "same team" as officers and willing to "collaborate" with officers. Officers also appreciated when social workers were willing to work with families by creating safety plans with the hopes of avoiding detention (5/8). When talking about social workers who

work with families one participant stated, "It was good to see them wanting the parents to get their act together and to help them anyway they could." Officers also perceived their interactions as positive when social workers communicated what criteria they were looking for and when they understood the officers' role (4/8).

Less frequent responses include the perception that social workers want to do right by children and families (3/8). Additionally highlighted were social worker actions such as "going above and beyond" for kids by using their personal vehicle, hugging children who were visibly filthy and who had lice infestations, and having proper equipment (i.e., car seats, large enough vehicle, change of clothing, etc.) (3/8) with them when arriving on scene. Police officers also expressed appreciation for social workers who have done the "leg work" involving their investigation prior to calling out law enforcement (3/8). Officers also conveyed appreciation for workers being prepared with proper car seats and vehicles (1/8) and expressed contentment with being called out for standby assistance (3/8). Law enforcement officers (3/8) also indicated they liked working alongside social workers to "keep kids safe." Two participants enjoyed working together on investigations with social workers, which could include going from location to location and conducting the interviews together (2/8).

Regarding the negative interactions law enforcement had with child welfare workers, the most prevalent perceptions were that social workers were "lazy," (5/8) which manifested in different ways. For some participants, social workers "want a 300 hold so they do not have to do work" (3/8). These officers (4/8) expressed their belief that if workers were able to provide family background, history, and previous reports that workers had enough time to write a Protective Custody Warrant (PCW) for a dependency court judge to sign off on but were choosing to enlist law enforcement for a 300 hold because it was faster. Some officers felt that workers "take advantage" or try to pawn off their work onto officers when they call for a 300 hold. One participant stated:

"I think one of the most frustrating calls we get from CPS is when they have a case they have been working on for weeks or months…they absolutely have the time to go get an actual court order to remove the child. And they call us out to circumvent that process...when there is no immediate nature for a hold."

Law enforcement participants also explained they interacted with workers who "lacked urgency" and others believed workers made safety plans to avoid having to detain children. Officers also expressed dislike when workers "disagree about the officer's decision whether to place a 300 hold" (5/8), some of which were due to "differing definitions of imminent risk" (5/8).

Less repetitive responses include officers' feelings that workers were "disrespectful" or "unprofessional" toward the officer when disagreements arose (3/8). A few officers stated they did not like when workers were "unwilling to work with families" and were "negative" in their interactions toward children and families. In relation to themes related to workers' efficiency, officers pointed to "lack of resources" such as insufficient number of vehicles, social workers, and car seats (2/8), as well as "wait times" (2/8). Officers expressed frustration at being "out of service" while waiting for worker response (2/8), as well as "insufficient communication" (2/8) and "information" (2/8) as aspects of negative interactions they have had with child welfare. One officer felt the multiagency response to child neglect allegations was unnecessary and expressed their frustration of having to respond to non-violent and/or non-criminal calls. Another officer spoke of the discontinuation of a direct line to child welfare, which used to expedite and make the process of investigation smoother. Officer responses to question 8 follow.

Question 8 asked officers to give their opinions about what would make the interactions between law enforcement and child welfare workers run more smoothly. The most significant response was "joint trainings" (5/8) to better understand the process of

child welfare services and an opportunity to share what law enforcement officers look for while investigating child abuse and neglect. Additionally offered were "joint briefings" to stay up to date and on the same page with each other (4/8). Half of the law enforcement participants noted "more resources" for social workers such as better pay, more employees, manageable caseloads, and more vehicles. A couple officers wanted workers to have more "authority" to place holds without law enforcement.

Other responses include "better communication" (3/8), which a couple believed was the responsibility of individuals rather than the agency (2/8). One officer suggested a joint training to take place every two years that could count toward relicensing for officers would help keep law enforcement and workers on the same page, while another believed a packet or guide from child welfare outlining what child welfare workers do, as well as the expectations regarding their responsibilities would suffice (1/8). Other officers stated their belief that law enforcement should not be called out to non-violent calls, citing workers had the ability to get PCWs (1/8). The following paragraph outlines the responses for question 9.

In question 9, participants were asked how familiar they are with the laws and policies that govern responding to child maltreatment. Over half of officers (6/8) stated they felt "very familiar" with laws and policies that guide their response to child abuse, while the remainder stated they were "averagely" familiar. Laws and policies discussed by officers were WIC 300, Penal Code 1116.5 on mandated reporting, and department policies. Participants mentioned they were not aware of the laws or procedures that guide child welfare (3/8).

