Perception of Social Justice in child welfare social work practice-
A Phenomenological Exploration.

Dissertation Manuscript

Submitted to Northcentral University

School of Social and Behavioral Sciences
in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

by

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June/2020

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Abstract

This qualitative research examined social justice phenomena in social work practice as perceived by Child Welfare social workers within the Child Welfare system. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 Child Welfare social workers between the ages of 36 and 76 who were employed for a minimum of five years. A purposive sampling method was used to recruit voluntary participants from social worker populations through an online social media website. Thematic data analysis generated four significant themes - social justice identity, advocacy, values and privilege - and 36 sub-themes, which included social attitude, reflective thinking, changes in policy and legislation/power, and understanding/empathy. This study's findings indicated child welfare social workers used different words and meanings to define social justice and the perceived application of social justice to practice differently. However, all participants reported perceptions of privilege versus oppression observed from the child welfare social work practice process, supporting the theoretical perspective of critical social theory, mainly the opinions and social attitudes of child welfare social workers about social justice within the child welfare system. The current findings for research question one and two implied there is 1) the inability for child welfare social workers to commonly agree on one definition for social justice, and; (2) the uncertainty for child welfare social workers to apply social justice to social work practice solely based on the National Social Work Association and child welfare agencies insistence on seeking social justice for clients. The research implications included consideration of professional and personal development and cultural competence for child welfare social work practice. Administrators are recommended to organize professional development training on informed social justice to help child welfare social workers, define and apply social justice. An important recommendation for future research is surveying child welfare

2

social workers to determine how social justice perceptions affect the National Association of Social Workers' standards for training, performance, and instruction inclusion of ethical standards as a competency.

Acknowledgements

"Of all the people I have ever met, you are the most determined person I know."
Ronnie-Elaine Veal 1985

My success in this every winding journey would not have been accomplished without the support of my family and friends. I am grateful for your patience to my consistent response, "I am writing or reading research." I am especially thankful to my parents, Albert Veal, Jr. and Ronnie-Elaine (Eugene) Veal who always believed in me and expected nothing less than for me to capture my dreams. I need to thank my Dad, who encouraged me with a flood of text messages and a gentle listening ear every time I thought I was stuck. My sister, Ulanda Michelle, I thank you for every phone call you accepted from me which the conversation begun with a complaint or concern about my journey. To my son, Kendall Remil Robertson, through the dark, there comes light. To the very end, I will be on your team. Please do not ever forget. I also must include in my granddaughter, Nikole Athena Robertson. During this journey, she was old enough to understand "Granny had homework" and was patient enough to quietly keep me company when she wanted to help me study. I want to thank my Chair, Dr. Deepa Tanksale, and Subject Matter Expert, Dr. Deborah Circo, for recognizing my diligence and determination to complete the program. I want to acknowledge my academic and financial advisor, Stacey Hamernick, who answered every call and responded to every email.

In celebration of life, I recognize the events in my life during this journey, which proved to challenge me and proved me to a more determined level toward succeeding. I am thankful for those situations which proved to work in my favor and created a graceful light. I believe I am truly blessed and highly favored. Lastly, to all the children and families I have encountered

during my tenure as a Child Welfare social worker, I pray you found I attempted to serve you

with transparency and integrity in the position of social justice.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

8

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

The American child welfare system provides services to children and families when a child is identified as vulnerable to physical, mental, and emotional harm due to an unsafe environment (National Association of Social Workers (NASW), 2018). The social worker's professional position plays a prominent role in providing appropriate services to the families receiving intervention through the system (Strier & Binyamin, 2013). The leading national and international professional social worker organizations provided the guidelines for extending appropriate services to children and families (Morgaine, 2014; NASW, 2018). Social Justice is one of the values, among the six core values, from the NASW standards rooted in the guidelines of the social work profession (NASW, 2018). Although social justice is a complex term, it is considered an organizing value and foundation of social work (Morgaine, 2014). The social work profession has been aligned with a commitment to social justice over the decades (Bhuyan, Bejan, & Jeyapal, 2017). Fonta and Maguire-Jack (2015) explained the practice of social work is historically the profession to promote social justice and challenge unfair treatment toward marginalized members of society.

Currently, social work practice models and frameworks include the implication of social justice in complex issues such as economic, political, and social imbalances along with cultural and gender issues (Harrison et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2017). While there is the ongoing association between social justice and social work practice (Moore et al., 2017), according to the research provided by Segal and Wagaman (2017) there are uncertainties of the alignment due to the challenge for social workers to define social justice and the uncertainty of how social justice is integrated with social work practice. To strengthen the collaboration between social justice and

social work, there is a need to establish what determines social justice in social work practice (Moore et al., 2017). As suggested by Harrison et al. (2016), the path toward building a stronger alliance is to consider the underlying need to establish a standard definition of social justice and unified application in social work practice.

In the child welfare system, the concept of social justice emerges through the protection of children against abuse and neglect (Keenan, Limone, & Sandoval, 2016). Understanding how child welfare social workers formulate social justice in social work practice will contribute to developing goals and processes sensitive to work performance (Morgaine, 2014). Seemingly, the consensus of a definition contributes to applying social justice frameworks and principles of social work, creating cohesiveness and collective understanding when applying social justice to social work practice.

There is not one given definition for the term social justice as a concept for the practice of social work (McLaughlin, Gray & Wilson, 2015; Morgaine, 2014). The importance of a succinct definition for social justice as it applies to the practice of social work has been reviewed and researched by scholars and experts in the social welfare field (Bywaters, 2015; Davidson-Arad & Benbenishty, 2016; Engstrom, 2017; Gasker & Fischer, 2014; Olson et al., 2013; Travis, 2017). There is an agreement among professionals to expand the volume of research and dialogue for the said topic of defining social justice and critical assessment to strengthen the foundation of practice, heighten the understanding of the social justice, and, address the social, political structures influencing the outcomes clients it is critical (Bent-Goodley & Hopps, 2016; Bhuyan, Bejan & Jeyapal, 2017; Hair, 2015; Havig, 2013; Irizarry et al., 2016; Wiener & Rosenwald, 2008).

Similar to the general practice of social work, associating social justice values to child welfare practice is a significant component to performance (DeLong-Hamilton, Krase & Bundy-Fazioli, 2016). The ethical standards created by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) stated child welfare social workers are to reject social injustice and to pursue social justice for clients (Bhuyan et al., 2017; NASW, 2017). A clear definition of social justice and guidelines to integrate social justice in daily practice is not provided (Williams, 2016; Wilson-Strydom, 2015).

In line with the studies of Wilson-Strydom (2015) and Williams (2016), Davidson et al. (2017) too addressed a social work practice framework of equality and fairness through evaluating an example of child welfare social work-related duties. Davidson et al. discovered that a high percentage of participants admitted to the uncertainty of how social justice is incorporated in the child welfare social worker's performance and revealed self-perception and the social worker's attitude toward the concept of the means to determine actions aligned with social justice.

When considering child welfare social worker's application of social justice to practice, Morgaine (2017) specifically questioned the perceptions of child welfare social workers behind the ability to define the meaning of social justice. Morgaine stated the difficulty of defining social justice within the context of social work practice could be due to child welfare social workers conceptualizing social justice-based social workers' attitudes toward individual rights and lack of knowledge to exclude understanding of global and cultural implications to social justice. Sharing the concern of challenges faced by child welfare workers, Ellet (2014) and Bent-Goodley (2014) also discussed the application of social justice within social work practice by examining the vagueness in the definition for social justice stemming from the attitude and

12

perception of social workers. As explained by Ellet (2014) and Bent-Goodley (2014), the lack of clarity in the definition imposed a level of uncertainty with how child welfare social workers operationalize their practice to align with the concept of social justice, which is essential with working within marginalized communities.

Complexities in the reflective thought process of social workers' casework could be the barriers of applying social justice to social work practice due to the unclear definition of social justice and the uncertainty of how to apply social justice to field practice (Bhuyan et al., 2017; Morgaine, 2014). Through genuinely embracing this fundamental value of applying social justice to social work practice, the profession can embed social justice in social work. Hence, it is necessary to understand the perception and attitude towards defining social justice by social workers and the application of this principle in the practice of social work (Carlson, Nguyen, & Reinardy, 2016; Crucil & Amundson, 2015; Lee & McAdams III, 2019; Munger, MacLeod, & Loomis, 2016; Richards-Schuster, 2015; Um, 2019; Windsor, Shorkey, & Battle, 2015)

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed by this study stemmed from how the child welfare social workers define the perceptions of social justice and how the social attitudes of social workers determined how to apply the concept of social justice to practice (McLaughlin et al., 2015, 2017). The prime objective in the profession of social work is providing services to improve human well-being and assist with meeting the basic needs of individuals (Irizarry et al., 2015). While there is extensive literature reviewing the discussion of the relation between social justice, social work, and social welfare (Bell & Romano, 2015; Morgaine, 2014; Olson et al., 2013), research relating specifically to how child welfare social workers perceive and examine social justice in their practice toward meeting the needs of children and families is minimal (Davis & Reber, 2016).

13

Child welfare social workers can pursue social justice for their children and families by aligning practice with the needs of the child and their families (Hansford, Ely, Flaherty & Meyer-Adams, 2017). However, additional research was called for about social justice as a useful advocacy tool for improving the well-being of clients (Bliss, 2015; Engler et al., 2019; Hardwick, 2014; Kilbane, 2014; Kozan & Blustein, 2018; Ramírez Stege, Brockberg, & Hoyt, 2018). Several articles written by scholars indicate value for including social justice within child welfare social workers (Bell & Romano, 2015; Morgaine, 2014; Olson et al., 2013).

The value of pursuing the definition of social justice and applying the concept to practice may help the child welfare social workers to lead intervention to reduce or eliminate the trauma which affects the familial structure (LaLiberte & Piescher (2015). Consequently, the value has an exceptional significance to the perception of social justice (Bell & Romano, 2015). There is intensely the acknowledgment by the social workers to recognize the impact of defining and applying social justice which affects the marginalized population of clients served in the child welfare system (Davis & Reber, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine child welfare social worker's perception of the definition of social justice and the application of the concept of social justice to practice. In the child welfare system, the concept of social justice emerges through the protection of children against abuse and neglect (Keenan, Limone, & Sandoval, 2016). Understanding how child welfare social workers formulate social justice in social work practice will contribute to developing goals and processes sensitive to work performance (Morgaine, 2014).   The qualitative phenomenological study design was used to

14

understand how the attitude of social workers influence or becomes a barrier for defining social justice and implementation in social work practice. There were 12 social workers recruited to participate in the study. The recruitment of the participants was closed when the data from these participants reached saturation, which occurs when the addition of more participants to a study does not result in further information or perspectives (Creswell, 2018).

For this study, participants were recruited from the following professional group: National Child Welfare Workforce Institute online social media website. A flyer containing details of the research study was posted on these websites. Interested participants contacted the researcher for any further questions. A Qualtrics link to the Informed consent form was provided on the flyer. Once the participants gave their informed consent, the participants were able to review the interview questions, and the participant arranged to speak with the researcher to complete the interview with the semi-structured questions and, if needed, scheduled a follow-up interview session. The completed semi-structured interview was reviewed, and the answers were analyzed through NVivo Pro 12 software to identify patterns, features, and themes.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study was Critical social theory. Critical theory was founded in 1923, by Marxist scholar, Carl Grünberg, at the commonly known Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt in Germany (Abromeit, 2013). The Institute was re-established in Frankfurt in 1953 after its affiliation with the Studies in Philosophy and Social Science program at Columbia University in New York City in 1935 (Abromeit, 2013). The Frankfurt School was a school of thought from a group of scholars developing critical theory and popularizing the interactive method of learning by questioning society's inconsistencies (Abromeit, 2013). A significant amount of Marx's activism and theoretical work was focused on

CST is mindful of the power in communication and action the service providers possibly generate and that of connection to clients and communities (Forte, 2007). Seemingly, the emphasis on the interconnectedness between social work practice and social justice places oppressed individuals and communities as vanguards toward promoting human liberation. As an empowerment perspective, CST exposes as a Marxist approach to a theoretical perspective striving for empowerment (Forte, 2007). The Marxism critical perspectives are ominously concerned with encouraging social action to establish environmental change (Feenberg, 2014).

The viewpoints from the critical perspective of Marxism support the point of this research for raising consciousness around the concept of defining and applying social justice in social work practice. Feenberg (2014) explained CST as an effort to reexamine and reject mainstream political, social, and intellectual views, analyze capitalism, encourages human liberation, and consequently attempts to expose control and oppression in their many forms. The emancipatory approach, known for increasing consciousness, involves issues such as addressing oppression to convert clients and communities into self-empowered citizens (Forte, 2007). For this research, the indication to formulate common words to define social justice is creating specific social justice language for social workers. This idea of a new way of creating and applying the social justice language will be perhaps become a significant change for social work practice. The implementation of collective knowledge can produce a new way of doing business through the establishment of new applications of social, behavioral action toward social work practice.