A follow up to question 9 is question 10, in which participants were asked to discuss their opinions regarding how effective laws governing responding to child abuse are. Some officers believed the laws governing child maltreatment are "effective with proper resources" such as those listed above (e.g., enough staff, manageable caseload,

funding) (5/8); while others categorized the laws similarly as "effective but inefficient" (2/8). One participant felt that the laws were not effective at keeping children safe and believed modernization of laws needs to occur. For a couple participants, "it is too easy for families to reunify" (2/8) and "positive change only occurs as a result of public outcry" (2/8). Other officers shared their belief that child welfare workers should have more "authority" when it comes to placing 300 holds (2/8).

Differences

From interviewing officers and child welfare workers, it became apparent that there were differences in how they experienced interactions with each other, solutions they offered to create positive change, and how effective they felt laws governing government response to child maltreatment are.

Social workers did not like when police officers acted as the sole authority during investigations. Social workers expressed they did not enjoy law enforcement officers who demanded workers do as they say regarding a family. When officers did not see a need for a 300 hold, social workers stated officers would not change their mind even when provided with more information. On the other hand, when officers wanted to place a 300 hold and social workers did not agree, officers expected workers to do as the officers instructed them to do. One officer felt it was unnecessary to come to child welfare calls for service that did not involve crime, as it took units away from potentially more dangerous calls taking place.

The major difference between social workers and law enforcement regarding their ideas for solutions was social workers suggested for positions in which workers could be housed in a law enforcement agency or for officers to be stationed at CWS. Additionally, law enforcement officers believed social workers in child welfare should have more authority to place 300 holds, particularly in situations of dirty homes.

Differences between professional groups can also be seen in how effective laws are surrounding child abuse and neglect. For officers, the desire for child welfare workers to have more authority came up again when asked question 10. Professionals from law enforcement believed laws governing family reunification were ineffective because parents were given too many opportunities to have their children back in their custody. Conversely, workers believed the law did not do enough to maintain families. One social worker stated:

> "I think our policies and the WIC codes ago away from all that (preserving families)...we can't just throw services at them and expect them to do things…it is not necessarily beneficial for them…we need to modify it to their needs."

Also discussed by officers was the need for more funding for child welfare in terms of hiring more employees, better pay, manageable caseloads, equipment such as vehicles, and sufficient car seats.

Commonalities Between Professionals

Commonalities between the groups' responses related to their interactions with each other, potential solutions to barriers in their working relationship, and effectiveness of laws that govern their practice also became apparent. Unsurprisingly, workers and officers enjoyed when their counterpart was collaborative and willing to work with the families to create a safety plan. Police spoke about enjoying being called out for safety standbys and social workers conveyed appreciation for officers coming to their aid. In terms of unpleasant experiences with each other, both groups disliked laziness from the other professional, wait times, being treated in a disrespectful manner, and lack of communication. Both groups also disliked when the officer or social worker was unprofessional toward families and unwilling to work with them. Another concept discussed by both groups was their differing definitions of imminent risk. Social workers

and officers misunderstood the stance of the other, especially as it related to imminent risk and PCWs. Although the professionals were aware they possessed different stances as it related to imminent risk—social workers were aware that officers primarily investigate for crimes committed—law enforcement officers seemed to believe social workers were "lazy" when they requested a 300 hold for situations where officers did not agree that children were in imminent risk. Workers wanted law enforcement officers to understand the safety risks posed by a dirty home as well as the process for obtaining a PCW. According to SW8, "Getting a PCW is not a quick thing, we can't just do it immediately. It's going to take 24 to 48 hours to get a warrant written, then viewed by a judge and signed by a judge. They know we get them, but they don't know the process."

Regarding the potential solutions offered by participants, both groups stated that better understanding of each other's role and better communication would improve their working relationship. Both groups discussed joint trainings, meetings or briefings, either at yearly, quarterly or every couple of years in frequency.

When asked how effective professionals thought the laws governing government's response to child maltreatment are, members of both groups discussed how they felt laws could only be effective with proper resources and support.

Summary

This chapter included a brief overview of the process of interviewee recruitment, demographics of the participants in this study, and questions asked to participants. The findings for questions 7 through 10 were examined for both child welfare workers and law enforcement officers. Also explored are the differences found in the responses given by professionals, as well as the commonalities.

In chapter five, a discussion of grounded theory and how themes derived from the data presented pertain to the theory are included. Additionally examined are the limitations, key takeaways, and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter includes the discussion of themes derived from the data collected in this study, as well as grounded theory and connections between existing research and this study. Also examined are the limitations of the study, key takeaways, and the researcher's recommendation for future research.

Discussion

The researcher sought to discover the experiences of child welfare workers and law enforcement officers experiencing the social phenomenon of cross-boundary practice. Through the collection of first-person accounts from professionals who share the responsibility of safeguarding children, the researcher examined experiences, perceptions, and interactions shared in hopes of gaining new insight and knowledge of the working relationship between institutions.

Participants in this study included fifteen social workers, 6 which were males and 9 females, eight law enforcement officers, 6 which were male and 2 females. In the officer group, 5 identified as Caucasian, 2 Hispanic, and 1 as Biracial, ranging from 26 to 40 years old. Social work participants identified as Hispanic (10), Caucasian (3), and Biracial (2), from age 25 to 50 years old. Law enforcement experience in patrol ranged from approximately 2 to 12 years. Workers' experience in Emergency Response (ER) ranged from 7 months to 12 years. The themes found in workers' perceptions of law enforcement follows.

Social Worker Perceptions of Law Enforcement

Child welfare workers in this study perceived law enforcement officers they interacted with in a multitude of ways. Pleasant experiences workers had alongside officers varied and did not have greatly patterned responses. The most repeated positive

attribute social workers assigned to officers was in instances in which officers exuded a respectful nature toward families, a willingness to work with families to create safety plans, and desire to avoid unnecessary detainment. Considering the values and goals of child welfare to strengthen and maintain families and to prevent further harm, it is unsurprising that child welfare workers would place the highest value on law enforcement officers' conduct related to how officers interact with and treat families.

Regarding less positive experiences with law enforcement, over half of the child welfare workers who participated in this study spoke about their impressions of law enforcement officers being standoffish during interactions. Of participants, both male and female workers of various ages and ethnic backgrounds felt as though responding officers appeared annoyed for being called out to (neglect) calls that did not involve criminal charges.

 Police and sheriff's departments are tasked with public safety and maintaining social order, part of which involves responding to and preventing further crimes from being committed. Patrol units are the frontline response for law enforcement agencies. Officers who are assigned to patrol are tasked with responding to calls for service that can be unpredictable and vary greatly both in risk and potential for violence.

When approaching calls, officers are trained to have a commanding presence and to make quick assessments based on the presenting information. Conversely, ER workers responding to referrals focus on building rapport with the family and consider the family's history, current circumstance, circles of support, strengths and areas that require adjustments during their initial investigation. The approach to investigations is one area where differing philosophies regarding the role of each professional and approach to their relationships with families become apparent—although safety is the primary priority of child welfare services (CWS) and law enforcement, child welfare also prioritizes the

maintenance of families when it is possible, whereas law enforcement's focus on crimes that have occurred.

Another difference that is apparent in the ways in which the professions interact with children and families is the amount of time the professionals engage with them. Like workers, officers are also responsible for writing up reports for each call for service they attend. Workers, however, may hold onto referrals and have ongoing contact with families for up to two weeks prior to transferring the case, referring out, or closing the referral. Considering the differing mindsets and function of patrol units and ER workers have, as well as the philosophies that underline each profession—child welfare focusing on strengthening families and law enforcement focusing on whether laws have been broken—it is possible to envision the "annoyance" officers display when called out to child welfare calls, specifically dirty homes in which no arrest will be made. While it is understandable that officers would rather attend to more "exciting" or higher risk calls, there is something to be said for the need for prioritization of issues relating to child welfare in all its forms. As workers who participated in this study have stated, there could be a lack of officer knowledge of the threats to safety and well-being a filthy home could be only one symptom of.

A theme that cut across age, race and gender of child welfare worker participants related to the power imbalance between law enforcement officers and social workers, how this difference manifests, as well as how this disparity gets handled. As has been discussed throughout this paper, child welfare workers in Fresno and Tulare Counties are unable to place a Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] Section 300 Hold when children are at risk or in danger and require the assistance of law enforcement, who have the authority to place 300 holds. When law enforcement officers do not agree with the need for a 300 hold, social workers must write a Protective Custody Warrant (PCW) and wait for a judge to approve before detaining youth. In situations where child welfare

participants encountered officers who did not agree with worker findings regarding the need to remove children from a home, workers recounted being dismissed and "bossed around" by officers. Workers stated that officers would not change their minds once their decision was made, regardless of the introduction of new information nor the worker's supervisor advocating on the worker's behalf. Workers recounted feeling as though they had to "beg" or "sell themselves," their knowledge, and the information they had on families to obtain a hold from officers. Child welfare workers also shared experiences in which officers wanted to place 300 holds and workers preferred to work with the family to avoid detention. In the situations which officers wanted children to be detained, workers stated officers became irate and make comments such as, "You do what I tell you to do."

Considerations for this occurrence can be associated with the duty of law enforcement officers to have an authoritative presence. Additionally, officers are trained to follow California penal codes, the Constitution, Welfare and Institution Codes, department polices, among others. Laws and policies governing police work do not always account for nuances or circumstances faced by people of various backgrounds. Officers may feel strongly that they are following the rules, which are rigid or black and white. For officers, there is significant concern and consideration relating to personal liability. If officers place a 300 hold when it is unclear if all criteria have been met, officers are held personally responsible for their decisions, without the backing of their agency. With qualified immunity in mind, is possible that the dismissive reactions from law enforcement stem from fear of repercussions of placing a hold where it is not within the law. It is also possible that in some instances, officers dismiss social workers' perspectives due to officers undervaluing the knowledge or expertise of child welfare workers. When officers and workers cannot find common ground, what gets lost is the education, knowledge, and philosophies of social work, which strive not only to follow

the laws, but to meet people where they are and to address concerns in the least harmful way. The themes found in perceptions law enforcement had of child welfare workers follows.