Accordingly, social work methodology as a practice is based on social concepts and moral values standards (Jütten, 2015). The methods incorporate primary responsibilities toward consideration of how to liberate the consciousness of the masses from oppression by the

16

capitalist system, and following that, to foster equal social change for all people (Feenberg, 2014) improving the social wellbeing of individuals and communities. Engstrom (2017) indicated that while there are concepts to formulate social work practice actions, there is also the development of scientific theoretical frameworks behind creating forms of knowledge toward improving the livelihood for all society. The scientific responsibilities of social work practice are shaped by theory range beyond the masteries, which are solely concept driven (Gair & Baglow, 2018).

There is theoretical practice-based knowledge combined with the general standards of social and moral standards, establishing the philosophical compatibility and incompatibility of social work practice (Gair & Baglow, 2018). Scholars have combined theoretical perspectives to examine the common symptoms of oppression (Jütten, 2015). With the mandatory ethical standards, social workers must maintain a level of ability to address the systemic causes of oppression and obtain practical skills to attain the standard objectives. The research completed by this dissertation examined the concepts and perceptions of social justice within social work practice to increase the efficacy of child welfare social workers in addressing micro and macro practice issues. It is the scope of CST, which shapes the relationship between the social and moral mandates and that of the theories toward the wellbeing of individuals and communities (Jütten, 2015). CST intends to support progressive social change by identifying and critically analyzing the disparity of both privilege and oppression.

Functioning from CST's stance commits social work science to the possibility of critical practice (Sloane et al., 2018). In this context, practice refers to the correlation amid practice, theory, and knowledge that can precipitate changes about clients, social workers, and social welfare. The consideration of CST's significance as related to social work practice is the

17

fundamental principle of how social workers understand social justice. The examining the principles and working to uphold the commitment to an ethical standard in which CST can advance social work practice toward progressive, guiding intentions (Perry et al., 2020; Sloane et al., 2018). It is the commitment of social justice regulating social work practice as ethically bound to address the child welfare social practice system, which provides intervention services to marginalized populations (O'Leary, P., & Tsui, M., 2019). The framework supports social workers and clients to develop and implement solutions toward social justice as an alternative and innovative practice. Forte (2007) emphasized it is the responsibility of social service providers to advocate for meeting the needs of individuals and ensure the opportunities and resources for communities, which in return conceptualize the common good between private and public domains.

As a theoretical and philosophical orientation to social welfare, CST is increasingly presented in social work theory and practice to address the oppressive socio-political conditions influencing individuals and communities served by community service providers (Steen, 2018). CST is significant as it focuses on social justice and empowerment (O'Leary, P., & Tsui, M., 2019). This theory explores social justice and correlates the relationship of ideology, knowledge at the center of the learning experience (Tsui, M., 2019). Accurately, for this research, CST is aligned with the social worker's mandate, the exploration of ethical standards underlying the essential incongruities concerning the ethical standards of social work practice for both essential social work practice and particularly child welfare social work practice (Spolander et al., 2015).

Nature of the Study

The qualitative phenomenological study design examined how the perceptions by child welfare social workers influence the social attitudes toward social justice and the action of

18

applying social justice to practice. It was beneficial to examine child welfare social workers' attitude toward social justice and identify the factors for integrating work-related skills of social justice advocacy associated with the best practice for children and their families (Bent-Goodley & Hopps, 2016; Bhuyana et al., 2017; Sayre & Sar, 2015). The qualitative approach of the study helped provide an in-depth, more robust understanding of how child welfare social workers think concerning the development of defining social justice and how social workers are guided to apply social justice to practice (Bird, 2016). For this study, the phenomenological design focuses on the commonality of the lived experiences of a particular group of child welfare social workers. Creswell (2013) offers the fundamental goal of this design is to arrive at the description of the nature of the particular phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews conducted with the group of child welfare social workers with first-hand knowledge of child welfare social work experience assisted with learning more about social workers in terms of the phenomenon as well as the context typically influenced by the experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

A semi-structured interview for this qualitative phenomenological study was the most appropriate approach to complete this study. Interviews are expedient methods of obtaining qualitative data about opinions and attitudes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research questions were formulated to evaluate the child welfare social workers' responses toward their attitudes toward defining social justice and how and the concept of social justice is applied to practice. Data analysis aimed to provide insight into the child welfare social workers' understanding of social justice and application of the concept of social justice in their practice. For this qualitative research, a semi-structured interview was used to uncover how child welfare social workers' social attitudes guide the perception of social justice to then applied to practice.

19

Marshall and Rossman (1989) and Merriam (1998) determined that qualitative research data collection and analysis is a simultaneous process. Marshall & Rossman explained qualitative data analysis includes classifying persons, things, and events, and the characterizations of the properties. The Colaizzi method of data analysis is often used to interpret and organize meaningful information into themes for qualitative research (Colaizzi, 1978). The seven steps of Colaizzi's procedure (Colaizzi, 1978) for analyzing data collected in an interview were used for this study. The Colaizzi analysis entails the procedural steps as follows: In the first step, a description of each person participating in the study is read to gain a sense of the participants, knowledge of the participant's feelings, thoughts, and ideas are included identifying significant statements and phrases to relate the information to the entire content. For this study, it was recognized by the first research question the significance in difference extracted in the descriptions of how child welfare social workers define the term social justice. The interview responses were analyzed to know the participant's perceptions and attitudes related to social justice. The meanings were sorted and organized into themes, and themes were clustered into categories of all the resulting ideas. A color-coded system was used to highlight the specific themed categories for a preliminary analysis. Finally, an exhaustive description of the lived experiences was written to structure the phenomena. Validation was solicited to compare the detailed results from the participants' lived experiences.

Research Questions

To determine how the social attitudes of child welfare social workers influence their perceptions toward defining social justice and applying the concept of social justice in social welfare practice, the following research questions were asked:

RQ1. How do child welfare social workers define social justice?

RQ2. In what way do child welfare social workers apply the concept of social justice in social welfare practice?

Significance of the Study

This study intended to contribute to the overall knowledge base of social justice implementation to social work practice and the understanding of the thought process by social workers on how to define and apply social justice to social work practice. Historically, social work practice has implications, undoubtedly including social justice when serving individual clients and the community (Bird, 2016). Currently, there is a concern in the lack of consensus by social workers for the definition of social justice, and there lies the struggle to apply the concept of social justice to practice for serving clients and communities (Davidson-Arad & Benbenishty, 2014). It is intended by the formality of practice for social workers to provide services enlisting the concept of social justice yet, the work is rhetorical and lacks to addressing the injustices suffered by clients due to the multiple definition and inconsistencies of application (Harrison et al., 2016). The initial presentation of social justice to the social work profession comes through instruction from social work education programs. Social work instructors increasingly find themselves responsible for offering students curriculum igniting the discussion to explore the development of understanding toward social justice, and the relationship of social justice to social work when applied to practice (Bywaters, 2015; Davidson et al., 2017).

21

Definitions of Key Terms

American child welfare system. The Child Welfare system of America is an institutional

organization created to protect children of diverse populations who are at the risk of

harm, abuse, and neglect from their biological parents or guardians by providing services of child

protection investigation, family-focused services, foster care, and adoption (Yang & Ortega,

2016).

Child welfare social work practice. The child welfare social practice is a service intended to

provide resources of shelter, financial resources, and public health concerned with the social,

mental, and physical well-being of children identified as the victim from the effects by the lack

of protective parental supervision and care and poverty (Whitaker et al., 2015).

(Social) Attitude. A pattern of behaviors or set of tendencies, a condition response,

predisposition to a specific adjustment to social stimuli. Social Attitudes are involved in

functional areas, including conformity, social perception, and prejudice. (Dockery& Bedeian,

1989).

Social change. Social change is the sociological term defined as the change in social structure to

the transformation of beliefs, social interactions, practices, organization, and structures of society

(Forenza, 2016).

Social justice. Social Justice is the administration of proper and fair principles adapting to the

natural laws constituted for all persons are treated equally without prejudice respective to gender,

race, ethnic origin, and religion (Harrison, VanDeusen, & Way, 2016).

Social welfare. Social welfare is the political advocacy concept aimed at reforming social

institutions to respond to maintaining or improving the livelihood of populations in need while

contributing to the solution of recognized social problems, or to improve the well-being of persons, groups, or communities (Ruth, Sisco, & Marshall, 2017).

Social work. Social work is a human service career with the fundamental objective of improving the quality of life for impoverished individuals and families through policy and program. initiatives and direct (face-to-face), case management service delivery (Schiettecat, Roets, & Vandenbroeck, 2016).

Social Work ethics. Social work ethics is a defined set of value standards for proper behavior regarding the social system written in codes determined by the National Association of Social Work (NASW, 2017).

Summary

For child welfare social workers, the social justice concept is essential to implement and develop the objectives and goals for a higher level of excellence in practice with children and families (Davidson et al., 2017) However, research on perception, and attitudes can serve as lasting or brief composites of one's beliefs and values. Patterns of beliefs and opinions are predisposed reactions to objective, situations and people. For this study, the implementation of child welfare social worker attitudes and perceptions of social justice in the child welfare system is critical to the performance of child welfare social workers (Bent-Goodley, 2017; Dahl, 2016; Gasker & Fischer, 2014). This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to examine the social attitude toward and perception of child welfare social worker's knowledge of social justice and understanding of the application of social justice in their practice as social workers in the child welfare system. There were 12 social workers as participants for this study with years of experience ranging between 5-25years. The participants volunteered to answer semi-structured interview questions designed to understand social justice as applied to social work standard

23

practice. Nvivo Pro 12 software was used to do the content analysis of the interviews. The qualitative analysis helped to generate themes valuable in understanding the definition and implementation of social justice within the practice of child welfare social work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The current study answered a call for conceptual research related to child welfare social workers' attitudes toward defining social justice in social work practice. Recognizing the universal criteria to identify social justice as a mandatory standard for social work practice, there is the concern that there is no one well-defined term for social justice and more so, there was lack of understanding as to how to apply the concept of social justice to child welfare social work practice (Carlson, Nguyen & Reinardy; 2016; Lee & McAdams, 2019; Munger, MacLeod & Loomis, 2016; Richards-Schuster et al., 2015; Thrift & Sugarman, 2018; Windsor et al., 2015). Defining social justice as it relates to social work practice, and its application to social work practice varies across reviewed resources (Austin, 2014; Bhuyan et al., 2017; Dahl, 2016; McLaughlin, Gray, & Wilson, 2015; Morgaine, 2014). Social justice within the context of social welfare practice is described as focusing on ensuring there is a fairness in the distribution of resources and opportunities amongst those where equality is often unequal and unfair (McLaughlin, Gray & Wilson, 2017). Thompson (2016) wrote social justice is a manner in which social work battles discrimination. These two definitions are included in the ongoing search regarding the philosophical expressions of social justice in social work practice.

Studies designed to examine the concept of social justice as a value to social work practice has increased over the last decade. Many researchers agreed social justice is a long-standing entity of the concept of social services in America (Bent-Goodley & Hopps, 2016; Bhuyan et al., 2017; McLaughlin, Gray &Wilson, 2015; Morgaine, 2014; NASW, 2107). Reinforcing the widely publicized recommendation of social justice included as an entity of social work practice, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2017) and International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2014) include social justice as a standard of

practice for social workers (Beckett, 2017; NASW, 2017; Pugh, 2016; Taylor, Vreugdenhil, & Schneiders, 2017; Zelenev, 2019). This literature review illustrates researched information by scholars about the perceptions, understanding, acknowledgments, and critical analysis by child welfare social workers as it relates to the inclusion of social justice as a standard of practice. There is the examination of current information about social justice and social work practice and the child welfare social worker's challenges with defining social justice and applying social justice to social work practice. Specifically, this literature review covers examining social attitudes leading to perceptions toward social justice by child welfare social workers in the child welfare system. The literature defines the aspect of social justice in child welfare social work by supporting and examining various behavioral actions social workers use to incorporate social justice successfully in social work practice.

The review of the historical perspective of social justice in social work practice frames the first part of the review followed with particular interest to the trends of social justice as it relates to the social attitudes and perceptions of child welfare social workers. Included in the review are research findings assisting with defining the considerations of this study. The later literature is sourced to help to develop meaning covering the themes emerging from the collected data. A partial foundation for moderating how child welfare social workers perceive social justice is extended by the concept reviewed, relative to social justice and social workers.