Law Enforcement Perceptions of
    Social Workers

Not unlike child welfare participants, law enforcement officers who participated in this research perceived their interactions with child welfare workers in numerous ways. Also like the other group of respondents, officers varied regarding what they considered positive facets of working with child welfare workers. The most frequent response shared by officers regarding what they liked when working with child welfare was when workers were perceived as willing to work with families to avoid removal of youth from the home.

A theme that was derived from law enforcement interviews and which cut across ethnic identity, gender and age was their perception that some child welfare workers were being lazy, lacking urgency and not wanting to do work. Officers conveyed frustration at workers' requests for 300 holds when no crime was committed, as well as when workers seemed to have paperwork and knowledge of the family's background. Officers also perceived workers' attempts to make safety plans when officers wanted to detain children as lazy. Interestingly, the same number of officers who considered workers as lazy also cited different professional definitions of risk as barriers to collaboration.

As outlined in the previous section, it is possible that officers' approach to dealing with situations via immediate action conflicts with workers' methods of assessing past, present, as well as future protective and risk factors. The notion that workers are lazy when asking for a 300 hold for a family they have previous information on highlights the difference in pace in which the professionals operate and illustrates an area in of misunderstanding of child welfare on the part of officers. For instance, if a family has

previously come to the attention of child welfare services (CWS), old referrals, basic identifying information and narratives will be accessible to social workers at the time of the new referral, even if the worker did not have the case before. Workers' attempts to legitimize the need for a hold via the family's history and/or recent behavior is misunderstood by officers as not wanting to do the work required to obtain a Protective Custody Warrant (PCW). While it is possible that workers may try to take the "easier" route in some cases, it is also plausible that workers have been trying to work with families before electing to detain children. After workers meet with families and acknowledge department concerns, it is typical that workers would monitor the functioning of families over the course of weeks. Families could show improvement at one point and worsen at the time of workers requesting a hold.

Another possible contributor to officers' perceptions is the differing definitions of imminent risk the institutions have. Officers intend to stop and respond to crimes that have occurred, or other situations where the risk is deemed immediate. While a child being with a caretaker who constantly moves from hotels to hotels is not a crime, workers may be aware of the mom's history of substance abuse or that the mom is constantly on the run due to a domestic violence relationship. While workers could opt for a PCW, the danger and risk for this situation would be considered higher and illicit a more immediate response from child welfare. Waiting two or three days to for a PCW could be too late.

Misunderstanding the role, philosophy and education guiding the practice of child welfare workers could also be at play in situations where officers perceived workers as lazy for wanting to create a safety plan when officers wanted to place a 300 hold. From the perspective of law enforcement participants, workers did not want to remove children to avoid doing more work. Social workers who talked about the phenomenon cited their approach to see the family holistically. Workers placed emphasis on maintaining families and avoiding traumatizing youth in situations that could be resolved. Workers considered

whether families had previous child welfare involvement, what support the family had, and whether the concerns could be resolved quickly, as with a dirty home. Given that child welfare strives to be family-centered, it is understandable workers would rather give parents an opportunity to make changes and to keep kids with their caretakers without intervention.

In the following section is an examination of ways in which the organizational structures of child welfare and law enforcement influence the ways professionals conceptualize potential solutions to improve interagency collaboration.

Influence of Institutions on Interagency Improvement

Following the discussion of social worker and law enforcement officer perceptions of each other, participants of the study provided insight to the ways in which their institutional affiliations guided their practice and impacted their interactions with professionals from another institution. What also became apparent through data analysis was the ways in which institution membership shaped the solutions offered by social workers and law enforcement officers relating to improving interactions with each other.

When asked what would improve interactions between child welfare workers and law enforcement, workers were clear in their belief that the working relationship they have with officers would improve when officers had a better understanding of the workers' roles. Workers spoke about the need for officers to receive training on the policies, methods, process, and philosophies that guide child welfare and social work more generally. Workers expressed their desire for officers to learn about the theoretical and practical approaches to practice that child welfare utilize. Workers spoke about Safety Organized Practice (SOP) and trauma-informed care (TIC) as areas where they would like to see officers receive education.

SOP is both a set of tools and strategies used in child welfare that is trauma-and-culturally-informed and informed by evidence (California Social Work Education Center [CalSWEC], 2022). In using SOP, child welfare departments seek to engage families, strengthen families' social support, and develop plans based on the unique strengths and needs of a family. The toolkit seeks to situate families and workers as partners and collaborators to increase safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families (CalSWEC, 2022). Trauma-informed care (TIC) is a practice adopted by CWS agencies and other institutions to realize the ubiquitous influence of trauma on functioning and life circumstances, to recognize signs or symptoms of trauma, to approach work necessary in child welfare from a trauma-informed lens and to avoid causing more harm (Trauma-Informed Oregon [TIO], 2021).