The two conceptual pillars of this study include micro-level social work practice and macro-level social work practice. From this approach, concepts and discoveries will be compared and vetted to define the materializing themes further. While there are challenges specifically with the role of child welfare social workers, and in the best interest of children and families (Auerbach, Zeitlin, Augsberger, Lawrence, & Claiborne, 2016; Davis & Reber, 2016;

26

Morgaine 2014) underachievement meriting adjustment in the area of how overall social workers perceive social work practice is documented. The alterations to social work practice include social justice application as a strategy to improve both the overall functioning of the child welfare system and child welfare social workers (Bird, 2016; Bywaters et al., 2015; Davis & Reber, 2016; Deepak, Rountree & Scott, 2015; Hair, 2014; Harrison et al., 2016; Hudson, 2017; Irizarry, Marlowe, Hallahan, & Bull 2015; Kam, 2014; McLaughlin, Gray, & Wilson, 2015; Morgaine, 2014; Olson, Reid, Threadgill-Goldson, Riffe, & Ryan, 2013; Roy, Rivest, & Moreau, 2016).

The literature search strategy extracted information from various vital scholarly resources to provide a substantial level of wealth in research, strengthening a rigorous methodology to this critical area of social work practice. The exploration of database searches for this study was conducted through the Northcentral University library. This literature review will be represented by full-text scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles research based on methodology, theory, and empirical studies published within the last five years and secondary seminal literature. The literature search strategy was chosen based on the primary, principal, and, subtopic themes of the attitude and perception for defining the term social justice, and the application to social work practice as related to the child welfare system. Within the Northcentral library, there were several database research engines supported the expanded search of terms related to the main topics of social psychology, critical social theory, social work, social justice, and child welfare. The EBSCO host allowed the search through the Education, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO databases. The ProQuest Central data allowed the search through the databases of Dissertations & Theses @ Northcentral University, Psychology, Social Psychology, Public Health Social Science, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. The SAGE Journal database allowed to browse the

27

journals by discipline. Identified disciplines included Theory & Psychology, British Journal, Critical social policy, child welfare, Psychology of Violence, Handbook of child psychology, and developmental science, International social work, Journal of social work, Psychology Learning and Teaching, Qualitative social work and Research on Social Work Practice. The other search engine for databases was through ScienceDirect. These databases search was under the umbrella of Social Sciences and Humanities. The search brought forth journal publications under the journal titles of American Journal of Community Psychology, Child Abuse & Neglect, Psychology, Public Policy, Social Psychology and Law, Children and Youth Services Review Social Science Review. The last research engine included the ERIC Institute of Education Sciences.

The following list of terms and combinations of terms were used in search of journal topics for articles. The list included the terms under several broad topics and subtopics. Under the broad term of child welfare, there are extended concepts of child welfare advocacy, decision-making in child welfare, history of the child welfare system, psychology and child welfare, historical legislation for the child welfare system, psychology and social work, child welfare, and social justice. With seeking information concerning social workers and advocacy through the profession of social work practice in terms advocacy, advocate action includes knowledge of community psychology, poverty and social work, humanistic social work, social welfare history, values and psychology, ethical foundations of social work practice, future roles of child protective services, social work and social policy, social attitudes and social work, changing nature of social work, micro and macro intervention, policy practice social work perspectives, Rawlsian social justice, and psycho-social development. Under the guise of the term social justice, the terms economic justice, psychology, and social justice, social justice, social justice,

28

SAGE Journal database allowed to browse the journals by discipline. Identified disciplines included Theory & Psychology, British Journal, Critical social policy, child welfare, Psychology of Violence, Handbook of child psychology, and developmental science, International social work, Journal of social work, Psychology Learning and Teaching, Qualitative social work and Research on Social Work Practice. The other search engine for databases was through ScienceDirect. These databases search was under the umbrella of Social Sciences and Humanities. The search brought forth journal publications under the journal titles of American Journal of Community Psychology, Child Abuse & Neglect, Psychology, Public Policy, Social Psychology and Law, Children and Youth Services Review Social Science Review. The last research engine included the ERIC Institute of Education Sciences.

The following list of terms and combinations of terms were used in search of journal topics for articles. The list included the terms under several broad topics and subtopics. Under the broad term of child welfare, there are extended concepts of child welfare advocacy, decision-making in child welfare, history of the child welfare system, psychology and child welfare, historical legislation for the child welfare system, psychology and social work, child welfare, and social justice. With seeking information concerning social workers and advocacy through the profession of social work practice in terms advocacy, advocate action includes knowledge of community psychology, poverty and social work, humanistic social work, social welfare history, values and psychology, ethical foundations of social work practice, future roles of child protective services, social work and social policy, social attitudes and social work, changing nature of social work, micro and macro intervention, policy practice social work perspectives, Rawlsian social justice, and psycho-social development. Under the guise of the term social justice, the terms economic justice, psychology, and social justice, social justice, social justice,

29

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and social work, ethical dilemmas and decision-making, social workers, psychology and moral standards, social justice, and the law, social work, psychology and ethics, Rawlsian social justice, and utopia and social justice. Lastly, to support the conceptual framework the terms relating to the critical social theory were searched such as components to psychology and critical social theory, psychology and critical social theory, critical theory, critical thinking, and social work practice and policy, critical social theory and social work, critical social theory and psychology and human rights and critical social work.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was the critical social theory that amalgamated through Marxism's critical theory (Forte, 2007). The pivotal proposition of critical theory offers the idealism of connecting community members to one another to create civic-minded communication and actions explaining the basic premise of critical social theory and an array of theoretical perspectives striving from an empowerment perspective (Reisch & Garvin, 2016). Forte (2014) critical social theory framework pursues to empower the social worker and the clients to create and obtain social justice solutions not previously contemplated or implemented. The critical perspective of child welfare social work practice is concerned with approaching the public systems from a consciousness opposition to converting equality for all clients/communities served.

For this study, the critical social theory ascribes to the reflection process and assessment of critiquing society and culture by knowledge of social science and humanities and applying how personal, and professional perceptions and social attitudes attribute to social injustices and societal problems (Hodgson & Watts, 2017; Mattsson, 2014; Tsui & O'Leary, 2019). Past theories traditionally rationalized scientific principles as associated with the phenomenon,

30

whereas critical social theory directs the examination of the social problems in social and historical contexts (Morley & Ablett, 2016; Pulliam, 2017). In context to examining social justice within social work practice, critical social theory criticizes the traditional social work practice for sustaining and emphasizing inequality and oppression explaining social dilemmas which negatively portrayed affect members of society are who cannot cope or progress with social situations in everyday life (Milner & Wolfer, 2014).

Child welfare social workers advocate for personal and environmental well-being conducive to health and definite basic human needs, and the promotion of progressive institutions which are compatible with social justice for all member of society (Bates; 2015; McLaughlin, Gray, Wilson, 2015; Morgaine, 2014; Sheppard & Charles, 2015). McLaughlin, Gray & Wilson (2017) specified child welfare social workers seek change for and on behalf of vulnerable and distressed individuals and groups by addressing poverty, racial bias, lack of resources and other configurations of social injustice; and progress toward expanding freedom and opportunity; and advocate social justice. It is imperative to acknowledge the conceptual framework or philosophy guides the process to examine the perspective of social justice as it relates to the personal, educational and professional experience of child welfare social workers (Morgaine, 2014; Whitaker & Reimer, 2017; Zelenev, 2019).

The theoretical concept of social justice within social work practice informed the conceptualization and framework of the study. The concept of social justice within social work practice was circulating widely by the 2000s' in American communities and social work and community organizations throughout North America (Ferguson et al., 2018). The concept of social justice within social work practice has evolved into critical social theory, recognizing the psychological impact of the historical oppression of marginalized individuals and communities

31

by the child welfare system and explaining contemporary social justice disparities (Ioakimidis & Dominelli, 2016; Morgaine, 2014; Munger et al., 2016).

The viewpoint of child welfare social workers' is social work practice should challenge oppression, marginalization, and, inequality at the organizational level by using systemic understandings to social problems (Auerbach et al., 2016; Engstrom, 2019; MacLeod & Loomis, 2016; Munger, Valutis & Rubin, 2016; O'Connor & Leonard, 2014). Munger, MacLeod, and Loomis (2016) revealed how an individual function in society is subjective to the interest-based on personal values and social, historical, institutional, and political influences. Critical social theory suggests critical analysis and social action are indispensable to the components in social justice and empowerment to transform configurations of oppression. (Ife, 2016; Whitaker & Reimer, 2017) This exploration process suggests there is a conventional element to maintain power over historical societal and cultural manners to inequality. Critical social theory regards society as comprised of two groups; the have and the have not in society (Bransford, 2011; Lathouras, 2016; Mathias, 2015). Evans, Rosen, & Nelson (2014) proposed there are members of society who live within poverty-stricken environments, are vulnerable, marginalized, and lack privilege.

Child welfare social workers detect clients who are impacted by social issues, and problems often lie within the means of accepting environmental injustice, resonating their exclusion from other members for society (Engstrom, 2014 & Mathias, 2015). The role of the child welfare social worker is to address systemic and institutionalized oppression against children, families, and communities (Ferguson, 2014; Morley & Ablett, 2016). Ife (2016) and Lathouras (2016) stressed the notable characteristics of critical child welfare social workers are

the skills of critical processing and self-awareness to be flexible, innovative, and versatile in social action and practice.

The role of the child welfare social worker and critical social theory is to evaluate the systemic distortions which solidify societal considerations, not in the best interest of all members in society (Samson, 2016). Through critical social theory and critical social work practice, corrective and other public policies and programs can increase critical perspective to which maximizes awareness for enhancing individual and community well-being and diminish injustice mechanisms known to traumatize children, families and, communities (Abramovitz & Sherraden, 2016; Mattsson, 2014; Rankine, 2019). This study acknowledges the role of child welfare social workers to provide services to disadvantaged children, families and, communities impacted by a level of poverty and lack of resources (Bradt et al., 2015; Bywaters, 2015; Davidson et al., 2019; Davidson-Arad & Benbenishty, 2016; Schiettecat, Roets & Vandenbroeck; Travis, 2017; Yang & Ortega, 2016).

Subsequently, this study proposed to explain the necessity for child welfare social workers to develop a compelling understanding of cultural and ethnical diversity and transcend personal perceptions to professional knowledge. To examine the ability for child welfare social workers to define social justice and apply social justice to practice, this study will also present how child welfare social workers are active participants in the process of interpreting and understanding personal and social perceptions shaping the profession (Perry et al., 2020; Thrift & Sugarman, 2019). By examining the concept of how personal values and attitudes influence personal views and values, there is a consideration of how values and attitudes impact the professional commitment for intervening to challenge social exclusion, inequality, and injustice (Campbell, 2016; Collins, 2015; Forenza, 2016; Hailes, 2012). Thus, this study must seek to

33

understand the relation between defining and applying social justice and the importance of developing the appropriate critical skills and knowledge for child welfare practice to be effective.

Social Welfare and the Profession of Social Work

The perspective of an involved social worker is of particular interest to this research effort as the social worker's involvement may improve the social worker's exposure to social justice (Baron & McLaughlin, 2017; Bent-Goodley, 2014; Bhuyan, Bejan, & Jeyapal, 2017; Olson, 2013). The exposure of the perception with social justice for social workers may increase the involvement of social justice with social worker's practice. Encouraged interaction may then enhance the probability of social workers shaping some understanding of the defining and applying the term social justice by developing an attitude supporting the importance of seeking to decrease the injustice clients suffer through systematic oppression (Kozan, & Blustein, 2018; Plitt Donaldson et al., 2016; Rackauskiene et al., 2013). Social workers for this study will hopefully demonstrate involvement with the community and social advocacy. Knowledge concerning the affected social worker population supported each stage of this investigation. This study will accurately demonstrate the participants' voices through their experiences relating to how the child welfare social workers define social justice and understand applying the term to social work practice.

There has been a series of publications on social justice and social work practice focusing on defining social justice, and the application in social work practice by addressing areas such as ethics, practice, policy, training, research, and, international issues (Bent-Goodley, 2014; Bent-Goodley & Hopps, 2017; Carlson et al., 2016; Danso, 2015; Hair, 2015; Liddell, 2019; McMillin, 2018; Moore, 2017; Taylor, Vreugdenhil, & Schneiders, 2017). The efforts of research are to support the response interest provided by social work students, social workers,

and communities served by the child welfare system. For example, in 2017, the Social Work Policy Institute sponsored a Policy Practice Summit. The representatives from 12 professional social worker organizations, university faculty, students and social workers employed in policy practice at the local, state and national levels, NASW chapter staff members, and national social work leaders and advocacy, agreed with social justice advocacy taught through social work education, and professional training (NASW, 2017). Morgaine (2014) provided complementary information stating NASW, International Conference on Social Work (ICSW), International Federation of Social workers (IFSW), and CSWE speak to effective social policy building as on social work as a primary function, and value of social work practice.

As a prevention intervention component, social justice is identified as a principal historical aspect of the social work profession. The field of child welfare social work practice has been specifically active in conveying a vision of social justice in training and practice (Bessaha, Schuler, & Moon, 2016; Irizarry et al., 2015; Keenan, Limone, & Sandoval, 2017). Social work specialists suggested the work profession seek provisions to integrate social justice into daily standards of practice. Based on the decree by professional social work practice organizations such as the NASW, there is the indication social justice is an inequitable value of social practice (NASW, 2017). Social justice development in social work has evident connections to the micro and macro levels and multicultural social work practice theory and practice (Kavanaugh, Dupont-Frechette, Jerskey, & Holler, 2017). Mattocks (2018) offered the concern social work licensures, and the therapeutic identity of social work practice ascends to maintaining an individual, developmental concentration, leaving systemic concerns to social work practice. Leathers et al. (2016) identified social justice as a critical component of multiculturalism, with the explanation of multicultural social work practice must be about social justice. This review

35

will examine the connection between multiculturalism, micro, macro level, and social justice application to social work.

Social workers. Social workers have always been at the core of addressing social determinants by dedicating to improving human health and social well-being. Social workers utilize clinical, bio-psychosocial, and ecological approaches to practice at multiple levels of society to include children and families, communities, and the government (Krings, Fusaro, Nicoll, & Lee, 2019; Rackauskiene, Kasnauskiene & Virbalienė, 2013). Krings et al. (2019) alluded to social welfare organizations continue to navigate an evolving policy development compelled by social trends, technology, and institutional practice in the effort for practice to align at the multiple levels. The current population of over 600,000 (Segal & Wagaman, 2017) social workers serves as the intermediary levels of advocacy and policy as administrators and advocates, while there is a population served indirect roles educators, and intervention providers.

The nature of direct service addresses casework, which is the social and psychological needs of individuals and families, and communities or macro social workers who engage in structural transformations intended to enhance community well-being (Jewell & Allessia, 2017; Lane, Chiarelli-Helminiak & Bohrmana, 2017). Recent literature examining the definition of social justice in social work practice suggests an urgency to address the local, national, and global levels of societal public health. Themes common to this level of practice include: (a) elevated level of connecting services to meet the needs of the children, family and, community; (b) value in advocacy practice as a collective measure as a group; (c) interest in supporting effective social change (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015; Christens, Peterson, & Speer, 2014; Malekoff, 2017; Taylor et al., 2018). Some social workers choose to enhance their college

36

education and career experience with involvement in organizations and social welfare-related activities. The increase of participation in social welfare advocacy organizations and activities may be the motivation and focus similar to prior generations (Moore, 2017).

Child Welfare

The child welfare programs in the United States were seemingly designed with the central concern to protect the well-being of children (Cross & Hershkowitz, 2017; Engstrom, 2014; Ferguson, 2017). It was the growing interest to elevate the growing level of neglected and poor children, which mobilized public aid for needy children (Ferguson, 2017). The policies created to support the charity and local government relief programs were assumed to distinguish between the undeserving poor and the deserving. The idea of innocent poor children suffering from their parents/caretakers modified a harsh reality and questioned the legitimacy of punishment for immorality toward children (Yang & Ortega, 2016). It was an overwhelming outcry of concern for the well-being of children characterized by the United States as shifting to provide service toward child safety and family preservation (Bradt et al., 2015; Frunză & Sandu, 2017).

As mentioned above, historically, there were community social programs associated with generating services with positive outcomes for the families in need of help (Ruth et al., 2017). Creating these resources to accommodate the multifaceted complex needs of children and families is often a challenge presented to the public agency administrators and child welfare social workers. Despite the positive projection public agencies present to assist families toward empowerment, Davidson et al. (2017) shared findings from previous studies including the research from Bywaters (2015) on how social service agencies have many negative attributes, including, lack of resources, discrimination/biases, racism, under staff programs, lack of

37

qualified staff, frequent high turnover of staff, and governmental regulations demonstrate a general poor community service program for children and families. These negative impressions are not merely a concern for social service agency serving child and families rather these negative social influences are inhibitors for the development of social work practice particularly for child welfare social workers who provide direct services to families who are oppressed with social injustices (Austin et al., 2016; Bliss, 2015; Helm, 2017; Krings et al., 2016). Scholars recognize the societal and environmental challenges encountered by children and their family severing as impediments to the development of social services (Harrison et al., 2016). There is also an indication of the inability for social workers to apply social justice to practice for clients successfully based on the impediments (Harrison et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2017; Mattocks, 2017; Reisch, 2016; Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014; Sheppard & Charles, 2017). Thus, the professional barriers established by the child welfare system's systematic structure impact the child welfare social workers' inability to create practice toward addressing the imbalance of justice for children and families who receive services through the child welfare system.

The struggle for the Child Welfare movement to balance the positive and negative social influences is dated back to an institution established for orphaned children located in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1729 (Ruth & Marshall, 2017). In 1853 and 1875, two organizations, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Children's Aid Society formed the essential elements of an advocacy child welfare movement (Reamer, 2014) to continue the formalities of providing services to the less fortunate. The primary purpose of the two agencies was to address the concern to protect children from living on the streets, in scanty households, and to find the children satisfactory living conditions, which were the finalizing goals of services for the children (Reamer, 2018).

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Following the lead of the two agencies in 1912, several child welfare activists contested to develop the United States Children's Bureau within the Department of Labor (Children's Bureau, 2018). The Children's Bureau functioned as an advocate of child welfare and overall welfare of communities greatly affected by the economic downturn throughout the United States (Ruth & Marshall, 2017; Zeanah & Humphreys, 2018). Ruth & Marshall (2017) recalled that the bureau's success is accounted for the creation of the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program within Title IV of the Social Security Act. The ADC program was sparse with resources and partially funded by the federal government based on the assumption the Great Depression would bring about the decline of motherhood, which, in turn, poverty would be eliminated (Zeanah & Humphreys, 2018). The funds distributed through the ADC programs tested the financial means as well as the moral values of recipients for the benefits were of the lowest prevailing wages and was a public charity and not given as an entitled resource. (Children's Bureau, 2017). The considered temporary program remained the primary resource for needy children and families for over 60 years, with the number of recipients growing and stipends available to children and families declining over the years.

Over the last decades in the 20th century, the development of resource programs for children and families remained with the child welfare policy's two main objectives: the protection of children and family preservation (Berliner; 2017; Bradt et al., 2015). During the 1970s and 1980s, social movements were progressive and emphasized the rights of more impoverished families, and there was pressured by the activist for the government to provide aid to intact families (Gupta, 2017; Yang & Ortega, 2016). The climate of purpose in the services turned in the 1990s, where there began the push to remove children from caretakers to ensure child safety, which proved cheaper for the government funding departments rather than

establishing resources to keep families intact (U.S. DHHS, 2018). To support the new concept of the purpose for federal support replacement funds emerged from the ADC to the new assistance program of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) (Zeanah & Humphreys, 2018). In general, the new government-funded program did not settle the needs of the families or support a level of self-sufficiency instead it led countless single mothers to employ minimum wage positions with no benefits, and in a more inferior status level (Engler et al., 2019; Schiettecat, Roets & Vandenbroeck, 2017).

The United States remains active addressing, the condition of child welfare and meet the basic needs of children and families (Carlson, 2017; Cross & Hershkowitz, 2017). As defined by the Children's Bureau (2018), child welfare agencies were created to provide prevention and intervention resources and support to families and, in return, protect children from harm and reduce the possibility of neglect and abuse (Engstrom, 2019). Engstrom (2019) supported the Bureau's definition by examining the current policies alluding to the idea policies are designed to protect the children from harm and create resources to strengthen families. According to Bent-Goodley (2017) and Davidson et al. (2019), the engagement of community partnerships and collaborations promote critical disciplines to align with the NASW standards in order to effectively establish measures of preventive services against child abuse and neglect. This study is developed to examine the child welfare social workers' effort within the child welfare system develop the definition of social justice and understanding to apply the standard to practice in the effort to respond to the needs of children and families receiving services from the child welfare system.

Child welfare social workers. For decades, the child welfare system dedicated both resources and staffing to intervention programs and services to support the practice of child

welfare social workers. Knowledge of how to provide justice to the service for children and families is enhanced when there are opportunities for the child welfare social workers to learn more about social justice. It is encouraged for child welfare social workers to engage in community activism outside of the agency, which is an essential consideration for agency administrators to continue developing organizational ethical standards (Bent-Goodley, 2014; Bradt et al., 2015; Shulman, 2016). The learning environment at an agency for child welfare social workers is enhanced mostly through training (Gitterman, 2014; Schiettecat, Roets & Vandenbroeck, 2017), while the child welfare social workers are often seeking to add meaning and understanding to their practice (Davidson-Arad & Benbenishty, 2016; Gitterman, 2014; Davidson et al., 2019).

The public child welfare agency can be an intimidating organization for child welfare social workers as it is an amalgamation of obligation, responsibility, and accountability. A child welfare social worker's ability to develop a sense of social justice connection to their practice helps to avoid the difficulties associated with how society views social workers based on job title, and social media portrayals of social workers specifically child welfare social workers as merciless, unproductive, ineffective and untrained (Auerbach et al., 2016; Hansford, Ely, Flaherty, & Meyer-Adams, 2017). Benefits to the child welfare social workers who attempt to connect social justice to practice include developing ways to formulate perceptions of fairness as a daily function. These behaviors may include child welfare social workers:

1. Explaining the decision-making process to clients;

2. Speaking truthfully with clients about the role and responsibility of child welfare social workers;

41

3. Informing the clients of the reality to the decisions and consequences of being involved with the agency process (Bradt et al., 2014).

The proactive conduct by child welfare social workers is also viewed by engaging clients in the casework planning development, exploring support services to empower clients to seek understanding of underlying trauma, and working with clients to participate in improving the safety well-being of children. For all the responsibilities of child welfare social workers, there is the uncertainty of child welfare social workers working toward connecting social justice to social work practice to improve services for the client. This study is interested in discovering if the procedure to work toward including ideas of social justice impacts a child welfare social worker's practice in the child welfare system, and in any way, shape their way of conducting business.

Social workers' roles and responsibilities in varied settings are designed concerning the foundation of social work as a studied discipline and a career-driven practice acknowledging interrelated cultural, personal, historical, political, socioeconomic, which serve as both barriers and opportunities for the development of human well-being. The research conducted by Segal & Wagaman (2017) found child welfare social workers generally agree of their role to help better the living condition for those who are disadvantaged, vulnerable and oppressed to promote social cohesion and social inclusion by upholding the principles of human rights, collective responsibility and, social justice. Assuming the position of child welfare social workers accompanies the undertaking of challenges and impediments of the barriers which seriously impair the worker's ability to work within the mandates to promote social development, social interrelation, social change and the empowerment for the children, families and, communities (Bywaters et al., 2015; Reamer, 2018; Gair, 2018). Yi (2018). To complicate the issue more, is

the question if child welfare social workers are equipped in their position to combat the systematic structural obstacles which contribute to the dissemination of discrimination, oppression, exploitation, and inequality. Yu et al. (2016) agreed in their study the same barriers as mentioned in several studies (Bank, 2016; Berliner, 2017; Chechak, 2015; Gelles, 2017; Gupta, 2017; Kam, 2014; Lathouras, 2016; Yang & Ortega, 2016) take a toll on the child welfare social workers progress toward addressing societal injustices.

Bywaters et al. (2016) suggest combating the barriers existing within the daily functions of child welfare practice, child welfare social workers who recognize the impact of the barriers, spend time cultivating their professional value of the ethical standards through participating in community social service activities and interacting with clients as well as others (i.e., foster care parents, administrators, attorneys, advocates). Subsequently, child welfare social workers who are considered uninformed do not take measures to expand their connection to the ethical standards, spend less time with clients, may not participate with community programs and fulfill required obligations with clients (Bywaters, 2015; Davidson et al., 2019; Ferguson, 2017; Gupta, 2017). Moreover, research indicates the advancement of a child welfare social worker's ethical development is influenced by both social and speculative involvements (Bent-Goodley, 2017; Gough & Spencer, 2014; Moore et al., 2017).

Comparable empirical support for the benefits of informing child welfare social workers is presented from McLaughlin, Gray, & Wilson (2017). They performed a qualitative analysis of the research associated with child welfare workers' understanding of their professional responsibility to advocate for social justice and its relation to their practice. Researchers found direct links between the experienced informed child welfare social workers who understood their role in the system and were able to incorporate social justice as central to their practice. The

informed child welfare social workers revealed through the semi-structured interviews their experience with social justice issues become more prominently into focus as the shift of the work is from the individual (client) to the broader societal (community) issues. The experience found advantages in critical thinking compared to the worker's motivation to participate and commit to others' views and experiences. A child welfare social workers' participation in social community activities has also shown to improve their awareness of social justice through a more significant gained experience and assurance in decision-making which translated to pursue the best interest in the client(s) (Ricciardelli & Laws, 2019; Yu et al., 2016).