Child welfare is a field which is commonly associated with trauma—children experience trauma and abuse at the hand of their caregivers and the process of being removed from one's home and family can be incredibly traumatic. Social workers' use of SOP and a trauma-informed approach to engaging with families can aid workers in better understanding the distinct needs of the family but also minimize unnecessary re-traumatization (CalSWEC, 2022). Considering that law enforcement officers are also involved during investigation of child abuse and neglect, as well as the detention of children, it is understandable that social workers believe officers would benefit from learning strategies to effectively work with families and reduce avoidable harm.

Both groups of participants wanted to reach better understanding. Officers specifically wanted to learn about the role of social workers, including their responsibilities and the criteria they follow when investigating abuse and neglect. Officers also wanted opportunities to explain their side of child abuse and neglect investigations. The next section revisits grounded theory and connects this study to previous research.

Grounded Theory Revisited

Although the researcher did not have preconceived notions about what the two groups would say, several responses were consistent with previous research on the subject. Because information shared from participant interviews was majorly consistent with existing research, no new theories were derived from this study. In the following paragraph is a discussion of the congruent current findings with preceding studies.

Existing research surrounding the working relationship between child welfare workers and law enforcement speaks to the successes, challenges, and different circumstances which the professionals interact with each other. Previous research displays the importance of open dialogue between law enforcement officers and child welfare workers (Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017) and respect and understanding of each other's roles (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017; Jeyasingham, 2016). This theme could be seen in the experience of social workers feeling as though officers did not understand their role or acknowledge their point of view.

Participants of this study stated the need for improved understanding, communication, and collaboration. Additionally in prior research and discussed infrequently in this study is the benefit of professionals working together for longer periods of time through the process of a case and getting to know professionals from the other institution (Bowen & Nhan, 2020; Cowley et al., 2018). The notion that law enforcement officers and workers from child welfare encounter conflict when their approaches to interviewing families –and particular forms of knowledge regarding abuse and neglect—are misaligned is also consistent with previous research and with participants' experiences (Shannon & Concubhair, 2016). What previous research also highlights is the unique professional discourse, organizational culture, and procedures regarding intervention (Jeyasingham, 2016).

Social worker participants in this study shared their preference for officers allow them to take the lead when engaging families, as well as their belief that law enforcement agencies would benefit from learning techniques from trauma-informed approaches to guide their practice. It is conceivable that conflict could arise from either professional feeling an interview or investigation is not being conducted in the manner they are used to, as well as when the social worker and officer do not see eye-to-eye on the risks, danger, and strengths a family has. Additional organizational structures to consider brought to light through interviews are the laws that govern the law enforcement and social worker response to child abuse. Although child welfare workers and officers follow the same laws regarding the definitions of child abuse, officers may not always act in situations where criteria for a hold is not clearly met. While workers may push for a hold, officers can face personal consequences of infringing on the rights of parents and families.

The following section discusses the limitations of this study.

Limitations

There were limitations to this study, from the amount of time allotted to complete the study, the difficulty in obtaining permission from various law enforcement and child welfare organizations, advertising and gaining participants from the study and technological difficulties utilizing Zoom.

The researcher had two semesters and one break to work on and complete this study. In that time the researcher had to wait for not only school review boards to approve the study, but also recruit and request participation from employees. It was challenging to discern who to contact from various departments, specifically with law enforcement agencies. From personal and educational connections, the researcher was able to get contact information for Fresno Police Department (FPD), Fresno Sherriff's

Office (FSO), Madera Sherriff's Office (MSO) and Madera Police Department (MPD). Additionally, the researcher was able to bolster educational connections from the university's social work program to contact Fresno and Tulare County CWS. The researcher originally planned on having equal numbers of participants from each agency, but was unable to acquire approval from every department. Following the departments' approval for the researcher to interview staff, finding volunteers was challenging. When struggling to recruit participants from FPD, the researcher was granted permission to attend a briefing prior to a shift start in Central district. From the briefing, more participants came forward and told their coworkers to volunteer. The researcher was unable to attend briefings or recruit participants in person for other department agencies, which could have improved the recruitment process. The main method of obtaining participants was via email and snowball recruitment, which made participant acquirement unpredictable. While the researcher was able to obtain 15 social workers from Fresno and Tulare County CWS, FPD was the only law enforcement agency that participated in the study. While the researcher was able to get some perspective from law enforcement officers, the study is not representative of all law enforcement agencies in the region. Each department is different and would expectedly have unique insight to contribute. Because of this, the research does not represent different types of law enforcement agencies—such as the differing perspectives of police departments that serve cities and sheriffs' offices that serve counties.

When volunteers came forward, most interviews took place over Zoom. However, due to connectivity issues, it was not possible to see every person face to face on Zoom, or to use the application in general. Sometimes the Internet connection was not secure, and the audio lagged or cut out. It may have been more advantageous to interview participants face-to-face.