Whereas the new uninformed child welfare social workers were aware of social justice as a core value of social worker practice yet, they encountered barriers for incorporating the social justice values into their child welfare practice (Carpenter et al., 2015). Experienced workers were able to view their work from a broader perspective provided by the increasing exposure to the child welfare system. This development of perspective, in turn, elevates the possibility of an informed child welfare social workers forming thoughts surrounding understanding and defining the term social justice and applying the term social justice to practice. Social work practice can be discovered from the involved child welfare social workers, much concerning social justice and child welfare. The administrators from the child welfare system often measure the agency's success by converging the interaction between the informed child welfare social workers and clients. Despite the rules and regulations of practice administrators use to monitor the performances of child welfare social workers (Gasker & Fischer, 2014; Mattocks, 2018; Taylor, Vreugdenhil, & Schneiders, 2017) the perception from the child welfare social workers regarding the developing of the definition of social justice, and the application to practice need further exploration in a research method. The void of available literature demands further examination.

To further guide this research effort, the following information presented an overview of child welfare social worker tendencies:

Child welfare social worker trends. As the field of social work continues to evolve as a significant part of making decisions for societal economic and social policies, social work practice often serves as an adjustable medium to contemporary trends when considering the method to serve communities (Bradt et al., 2015; Gough & Spencer, 2014; O'Connor & Leonard, 2014). Krings et al. (2019) shared the historical meaning behind social work practice has moved to advocate human rights and against discrimination, organize communities, and champion to improve the quality of life for all persons. The transitioning of the outlooks and understandings is the emergence of social concepts carving reality by shaping paradigms within the ever-changing society as viewed through the interactions of new child welfare social workers (Lub, 2019; Mattsson, 2014; Rankine, 2019). Steen (2018) and Steen, Mann & Gryglewicz (2016) displayed child welfare social workers tend to continue to serve as a focus in studies, and subsequently offer insight into the practice of child welfare social workers by defining some significant influences. Hence, the current child welfare social worker population carries uniquely expressive physiognomies that differentiate this population from past generations (Beckett, 2018; Boddy, 2018; Pritzker & Lane; 2016; Oliver et al., 2017; Steen et al., 2016).

Research indicated child welfare social workers stayed away from community practice and solidified roots in individual base private practice. This trend has and is beginning as a parallel to the cost of college education, the profit in clinical social work, increase in income equality, and the decrease of political progress to increase monies in social welfare programs (Dominelli, 2016; Morley & Phillip, 2016). With child welfare social workers seeking to secure livelihood to meet their needs, there is no intention to create a career based on the purpose of

45

helping those in need (McBeath, 2016). With seeking an individualized avenue of social worker

practice, there is a decline for this population of child welfare social workers associating the

practice with the purpose of justice for clients. Child welfare social workers are stirring away

from community practice, and this study examines why this trend is happening when society is in

desperate need of community organizing. Conceptualizing this trend will help construct a

framework to build understanding, as this study aimed to find how child welfare social workers

understand the definition of social justice and share the perspective of how social justice is

applied to practice.

Child welfare social worker characteristics and approaches. The historical review

based on the study by Yang & Ortega (2016) presented characteristics social workers are to

develop specific skills to address social justice issues. There is a level of knowledge developed

by child welfare social workers combines the commitment and awareness for human suffering;

communication skills of nonverbal and verbal capacity; a perspective of strategies to use for

individual, community and organizational on a multi-systemic level; modern technology

knowledge; and research and assessment skills (Williamson-Ashe & Ericksen, 2019; Yu et al.,

2016). It was explained in the study while it is expected for social workers to remain abreast of

the social injustices impacting clients and work toward diminishing unfairness, it is not

necessarily there are no wet rules and regulations for social workers to participate as a member

of social advocacy causes (Auerbach et al., 2016; Davidson-Arad & Benbenishty, 2016; Lizano

& Barak; 2015). The authors, Sayre & Sar (2015), noted there are some cases where social

workers who advocate for social change may experience opposition and risk losing employment

by addressing systemic matters. It was also suggested child welfare social workers interested in

actively participating in social causes learn professional goals according to the context of their job (Ackerman, 2017; Sayre & Sar, 2015).

There are suggestions offered for revising social work for a social justice approach. It is recommended to work with clients in communities when suitable rather than the formality of working with the clients in the agency setting (Austin et al., 2016; Harrison et al., 2016; Mattocks, 2017; Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014). It is mentioned for child welfare social workers to examine professional boundaries when addressing social justice issues through advocacy while establishing boundaries with clients to reduce ethical risk of weakening social worker-client relationships (Bliss, 2015; Engler et al., 2019; Kozan & Blustein, 2018; Lee & McAdams III, 2019; Stege, Brockberg, & Hoyt, 2017). Lastly, Hardwick (2014) advises for child welfare social workers to reflect on how, as advocates, personal morals, and values can integrate into professional practice. Considering the integration of personal morals and values in practice is an act to purposefully work toward enhancing social justice when the profession of social work remains unclear of the meaning of social justice (Bird, 2016; Zelenev, 2019).

Child Welfare Social Action. Enhancement of human well-being and aid to meet the basic needs of all people may be considered two significant components of the social justice approach to social work practice (Bell 2019). Boddy et al. (2017) described historically; there was a consideration of the economically less fortunate rooted in the emergence of social work in the late 19th century. The importance of social action in the development of programs for the betterment of human well-being is often observed in community service programs geared toward the safety of children, parent education programs to enhance the knowledge of caregivers and economic assistance programs for families who face financial hardships (Bessaha, Schuler, & Moon, 2016; Bywater et al., 2016; Davidson-Arad & Benbenishty, 2014). The position of

47

children welfare social workers are to consider social contexts, intercede on a systemic level and advocate as a worker on a larger platform for change against bias (de Saxe Zerden, Jones, Lanier, & Fraser, 2016). Davis & Reber (2016) illustrated in their study that child welfare social workers actively supported changes in public policy, such as addressing race disproportionality in foster care, homelessness, domestic violence, immigration reform, and especially the overall welfare of children in foster care.

There are child welfare social workers who do not conceptualize the work as related to social justice regardless of the social action taken (DeLong-Hamilton, Krase & Bundy-Fazioli, 2015; Houston, 2016). Leathers, Melka-Kaffer, Spielfogel, suggest it, & Atkins (2016) and Lizano & Barak, (2015) of child welfare social workers refining social justice practice in the context of social work by focusing on public policy expanding to the roles of social workers across the systemic issues of child welfare. Examining the role and responsibilities of child welfare social workers are considered for future training of child welfare social workers to understand social justice as a critical component of the profession and to help new workers develop tools essential to engage in social activities effectively.

Social Justice. Morley & Ablett (2016) encouraged the critical analysis of the dynamics between social justice, social workers, and communities. The authors argued for a collaborative learning process in the effort for the learners to gain understanding and perspective to measure the level of the social worker's expertise. The social workers are encouraged to construct knowledge based on their experiences (Munger, MacLeod & Loomis (2016). Morley & Ablett (2017) proposing social justice serves as a liberating force for both social workers and the communities.

From a social worker's perspective, Morgaine (2014) defined social justice as all groups in society participating in shaping society to meet the groups' needs mutually. The concept of social justice includes a vision of society in which the allocation of resources is equitable, and members are psychologically and physically safe and secure. Also, Banerjee (2005) and Sayre & Sar (2015) defined Rawls (1999), who presented the concept of social justice as individual rights and mutual obligation with a balance to create a state of equity. Citing Rawls as an influence, Banerjee (2011) and McLaughlin, Gray & Wilson (2015) advocated for a more transformative social welfare, not only for individuals but also for societies. Gasker & Fischer (2014) asserted that social workers had strengthened existing individual injustice by focusing on societal concerns. It is contended that social workers discouraged a thorough examination of how social injustice contributes to human suffering in two ways. 1) shifting focus toward the individual and away from the community systemic sources of distress; 2) avoiding political action in favor of clinical interventions (Gasker & Fischer, 2014; Thrift & Sugarman, 2019). Hair's (2015) model of humanity social work, which grew out of the political repression of the 20th century, pressed social workers to think creatively about people's needs, moving beyond the boundaries set by training, background, and socialization.

History of Social Justice in Social Work. Sayre & Sar (2015) explained social justice as an established facet of social work and one constant with other core mechanisms of the profession. One mechanism of the social justice concept to social work involves advocacy, which Zelenev (2019) defined as actions deriving from social justice ideas. Jones (2014) presented the definition of social justice advocacy within social work practice as presented by is the action taken by a social work professional to facilitate the removal of environmental and systematic barriers to the client's well-being. It was described by Pritzker & Shannon (2017) the

49

history of social justice in social work was noticed through social justice advocacy in the community rather than institutional settings.

Research on social justice advocacy as related to social work is dated back to the era of the 20th Century in the United States when Jane Addams, an influencer of professional social work profession in the United States, founded the United States Settlement House (Hudson, 2017; Ruth & Marshall, 2017). Using her experience as an activist/reformer to address the injustice in poverty, immigration, child labor and, overcrowding, Addams advocated to reform public health and improve social well-being for communities (Pritzker & Lane, 2016). Ruth & Marshall (2017) cited Addams's advocacy for social work to improve the living conditions for many residents transitioned from the social work practice of the 19th Century led by Mary Richmond of the Charity Organization Society (COS) along with Lillian Wald and Florence Kelley. Addams intended to incorporate social programs as an ethical principle for helping impoverished communities created the optimal approach and a superior ideology to immerse themselves into the problem and presented a traditional scientific method to focus on efficiency and prevention. (Beckett, 2018; Ruth & Marshall, 2017). In sum, in the mid-20th Century, social work attention toward preventive methods became primary and intensified (Hanson, 2017; Lub, 2019; Munger, MacLeod & Loomis, 2016; Zelenev, 2019).

The preventive methods Addams proposed included involving the government with developing funding packages to enforce the social programs for needy communities (Edmonds-Cady & Wingfield, 2017; Ruth & Marshall, 2017; Yang & Ortega, 2016). Moreno-Ternero & Veneziani (2017) explained a federal task force on social work education presented an argument to the United States Public Health Commissioned Corps for the need to build more preventive social work programs. The task force steered by dedicated social work activist advocated more

50

prevention programs was the only measure for the new generation of social workers to apply skills to attack the roots of social problems (Bent-Goodley, 2014; Felderhoff, Hoefer & Watson, 2015; McGregor, 2016). Unfortunately, the appeals for strengthening and increasing the level of prevention programs remained centered on casework and were not integrated into social work education or practice (Gair & Baglow, 2018; Raineri & Calcaterra, 2018). In the 1960s, the advocacy social movements such as the civil rights for minorities and women's rights transformed social work activism. Debates raised surrounding the value of social work concerning the profession's role, which promoted social work to communities on a larger platform veering slightly away from the norm of working with individuals (Shulman, 2016; Frunză & Sandu, 2017; Reamer, 2018). There were discussions and debates between practitioners and scholars concerning the role of social workers in service provision versus systems change (Bird, 2016; Edmonds-Cady & Wingfield, 2017; Kozan & Blustein, 2018; Lathouras, 2016; Munger, MacLeod & Loomis, 2016).

Hanson (2016) shared the inclusion from research, special editions in prominent journals and profound writings (e.g., Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire in 1970) exposed the profession tackling social justice concerns. The concern for promoting social work for community building increased by the political war fair and paved the way for more robust advocacy in the social work profession to proliferate the systems level government programs (Berliner, 2017; Krings et al., 2019; Pritzker & Lane, 2016; Um, 2019). Finally, the after years of advocating for the increase of social programs there were substantive advances in social work education, training and practice though unfortunately, there was a turn in political actions projecting fiscal reductions and undercut the future in the advancement of much social work intervention, and prevention programs (Keenan et al., 2016; Ruth & Marshall, 2017; Shulman,

51

2014). Pritzker & Lane (2016) recorded by the end of the 1970s, the community-oriented social work jobs decreased as the conservative political climate strengthened, and a larger population of social workers advanced professional survival through licensures, private clinical practice and, third-party reimbursement.