Another limitation of the study is the lack of attention given to identity markers in the recruitment of participants. It is possible that law enforcement officers are predominately Caucasian males, and that most child welfare workers are Hispanic females, however, the researcher did not account for racial identity, age and biological sex when recruiting participants. The researcher could have attempted to obtain professionals with identities in more equal numbers to delve into patterns related to identity markers. Additionally, the researcher did not ask questions that would lend insight to how race, biological sex, or age would shape the interactions between law enforcement and child welfare workers. While the study had limitations, there takeaways from the study. Takeaways of the study follow.

Key Takeaways

This research illustrated the strengths, challenges, and potential actions for law enforcement and child welfare agencies in the Central Valley of California. The participants were asked to talk about their experiences working with professionals from either child welfare or law enforcement, to give ideas about how the relationship between institutions could improve, to rate their level of understanding of policies and laws that govern their response to child maltreatment and how effective they believed those laws are. Regarding their positive interactions with law enforcement, child welfare workers spoke of collaborative, supportive attitudes, willingness to work with families to avoid detention of minors, assist workers with a safety standby, and when officers allow workers to run investigations where crimes have not occurred. Officers liked working with social workers who were willing to work with families, aware of the role law enforcement officers, workers who were collaborative, and were also happy to be called for standby assistance for workers. Both groups also enjoyed when they had opportunities to work together for longer periods of time. For areas needing improvement, workers

disliked when officers were standoffish and appeared as though they did not want to be on calls, when officers considered themselves the sole authority or shot caller and were unwilling to hear what the social workers had to say. Participants from law enforcement disliked when workers seemed though they wanted to take the easy way out and felt as though child welfare workers would ask for a 300 hold from officers instead of getting a PCW signed by a judge out of laziness and the differing definitions of imminent risk. The responses of participants highlight the commonalities between groups and where their organizational cultures may impact how their interactions go.

Participants provided insight to their beliefs regarding potential resolutions to improve the working relationship between institutions. Improved communication and understanding of the role of the other profession, ongoing trainings, briefings, and opportunities to meet each other. The recommendations of the study follow.

Recommendation

This study sought to uncover the experiences of child welfare social workers and law enforcement officers who share the responsibility of safeguarding children, how the groups experience interacting with each other, what they felt would improve interactions between them, and how effective the groups believe the laws governing protecting children are. Recommendations for future research include continued development and more recruitment of departments where possible. This study only included 8 FPD officers, and 15 workers from Fresno and Tulare County CWS, as there was limited time to recruit more participants or approval from other agencies. With more interviewees and department participation, a more nuanced look into how different agencies operate and experience interagency collaboration. Future research should also take further consideration into the ways in which identity markers such as age, race, and biological sex impact interactions between professionals.

Conceivable changes to come from this research involve suggestions brought to light by participants in the study, who experience the child protection community of practice (CoP). A recurring theme throughout the study was the lack of understanding between professionals. As suggested by both groups, joint trainings, briefings and/or meetings could benefit the working relationship and facilitate better communication between law enforcement and child welfare in the near future and for the long term. Through interviewing participants, the need for law enforcement officers to understand the role of child welfare workers and processes of child welfare services (CWS) more generally was striking. Officers expressed the desire to understand the role of workers, to know their responsibilities and to become acquainted with the ways they conceptualize their decisions. From the perspective of workers, law enforcement officers would benefit most from an understanding of criteria workers look for and trainings in practical tools (Safety Organized Practice, trauma-informed care) that workers use when engaging with families who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing child abuse and neglect.