Moving forward in the 1980s, social work activist pushed for solutions to heighten the profession's visibility and impact, including discussion by professionals and scholars to redirect practice toward intervention and prevention through public health avenues (Gibson, 2015; McGregor, 2015; Schiettecat, Roets & Vandenbroeck, 2017; Sloane, 2018; Williams, 2016). Since the 1990s and thereafter, McGregor (2015) claimed the value of social work skills is highlighted in community outreach with the growth of community partnerships with preventive measures and cultural awareness. Nevertheless, with the approaching millennium, there is the apparent concern the platform is set to shift once again in trajectory concerning the plight of social work practice in public health. Social workers employed in public health settings while not directly involved in health development are involved in child welfare, and the promotion of varied forms of social justice (Austin et al., 2016; Boddy, 2018; Reisch, 2016; Williams, 2016). McGregor (2015) projected in the future, 70% of social workers, will assume employment in public health agencies while there is also the idea in the emergence of social work response with community engagement, prevention and inter-professional teamwork which are rooted practice expertise began a century ago and still very much-needed (Kam, 2014).

Moral Dimensions of Social Justice in Social Work Practice. The test of the morality in society is often regarded by which the most vulnerable community members are progressing (Etnyre, 2015; Eversman & Bird, 2016; Poikolainen, 2017). Over decades there has become an

overwhelming development of economic divisions between the poor and rich communities (Ife & Tascón, 2016). There is a common belief based on the history of social work in American;

The role of the child welfare social worker and critical social theory is to evaluate the systemic distortions which solidify societal considerations, not in the best interest of all members in society (Samson, 2016). Through critical social theory and critical social work practice, corrective and other public policies and programs can increase critical perspective to which maximizes awareness for enhancing individual and community well-being and diminish injustice mechanisms known to traumatize children, families and, communities (Abramovitz & Sherraden, 2016; Mattsson, 2014; Rankine, 2019). This study acknowledges the role of child welfare social workers to provide services to disadvantaged children, families and, communities impacted by a level of poverty and lack of resources (Bradt et al., 2015; Bywaters, 2015; Davidson et al., 2019; Davidson-Arad & Benbenishty, 2016; Schiettecat, Roets & Vandenbroeck; Travis, 2017; Yang & Ortega, 2016).

Subsequently, this study proposed to explain the necessity for child welfare social workers to develop a compelling understanding of cultural and ethnical diversity and transcend personal perceptions to professional knowledge. To examine the ability for child welfare social workers to define social justice and apply social justice to practice, this study will also present how child welfare social workers are active participants in the process of interpreting and understanding personal and social perceptions shaping the profession (Perry et al., 2020; Thrift & Sugarman, 2019). By examining the concept of how personal values and attitudes influence personal views and values, there is a consideration of how values and attitudes impact the professional commitment for intervening to challenge social exclusion, inequality, and injustice (Campbell, 2016; Collins, 2015; Forenza, 2016; Hailes, 2012). Thus, this study must seek to understand the

53

relation between defining and applying A supporting level of evidence presented by Carlson, Nguyen, & Reinardy (2016) proposed a human capabilities' perspective as a conceptualization of social work and one correlates to social justice. The philosophy of humanism focuses on enhancing personal development of capabilities relating to the context of the betterment for society (Bent-Goodley, 2017; Gair & Baglow, 2018; King & Austin, 2014; Lathouras, 2018). According to King & Austin (2014), the humanistic approach involves the strict attention for developing human capacities through shared social relationships of equality, personal growth, freedom (Ife & Tascón, 2016; O'Leary & Tsui, 2019; Roose, Roets &

Schiettecat, 2014). Ife & Tascón's (2016) study indicated the concept of the humanistic approach involves social workers developing the understanding of the community values, which would offer insight for the definition of ethical practice required for innovative interventions to meet the needs of the communities. The author added another significant factor indicating the humanistic social work approach seeks to focus on understanding the needs of communities by creating community level-based interventions (Applewhite, Kao & Pritzker, 2018; Bransford, 2011; Gupta, 2017; Munger, MacLeod & Loomis; 2016; Sheppard & Charles, 2017; Steen et al., 2018). Incidentally, the obligation of social workers entails examining the unfair systematic injustice and how societal oppression affects the individual psychological well-being of the community members (Abramovitz & Sherraden, 2016; Anastas, 2014; Baron & McLaughlin, 2017; Bell, 2019; Bent, 2014; Munger, Bent-Goodley, 2017; MacLeod & Loomis, 2016).

Social Justice standard, objective or moral value. Incorporating social justice in social work practice is often conceptualized as a standard or moral value (Bent-Goodley, 2017; Frunză & Sandu, 2017; Miller et al., 2016). Though the NASW (2018), CWSE (2016), and other social work affiliated organizations geared toward social justice as an unquestionable component of

54

social work practice, there is the concern if social workers can integrate social justice as an outcome objective in daily practice. The research described the advancement of social justice through several standards and moral values such as ensuring child welfare practice is aligned with the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW (2015) for best practice. Best practice has been outlined as advocacy for children and families to receive the highest quality level of treatment, and appropriate decision-making for positive outcomes and child welfare worker participate in refining public policy at all governments levels to encourage the well-being of children and communities (Jones, 2014; Zelenev, 2019). Covering services to provide basic human needs and promote dignity am lessened the disparities across economic, ethnic, cultural, racial, and geographic boundaries and advance the advocacy of social justice. Morgaine (2014) reported social workers perceived respect or act of empathy through acts of social work values, including self-determination, allegiance to equality; and, respect for individuals who do not resemble ourselves.

With the professional focus to provide service based on the importance of human relationships, social work practice is affirmed by social justice, integrity, and competence (Bent-Goodley, 2014; Forenza & Eckert, 2017; Levy, Shlomo & Itzhaky, 2014; Maier & Sirbu, 2017). Social workers are encouraged to seek social justice based on the principles. It is the principles stemming from societal factors encouraging social workers to consider the impact on an individual's well-being (Felderhoff, Hoefer, & Watson, 2016). As a core value for NASW (2016) Code of Ethics, social justice, incorporates four principles:

1. Client Advocacy

2. Promotion of Cultural Competency and Equity

3. Equality, Empowerment, and, Opposition to Injustice;

4. Advocacy for Community-level social justice (Forenza & Germak, 2015)

Observing the interwoven factors impacting individuals and communities plays a crucial role in the practice of social work. Social work practice needs to ensure external environmental factors positively impact the well-being of the community members.

Lane (2017) and NASW (2013) revealed the concept of child welfare social worker's ethical responsibility to pursue social justice allowed consideration in how meaningful participation in community activities outside the agency affects a social worker's overall understanding, learning, personal and professional development. NASW's development of the concept of social justice as an ethical standard points discernment to a more nurturing recognition of child welfare social worker's present experiences, expectations, and institutional knowledge to the profession (Engstrom, 2019). The 2016 -2017 NASW Social Justice Priorities (NASW, 2016) service as a conduit for child welfare social workers to engage in the purposeful effort further cultivating professional development while supporting and expanding their awareness. The concept of social justice as an ethical standard for social work practice serves as the ideological principle for social workers who dedicate to providing the best practice to clients.

Social Policy

Research corroborates social work practice is embedded within the policy and practice developments (Bird, 2016; Bywaters, 2015; Weiss-Gal; 2016; Weiss-Gal; 2017). The policy established and implemented creates more intrusive social work interventions in child welfare social work practice. From the development of social and economic disparities impacting community development, it is thought macro practice amongst social workers would draw a more significant concern toward social action (Mattocks, 2017). The research conducted by

Davidson-Arad & Benvenishti (2016) formulated results from child welfare social workers and social work program college students. The study evaluated the relationship between child welfare social worker's interest in policy development, attitude toward poverty, the concern of professional goals, and found no association between the interest in policy building and response to poverty (Bradt et al., 2015; Engler et al., 2019). As such, the workers' attitudes were substantial to the intervention decisions with responding to social dilemmas and had an impact on their level to engage in policy (Davidson-Arad & Benbenishty, 2016). In contrast, the students responded to the structural causes of poverty and believed the social dilemma impacted the interest to engage in policy creation as there was a direct impact on clients.

An equally significant aspect of social policy concerning social work practice was found in the reviewed literature, which revealed the relationship between social justice, the belief of uncertainty to engage and, policy reform was common themes (Bird, 2016; Irizarry, 2016; Krings et al., 2019; Weiss-Gal, 2017; Yu, 2016). One study discussed the level of uncertainty to engage with the social policy action of social justice (Schiettecat, Roets & Vandenbroeck, 2016). Schiettecat, Roets & Vandenbroeck (2016) indicated the child welfare social workers as participants indicated in the study their thoughts of the frustration associated with the injustices sustained within the public child welfare system and the lack of direction as to how to get involved with social policy action. Morgaine (2014) exposed through her study the discussion from the social workers as participants revealing the barriers leading to the views of defeat and annoyances with the concern of social policy toward social justice. McLaughlin (2017) uncovered child welfare social workers recognized the barriers impede the advancement of social justice and expressed a level of frustration concerning the structural nature of social justice as it relates to social policy advancement with the agency. The studies presented child welfare social

workers face a considerable number of barriers which collide with the dual mission of public service and policy reform. Moreover, the complexities child welfare workers encounter act to advance social justice; this study aims to address the literature gap on how the lack of definition of the term social justice impacts child welfare social work practice behaviors.

Common themes in defining social justice in child welfare social work

Child welfare social workers need to develop skills to heighten both the personal and professional abilities to work within a society where systemic injustice evolves on a continuum while acknowledging the importance of intervening in affecting socially just policies (Bird, 2016; Bywaters, 2015). Conversely, there is limited research as to how child welfare social workers are to develop a clear understanding and pursue engagement in social justice policy changing. There are themes examined and presented in the literature of child welfare social workers' perceptions, conceptualization, and awareness of social justice.

The following themes were found most prevalent and included in this study's literature as follows: lack of clarity, confidence, cohesiveness. There are three common theme words found in the literature: clarity, confidence, and cohesiveness. Several research studies indicated child welfare social workers tend to be cautious and confused when sharing their opinion about social justice (Morgaine, 2014; Morley & Ablett, 2017). The social workers in two research studies reviewed voiced the lack of clarity attributed to their lack of confidence when discussing social justice related to practice (Hair, 2015; McLaughlin, Gray, Wilson, 2015). The participants conveyed the challenge to define the term social justice due to the varied definitions used in context to practice (McLaughlin, Gray, & Wilson, 2017; Morgaine, 2014). Morgaine (2014) found a child welfare social worker related the term to direct practice due to the lack of confidence when providing the definition. In agreement with the findings for child welfare social

58

workers (Henrickson, 2018) found social workers associate with social justice with the systemic change, along with social workers who inspired to promote social justice inclusion is needed on all levels. The research indicated a need for a concise definition of social justice to support social workers with conceptualizing how to integrate social justice in everyday practice (Morgaine, 2014).

 Utopian perception. Social workers identify social justice as a Utopian concept (Edmonds-Cady & Wingfield, 2017). For example, research of social work students from a school of social work social justice focused interdisciplinary minor program articulated the disbelief of social justice as attainable (Richards-Schuster et al., 2015; Segal, 2014). In another study conducted by Morgaine (2014), the participants viewed social justice as a fantastical illusion. A review of several studies suggested a percent of social workers experience indifference concerning the development of a collective just society (Valutis & Rubin, 2016). The concern of social workers believing in the concept of social justice interrelated in social work practice is it possible for social workers to develop the level of skills to reach the ethical standard of social justice and commit to engaging in social action for clients. Nonetheless, it is noted social workers who defined social justice as a goal within the everyday practice was able to experience effectiveness when seeking social justice as a professional (Raineri & Calcaterra, 2019; Wiener & Mitch Rosenwald, 2008). This action is increasingly essential, recognizing the political and organizational barriers social workers encounter combined with the escalation of social inequalities.

Social Justice Competency and behaviors

 There is a mandate from the accrediting agency, Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), which directs Master of Social Work programs to develop an unambiguous curriculum

59

for preparing graduates to master nine core competencies for practice (Hill et al. 2017; Sayre & Sar, 2015). The organization is determined to enrich the quality of social work education, ensuring the professional practice promoted the well-being of individuals, families, and the communities and social and economic justice (CSWE, 2016; Hodgson & Watts, 2017; Lane et al., 2017). The pursuit of the organization is to set and maintain accreditation of national standards for college degree programs in social work, through the promotion of faculty development, collaborating on an international level, and by the advocacy of social work education and study (CSWE, 2016; Gelles, 2017; Pugh, 2017).

The third competency established by CSE conceptualizes social justice as the process whereas social workers understand all members of society regardless of status deserve fundamental rights such as acceptable standard of living, privacy, freedom, healthcare, privacy, and education (Bhuyan et al., 2017; Carlson et al., 2016; Edmonds-Cady & Wingfield, 2017; Flores et al., 2014; Funge et al., 2011; Ricciardelli & Laws, 2019). Flores et al. (2014) explained with understanding social justice practitioners such as social workers is to acknowledge the global manifestation of oppression as it is connected to society and obtain knowledge of justice philosophies and policies to encourage human and civil rights. The authors further stated it is essential for social work practice to incorporate social justice in the community service associations and foundations to ensure there is no prejudice and non-equitability against human rights (Flores et al., 2014). The practice entails the advancement of social justice for human rights through the service of social work toward economic, social, and environmental justice (Bent-Goodley, 2014; Chechak, 2015; Pugh, 2017; Sloane et al., 2018). It is determined through research in high regard as practice toward achieving competency social workers are expected to acquire the understanding of mechanisms of discrimination and oppression as well as engage in

60

practices which promote and advocate for human rights and social justice (Baron & McLaughlin, 2017; Beckett, 2018; Caras & Sandu, 2014; Hodgson & Lynelle Watts, 2017; O'Leary & Tsui, 2019; Veal, 2018).

Advocacy

Advocacy is regarded as a commonly used strategic approach to integrating social justice in social work practice (Hardwick, 2014; Kozan & Blustein, 2018; Oliver, 2017). Advocacy is characterized as acting to guard the customer's rights and interests to avert treachery (Engler et al., 2019; Lee & McAdams, 2019; Steen, 2018). Likewise, it was characterized as helping customers gain the aptitudes to advocate for themselves and to approach the resources essential to advance freedom (Ramírez Stege, Brockberg, & Hoyt, 2017). With social workers supporting advocacy as central to the social justice strategy, there is research indicating the challenge for balancing work and social action. An example of the balance barrier is illustrated in research conducted to examine the number of social workers who participated in advocacy within their employment (Rogers et al., 2019). In a similar research study, when asked to rank the order of tasks, the participants listed the advocacy among the least task performed (Kilbane, 2014). As social workers acquaint advocacy with social justice, more understanding is needed of how social workers conceptualize advocacy for social justice.

Advocacy Competencies. The NASW (2017) advocacy principle (NASW, 2013) provides suggestions to child welfare social workers as to how to engage in social justice action. Travis's (2017) suggestions include examples in different working directly with clients and working on behalf of the community. Research on social activities includes the demonstration of how child welfare social workers function across working with individual clients, community,

61

and public domains (Bliss, 2015; Kozan, & Blustein 2018; Ramírez Stege, Brockberg, & Hoyt, 2017). For instance, child welfare social workers, when working with children and families may focus on helping to frame self-advocacy skills for the parents, acknowledging the role of oppressive barriers to the families acquiring resources, and pursue empowerment for the child, parents, and community encountering the same oppression. Child welfare social workers may intervene and engage in systemic advocacy on behalf of children's well-being concerning education, mental health, physical health, and emotional, social development (Kavanaugh et al. 2017; Yang & Debora Ortega, 2016). On the community level, child welfare social workers may engage in activism, and political advocacy toward issues impacting the children and families served through the child welfare system (Steen et al., 2016).

Social Justice and Macro Advocacy

Rothman & Terry Mizrahi (2014) believed there is a balance to social justice and macro advocacy approaches in social work. The authors contend the share of moral values and methods, and objectives focus on the individual and the community development on the social context (Ricciardelli & Britton Laws, 2019; Olson et al., 2017; Winter, 2016). The social work practice approaches applied to the consequences of oppression (Ashley et al., 2017; Keenan et al., 2016). Each undertaking acknowledges the systemic privilege of selective individuals in society who reap the benefits based on specific allowances separating community members (Anastas, 2014). The definition the authors, Ashley et al. (2017), offer for social justice social work is given as the approach to practice which specialists attempt to improve the development of human well-being an on a large scale. These actions are steered by the principles of access, fairness, engagement, and humility (Forenza & Caitlin Eckert, 2017; Um, 2019).

62

Several researchers noted social workers advocating social justice and micro-macro advocacy seek to develop ways to benefit individuals and reduce injustice impacting society (Jewell & Owens, 2017). The identification of commonalities in the approaches is to establish social change for promotion of future changes in individual and community well-being; affirmation of experiences of injustice and recognition of the individual problems emerge from societal influences. Child welfare social workers practicing from the social justice and macro advocacy approach intermingle interventions and concepts based on client needs. Each paradigm requires child welfare social workers to adopt the role and accept the responsibilities of an activist, advocate, and, most commonly, categorized as a change agent for social change. Despite the difference between the two approaches of social justice and macro advocacy, there are shared values, and of these social actions, there is an integrated approach to practice (Weinberg & Campbell, 2014).

Micro and Macro Practice

Historically, the profession of social work practice was formulated on a two-fold foundation of micro-macro approaches (Austin, 2016; Bonella, 2018; Ferguson et al., 2018; McBeath, 2016; Mattocks, 2017; Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014). This dual approach to social work practice offers social action definitions since the inception of community service (Rothman & Terry Mizrahi, 2014). Ferguson et al. (2018) further explained micro social work practice involves direct patient-practitioner services for individual needs while macro social work practice focuses on social action at the structural/organizational level (Donaldson et al., 2014). Included in the definitions is the implication of social justice as essential at both micro and macro practice of social action.

With both approaches, there are two typical categorical duties of social work practice where child welfare social workers intervene to effect change. Austin (2016) distinguished the two approaches concerning the complementary relationship of cause (micro) and behavior (macro). The outpour of macro-level social work practice began during the era of Depression in the United States and presented a rush of community service for the poverty-stricken neighborhoods (Spolander, Engelbrecht, & Pullen, 2015). There was a social advocacy level on a macro level drawing the attention of social workers and presented the ongoing engagement in politics and public policy. In accordance over the years, there was an increased level of engagement for direct service from social workers. Over the years, the most common employment position for micro-level social workers is a licensed social worker in the United States (McBeath, 2016).

From the development of micro and macro practice, there has been a noticeable surge of micro practice, causing a higher percentage of micro-level practitioners (Reisch, 2016). The direction of micro-level social work practice continues to surpass the percent of social workers and social work students who establish an interest in obtaining a job at the macro-level of social work practice (Harrison et al., 2016). Two assumed reasons calculated for the imbalance of micro and macro practice is 1) the shift to individual practice for social workers based on the climate and educational curriculum in social work education programs; and, 2) financial gains with choice of acquiring a clinical license (Knight, & Gitterman, 2018).

It is foreseen that micro-level social workers pull to practice with individuals while macro-level social workers process thoughts toward the world's broader concerns (Applewhite, Kao & Pritzker, 2018; Miller et al., 2015; Miller, Grise-Owens, 2016). Choi, Urbanski, Fortune, & Rogers (2015) research survey examining the Baccalaureate (BSW) and Master (MSW) level

curricula indicated there were a minimal number of course topics of macro practice and accentuated careers toward private clinical careers. The author concluded the result of the emphasis on clinical careers led to the lack of knowledge of macro practice and minimal interest in community practice for a recognizable number of students (Choi, Urbanski, Fortune, & Rogers, 2015; Escobar-Ratliff, 2018). Similarly, in 2010, the research findings from the Mattocks (2017) study uncovered 90% of MSW students elected to concentrate on micro practice. More support of this notion was provided by The Association of Social Work boards from the United States, and Canada sharing micro practice social workers made up 65% of social works in practice (Mattocks, 2017). According to the boards, behavioral health workers make up the largest number of providers of counseling services (Mattocks, 2017). Subsequently, a 2015 study revealed among 246 respondents of MSW graduates, 85 percent enrolled in an MSW clinical concentration program, and direct practice career positions were filled by 83 percent of the graduates (Mattocks, 2017). In conclusion, from the studies, the results imply direct practice is currently the chosen highly orient social work profession.

Child Welfare Micro-Macro level practice and Social Justice

Reisch (2016) and Pritzker & Applewhite (2015) outlined macro-level practice has stood by the forefront of child welfare practice. The translation of service agrees with the ethical standard for social justice as established by the mandate from the CSWE (CSWE, 2015) and the NASW Code of Ethics (Bent, 2014). McBeath (2016) declared the practice of macro child welfare social work embodies the ethical perspective by expanding knowledge of human needs to service practitioners. The author added that the macro practice's intentions are for child welfare stakeholders to create and implement varied strategies are the productive model of the profession's fundamental concept for empowerment (McBeath, 2016).

65

Hill et al. (2017) explained the leadership roles of macro-level practitioners translate into the social action advocating change in structures and systems shaping people's well-being. Both professional social work organizations explain it is expected for macro-level child welfare social workers to advocate the improvement of social conditions to meet the basic needs of identified individuals and encourage social justice for all people. The critical role of macro child welfare social work practice is to understand the changes processed by community structure and mechanisms of the external, internal, and organizational process involving the policies and provision of social community service (Jewell & Owens 2017; Lightfoot et al., 2016; Reisch, 2016; Whitaker et al. 2015). Donaldson (2016) clarified the goals of macro-level practice to address the empowerment of individuals through the collaborative endeavors; to create and project implementation of innovative policies and practices through community-directed programs and improve the lives and well-being of those in need of mutual support social actions. The macro child welfare social worker's function is to identify issues threatening the rights of diverse communities and personal identification of class, gender (identity), race, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and immigration status (Reisch, 2016).

The ability to guide micro practice toward macro-level social action is how the concerns of macro-level practice affect the lifestyle of individuals experiencing challenges based on social problems (Gonzalez & Gelman, 2015). This idea is a fallacy of social justice action is only addressed at the structural level of macro practice. With this belief, social work students interested in direct practice and social workers of clinical practice work within the narrow concept of professional responsibility toward more substantial interactions on community issues. The macro-level practice needs to incorporate micro-level practice for the betterment of the under-served. For example, on a micro-level, an individual with limited finances may seek

services for a personal social challenge may find difficulty accessing services. The limited

number of available resources for the population of individuals with limited finances is the

concern on a macro level. Under these circumstances, there is the relevance of how macro-level

practice impacts the micro-level of practice. It is both micro and macro practices where social

individuals and encourage social justice for all people. The critical role of macro child welfare

social work practice is to understand the changes processed by community structure and

mechanisms of the external, internal, and organizational process involving the policies and

provision of social community service (Jewell & Owens 2017; Lightfoot et al., 2016; Reisch,

2016; Whitaker et al. 2015). Donaldson (2016) clarified the goals of macro-level practice to

address the empowerment of individuals through structures and systems are shaping people's

well-being. Both professional social work organizations explain it is expected for macro-level

child welfare social workers to advocate the improvement of social conditions to meet the

workers can advocate for the oppressed by supporting communities to take social action against

organizations for the produce and distribution of goods for the under-served population (Austin

et al., 2018; Donaldson et al., 2015; Katz, 2015).

Challenges with the integration of Social Justice in Child Welfare

Spolander, Engelbrecht & Sansfaçon (2015) proclaimed substantial progress in the

development of micro-macro level practice in support of integrating social justice in social work

practice. Nevertheless, there are barriers to social justice integration in child welfare practice

(Harrison et al., 2016; Lee & McAdams, 2019; Moore et al., 2017). The hesitance may come in

part from the biased political system opposing the type of change with social justice would

generate in policy development and applied to practice. Also, in the context of child welfare

practice, those who are of privilege and hold power for altering the work with children and

67

families are genuinely resistant to modifying the system's formalities. Flores et al. (2014) offered it is the government systems, in which child welfare social workers are employed, recommends training and acknowledge standards to advocate for clients while the same system resists social justice interventions for empowering clients to develop independence from the system.

Significantly, it is essential to point out the appraisal of the viability of social justice interventions within child welfare services are not likely to produce the outcomes in abundance assumed due to the uncertainty of not having measurable components to measure (Ife & Tascón, 2016; Jewell & Owens, 2017; Strier & Binyamin, 2014; Williams, 2016; Yu et al., 2016). With the lack of a unified definition for the term social justice of a universal curriculum to teach social justice objective for practice, the goals and activities to address social justice with no measurable results. Gelles (2017) stated without institutional support for the commitment of social justice actions, no matter the intention, the integration in practice would continue an ongoing effort. The author advocated for additional training at the social work education level and professional development for child welfare social workers to work systemically to create ways to make social justice a common factor to practice for measurable outcomes (Gelles, 2017).

Bywaters et al. (2016) presented challenges to social justice integration with social work practice by presenting doubt toward the integration of social justice in child welfare services. Concerning the concept of integration, the author identified the conceptual groundwork of social justice action as a paradigm shift from practice concentrating on children and families to communities. There is the belief that child welfare social workers are obligated to not only support the well-being of clients but to also engage in actions addressing the social ills of communities, and the broader societal populations (Bywaters et al., 2016). Additionally, Bywaters et al. (2016) noted traditionally, child welfare social workers focused primarily on the

68

service objectives within the professional context of being a child welfare social worker. Seemingly, while the child welfare administrators focused on the meeting the obligations from the policies and principles of the child welfare agency, there are child welfare social workers interested in integrating the ethical standard of social justice in the process of practice (Rosanbalm et al., 2016; Rousseau & Gunia, 2016; Russell, Kerwin & Halverson, 2018; Sidebotham, 2018; Shulman, 2016). In contrast, there are child welfare social workers who assume the role with the public agency and focus on complying with the agency focused objectives as learned through training which is the primary guided by the policies and legislative measures governing institutionalized perspectives of child welfare (Rackauskiene, Kasnauskiene, & Virbalienė, 2018; Raineri, & Calcaterra, 2018; Ricciardelli & Laws, 2019).