Some participants spoke of enjoying working with the same officer or worker for a longer period, which allowed them to build a relationship with each other. Participants spoke of having professionals from the other institution being stationed at their office. While the idea for continued interactions and opportunities to build rapport with members law enforcement or child welfare is invaluable, the structural change of the institutions is not likely. Future research should assess the functioning of Children's Advocacy Centers and whether increased CACs would benefit the working relationship between institutions. If departments agree and commit to holding joint briefings to discuss strengths, areas of concern and next steps, or agree to quarterly, yearly, or bi-yearly joint trainings, relationships between officers and workers can be fostered and sustained.
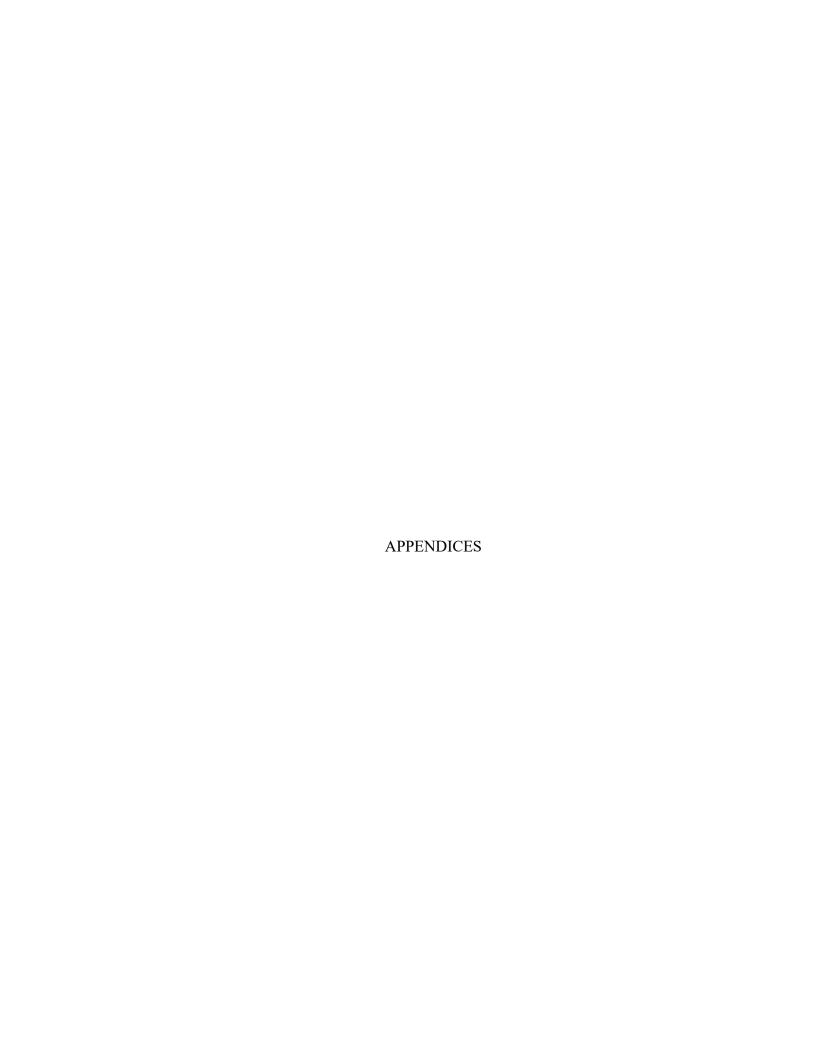
Conclusion

The responsibility of child protection is shared across multiple disciplines. At the forefront of safeguarding children are Emergency Response workers from child welfare and law enforcement officers assigned to patrol. While the interactions of law enforcement officers and child welfare workers is necessary, the working relationship between institutions is not always seamless due to differing organizational differences in procedures, professional cultures, and schools of knowledge. When misunderstandings and disagreements about risk, danger, and safety present themselves, the consequences can be fatal. To work toward a more collaborative process between child welfare and law enforcement, this study enlisted the experiences of social workers and law enforcement officers who interact with each other when attending to child abuse and neglect referrals. Through conducting interviews, it became apparent of the need for better understanding of roles and philosophical lens of each professional. With better understanding, communication, respect for differences and acknowledgment for each other's strengths, the duty of both protecting children and strengthening families is possible.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LETTER REQUESTING PARTICIPATION CWS

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Magdalena Fitzgerald and I am a second year Master of Social Work and Title IV-E student at California State University, Fresno. I am currently working on a research study in which I hope to obtain approval to interview social workers from the Emergency Response task area. The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of ER social workers in their interactions with patrol unit law enforcement officers in the context of investigating child maltreatment. In gathering information from both social workers and officers, I hope to highlight how professionals from the institutions experience working with each other. Through understanding of the working relationship between the two agencies, positive changes are possible.

Professionals from both child welfare and law enforcement serve the community in their own right, intervening when protection of life and prevention of harm are at stake. While social workers in child protection and officers share the responsibility of safeguarding children, collaboration between professionals may not always be seamless due to lack of understanding of the other's role, differing professional perspectives and/or agency protocols. Through this research, I hope to give voice to professionals who experience this interagency collaboration phenomenon.

With the help of Fresno State faculty members Dr. Andrew Jones, Dr. Salvador Montana, and Dr. Cheryl Whittle I hope to conduct focus groups interviews—a list of questions to be asked in the interview are attached. The study will include demographic information regarding the department name, amount of years social workers have worked with the department, race, ethnic identity and age. Focus groups will take place over video-conferencing application, Zoom. While interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes, names and other identifiable information will not be reported in the research for privacy of participants. Following the completion of the study, recordings of interviews will be erased.

The work of child welfare agencies in our community is invaluable. With your permission, I seek to examine the current status of the interagency interactions child welfare social workers have with law enforcement. I believe collaboration between institutions can only be fully realized through deeper understanding. I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Magdalena Fitzgerald

APPENDIX B: LETTER REQUESTING PARTICIPATION L.E.O.

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Magdalena Fitzgerald and I am a second year Master of Social Work student at California State University, Fresno. I am currently working on a research study in which I hope to obtain approval to interview 8-10 patrol officers. The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of officers in their interactions with child welfare social workers in the context of investigating child maltreatment. In gathering information from both law enforcement officers and social workers in Tulare and Fresno Counties, I hope to highlight how professionals from the institutions experience working with each other. Through understanding of the working relationship between the institutions, positive changes are possible.

Professionals from both law enforcement and child welfare serve the community in their own right, intervening when protection of life and prevention of harm are at stake. While law enforcement officers and social workers in child protection share the responsibility of safeguarding children, collaboration between professionals may not always be seamless due to lack of understanding of the other's role, differing professional perspectives and/or agency protocols. Through this research, I hope to give voice to professionals who experience the interagency collaboration phenomenon.

With the help of Fresno State faculty members Dr. Andrew Jones and Dr. Salvador Montana, I am conducting one-on-one interviews—a list of questions to be asked in the interview are attached. The study will collect information regarding the department name, years of work experience, race, ethnic identity, and age. Names will not be used in the reporting of this study. Interviews will take place over video- conferencing application, Zoom and take about 10-15 minutes. While interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes, names and other identifiable information will not be reported in the research for privacy of participants. Following the completion of the study, recordings of interviews will be erased. Each participant receives a gift card to Starbucks.

The work of patrol units in our community is invaluable. With your permission, I seek to explore the current status of the interagency interactions officers have with social workers in child welfare. I believe collaboration between institutions can only be fully realized through deeper understanding. I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,
Magdalena Fitzgerald

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to obtain information regarding how Child Welfare social workers in Emergency Response and law enforcement officers who are in patrol units experience their interactions with each other when it comes to responding to calls regarding child abuse. Information gathered can highlight factors that both help and hurt the collaborative relationship between professionals from different institutions in their shared responsibility of safeguarding youth. This study seeks to understand the experiences of professionals from both institutions when working with each other with the shared goal of child protection.

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed by the researcher. The interview will consist of 10 questions. The location of the interview will be conducted using Zoom teleconferencing technology. The interview is estimated to take 30 to 40 minutes to complete and will be audio recorded for data collection purposes. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Potential Benefits: Participation in this study will help to examine how the working relationship between social workers in child welfare and patrol officers functions. The study provides professionals from both institutions an environment in which to share their experiences and may lead to further discussion and potentially, positive changes in how the groups understand and work together.

Potential Risks: Risk associated with participating in this study is likely to be low. All recordings, transcripts, and other information will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Voluntary Participation and Withdraw: Participation in this study is voluntary. After initial acceptance of involvement, participants may change their mind and decide to withdraw. If one decides to withdraw prior to the completion of the study, the data collected from them will not be used in the study. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your future relations with California State University, Fresno. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw and 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 research.

Participants in the study will receive a $5 Starbucks gift card as a form of gratitude for participating in the study.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact the researcher at mbfitz92@mail.fresnostate.edu. If you have any additional questions later, please contact Dr. Salvador Montana at 559-278-8581 or smontana@csufresno.edu and he will be happy to assist you. Questions regarding the rights of research subjects may be directed to Dr. Jennifer Randles, Chair, CSU Fresno Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects at 559-278-5146 or jrandles@csufresno.edu.

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. You will be given a copy of the consent form.

Signature _____   **Date**

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE CWS

What experiences do Emergency Response social workers have when interacting with law enforcement as it relates to the investigation of child maltreatment?

Demographic questions:

1. What department do you work for?
2. How long have you worked in Emergency Response?
3. What racial group do you identify with?
4. In terms of culture, what is your ethnicity?
5. What is your age?

Interview Questions:

1. What is your understanding of the role of a law enforcement officer in the investigation of child abuse allegations?
2. Tell me about your experience interacting with either sheriff's deputies or police officers from law enforcement agencies while attending to child abuse and neglect referrals. [Probing]: what are positive/negative interactions you have had?
3. What would improve your interaction with the officer/deputy?
4. How familiar are you with policies that govern responding to child maltreatment?

5. How effective do you think these policies are?

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE LEO

What are the experiences patrol officers have when working with child welfare social workers as it relates to investigating child maltreatment?

Demographic questions:

1. What department do you work for?
2. How long have you worked in patrol?
3. What racial group do you identify with?
4. In terms of culture, what is your ethnic identity?
5. What is your age?

 Interview questions:

1. What is your understanding of the role of child welfare social workers in the investigation of child abuse allegations?
2. Tell me about your experiences interacting with social workers from child welfare agencies such as Children's Protective Services. [Probing]: what are positive/negative interactions you have had?
3. What would improve interactions with child welfare social workers?
4. How familiar are you with laws/policies that govern responding to child maltreatment?

    5. How effective do you think these policies are?

APPENDIX F: HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

Administrative Details Form

Department Risk Review

Risk Level of Protocol
Minimal Risk

General Review Comment

Department Approval

I approve this protocol

Department Reviewer

Crawford, Marcus Royal

Study Status

Study Status

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