Additionally, Mathias (2015) assessed social justice is a liberal political philosophy inconsistent with the beliefs and values of child welfare social workers, therefore, the concept of integration in social work practice is not unproblematic. In support of this perception is the discussion of recognizing in child welfare social work practice, the advocacy of social justice is intended to enhance the promotion of empowerment, ignite freedom of choice, and limit the stereotype of victimization (Bird, 2016). Mathias (2015) and Bird (2016) contend while social justice is a recurrent thought in child welfare practice, the profession has not characteristically concentrated on the integration of social action advocacy as a standard for daily function, and limited information as to how child welfare social workers are trained to include social justice in daily practice. This vital detail distinguishes child welfare social workers from a social activist (Danso, 2015; Ferguson, 2017; McLaughlin et al., 2017; McBeath, 2016; Raineri & Calcaterra, 2018; Reisch, 2014; Shulman, 2016; Talbot & McMillin, 2014).

McLaughlin, Gray, & Wilson (2017) explored the accusation demanding for child welfare social workers to engage in social action advocacy is not a standard characteristic of child welfare social workers. Hardwick (2014) mentioned that a large scale of child welfare social workers reacted negatively to the inclusion of social action advocacy in the professional agenda for child welfare social workers maintaining the belief that the professional position of child welfare can be apolitical. Bliss (2015) regarded commitment to social justice advocacy obligates the child welfare social workers and researcher to examine the unforeseen consequences and ethical drawbacks. For instance, the idea of self-advocacy may not be consistent with the culture of a community. Child welfare social workers engaging in self-evaluation may discover cultural differences affecting their work with the community, and the development of ongoing dialogue about the difference is essential to create effective practice procedures for the future. There are cases of interest when a client and community may be at a difference with the child welfare social worker believing what would best serve the individual or community. When committing to the social action, child welfare social workers are to make decisions about the concept to support the child's best interest, family, and community (Bradt et al., 2015; Gough & Spencer, 2014; O'Connor & Leonard, 2014).

The concern with committing to social action is the dilemma of the child welfare social worker engaging in a social cause in opposition to the child welfare system's mechanism. Davidson-Arad & Benbenishty (2016) stated for a child welfare social worker working with marginalized communities, there is a risk of reinforcing the hierarchies supporting social injustice. For instance, when child welfare social workers from economically higher-income living environments work with clients from lower economic status consideration of privilege, lack of knowledge, and empowering individuals from distressed communities should be given

70

close attention. Strength base focus of racial bias is also addressed when a non-minority child welfare social worker addresses racism, and the impact of racism on a client and communities served (Ackerman, 2017). It is suggested it is perhaps more practical for child welfare social workers to take social action, not within the capacity of their employment. Participating in social advocacy activities outside of the agency will be helpful to manage the limited time and resources which prevent child welfare social workers who provide clients and communities with resources needed to work against the injustices impacting their success (Kim, 2017; Richards-Schuster, Espitia, & Rodems; 2019) successfully.

Summary

Child welfare social workers assuming the role of a service provider extend social service resources to society's marginalized population (McLaughlin et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2017; Morgaine, 2014; Rogers et al., 2019). McMillin (2018) affirmed that the marginalized population is categorized as those without resources and suffer economic gains across social trends and policies. Child welfare social workers advocate on behalf of individuals and communities by advocating for human rights and against bias/discrimination (Lee & McAdams III, 2019). Stating this, child welfare social workers help to improve the quality of life for members of society by serving to enhance the quality of well-being for all persons (Bird, 2016; Eversman & Jason, 2016; Ferguson et al., 2018; Keenan et al., 2016; Reisch, 2016). The concept for child welfare social workers is to address individuals' well-being through consideration of ethical and moral values decision-making (Etnyre, 2015; Hodgson & Watts, 2017). There are social justice focused training and, curriculum (Engler, 2019; Flores, 2014; Sheppard & Charles 2014) developed to prepare child welfare social workers to adopt skills to meet the development of competency

71

guidelines helpful to steer research, training, and, practice (Rousseau, & Gunia, 2016; Stege, Brockberg & Hoyt, 2017).

The research conducted thus far on the topic of social justice and, social work practice includes the ongoing debate concerning the prominence of social justice in social work practice (Austin et al., 2016; Bent-Goodley, 2014; Kam, 2014; Crucil & Norman Amundson, 2017; Richards-Schuster et al., 2015). The concept of social action advocacy by child welfare social workers is questionable, for there are social workers who do not agree with social justice action as a component of social worker obligation or professional responsibility (Dominelli & Ioakimidis, 2016). The other premise of the debate is the reliable connection within the conceptual framework between social justice, micro and macro levels, and child welfare practice. There are findings from research revealing an increase of social workers and social work students straying away from macro-level practice to participate in the lucrative career path of private practice.

Although there is this revelation of increase of micro-level practice, there is the recognizable need for the continued macro-level practice by child welfare social workers. The macro-level practice addresses the regulation s of community resources, which is a barrier and limits the progress of the individuals fighting to progress past oppression. The debate includes the proclamation revealing social action advocacy has not sufficiently addressed social issues of inequality outside of every individual casework intervention (Raineri & Calcaterra, 2018). The disclosure in research exposes within micro and macro-level practice child welfare social workers and child welfare stakeholders who recognize social justice has done a magnitude level to affect the change over the years (Applewhite et al., 2018; Gough & Spencer, 2014; Keenan et al., 2016; Mattocks, 2017; Rankine, 2019). Hudson (2017) and Eversman and Bird (2016) also

72

found by focusing on the universal themes of equality in the child welfare social work relationship, recognizing the role of systemic injustice in people's lives, and affirming clients experience of injustice there is the precise application of social justice in social work practice and a higher possibility for generating a standard definition for the term social justice.

The examination of critical social theory and its ability to address the social attitudes and behaviors of social workers who fall inside the scope of traditional social worker behavior becomes a significant problem when we begin to examine how social injustice has been a relatively widespread social phenomenon (Lathouras, 2016; Lerner, 2015; Mattocks, 2018; Munger et al., 2016). With injustices being as widespread as it is, is it reasonable to assume all social disparities consist of asocial inequality dichotomy (Sheppard & Charles 2014). The examination and existence of knowledge about marginalized communities were once perceived as society's privilege toward a particular community (Sloane, 2018). Currently, society's limited resources and opportunities are seen as a way to exert power and control over marginalized communities (Bank, 2016; Shulman, 2016).

Given many individuals could be victims of injustices, it makes sense social justice social work would be widespread to help then the most considerable number of people who were suffering from a belief one group of individuals should have less equality than the other. While the overall understanding of the concept of social justice has increased within the practice of social work since the inception of social welfare movement over two centuries ago, the knowledge of social justice with the child welfare social work practice is still nascent (Keenan et al., 2016). Though there is enough anecdotal and tangential evidence to witnessing social justice with child welfare social work practice occurs, the knowledge about this phenomenon is limited. This lack of knowledge encompassing by the lack of definition for social justice within child

73

welfare social work practice could seriously be disadvantageous to the overall application of services provided to individuals and those marginalized communities not receiving adequate services from the child welfare system. Although studies have been conducted to examine social justice in social work (Austin, 2014; Bywaters, 2015; Chechak, 2016; Russell et al., 2018), these studies have not examined some of the varying beliefs which many social workers and specifically child welfare social workers hold while providing their services.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Social Justice and its application to child welfare social work practice are essential to the service of child welfare. Nevertheless, the definition of social justice and how the term is applied to social work practice is not entirely understood (Morgaine, 2014). While there is extensive literature reviewing the discussion of the relation between social justice, social work, and social welfare (Bell & Romano, 2015; Morgaine, 2014; Olson et al., 2013), research relating specifically to how child welfare social workers perceive and examine social justice in their practice toward meeting the needs of children and families was called for (Davis & Reber, 2016).

The problem addressed by this study is how the child welfare social workers define social justice and how and if the concept of social justice is applied to practice (McLaughlin et al., 2015). In the child welfare system, the concept of social justice emerges through child welfare social worker's focus building upon individual, family, and community strength in the effort to protect children against abuse and neglect (Keenan, 2016). Understanding how child welfare social workers formulate social justice in social work practice will contribute to developing goals and sensitivity to work performance (Morgaine, 2014). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine child welfare social worker's perception of the definition of the word social justice and the application of the concept of social justice to practice.

This chapter described the qualitative research design used for this study, followed by a description of the population and sample, recruitment procedures used, and method of data collection and analysis. The population of child welfare social workers is described, including a description of the sample of participants, how and where they were recruited, and the method of the sampling. The material and instrument are described in detail with the data collection,

processing, and analysis following the instrument all complete with comprehensive descriptions of the steps taken. The chapter concluded with the steps required to conduct the research written in the specificity necessary to provide clarity for replication along with a discussion of the assumptions, limitations, delimitation, ethical assurances, and a summary.

Research Methodology and Design

A qualitative method and phenomenological research design was used to examine child welfare social worker's perception for the definition of social justice, and the application to the concept of social justice with social work practice as derived by the experience of social workers employed by a child welfare system (Depner et al., 2016). Qualitative research methods are useful with discovering the meaning to the experiences provided by the participants (Morrow, Gustavson & Jones, 2016). The qualitative analysis best served the purpose of this study with a stronger sensitivity to the intended collected data than quantitative methodology. Given, the nature of the quantitative methodology to seek measurable, observable data on variables, the qualitative methodology seeks to understand the participants' experience (Barnham, 2015). Also, in contrast to the quantitative inquiry where the data is represented through numerical symbols, the qualitative inquiry presented information through primary linguistics.

Since the nature of this phenomenological study was an exploratory process, it allowed the data to represent itself, which further supports a qualitative method of inquiry. With minimum research on this topic, the qualitative method is was suited for this study as qualitative research methodology allowed in-depth inquiry which proved valuable to add to the further research on this topic (Barnham, 2015). The qualitative method uses individual experience, descriptive data, and subjective interpretation to understand and interpret social interactions, the generalizability of quantitative method to place the data in measures of units for measurement is

76

not the goal for this study (Yilmaz, 2013). A concluding thought is philosophical, qualitative methods recognize the knowledge provided from the participants of a study as contextual, and to construct the analysis for the findings and results, the data collected is systematically interpreted by the researcher.

Over recent years, research concerning social justice and social work practice increased with substantial work to elaborate and clarify the practice of social work (Bird, 2016). From the lack of research about the direct practice of applying social justice in social work practice, qualitative research methodology can gather detailed, in-depth inquiry and explore narratives which can prove valuable (Levitt, 2016). The method of qualitative research allows the researcher to examine phenomena, such as opinions and feelings, which are not easily extracted or learned through the exploration of conventional research methods (Singh, 2015). Depner et al. (2016) reasoned the use of qualitative methods presents an opulent description of convoluted processes. This aspect of qualitative methods is desirable for the possibility of multiple social justice descriptions in social work practice (Gringeri, Barusch & Cambron, 2013). For the current study, the phenomenological study design was used to explore the participants' life experiences and perceptions of lessening the barriers interfere with the development of a succinct definition of social justice as applied to social work practice. Depner et al. (2016) depicted qualitative methods as a guide for child welfare social workers to obtain insight into their practice and for the social work field to address social justice by studying the specific experiences of individuals working to provide services in the context of social justice. The study from Askerud (2017) further addressed recognition qualitative methods of collecting data from open-ended questions to create insight into the individual's perceptions, experiences, and beliefs.

77

Along with the elements and fundamentals guiding qualitative research, the phenomenological study qualitative method provides the means to understand and contextualize the purpose and statement for this study. The phenomenological method for this study was used to explore child welfare social workers experience defining the term social justice in the practice of social work. The direction of this research was to focus on the perception and emotional responses of the participants. The current literature is limited to describe the collaboration between these two critical entities within the social work practice, particularly in the public agency environment. It is the voice of the child welfare social workers at the core of the examination as these social workers' lived experiences give a level of understanding of this phenomenon. A qualitative strategy was chosen to assist the navigation of the examination, which will motivate the research and guide the aspect of the study from the questions to findings through to the conclusion and discussion.

Through the in-depth conversations between the researcher and the participants, the child welfare social workers were presented the opportunity to rethink their experiences and structure meaning through discussion. The participants' data were collected through the semi-structured questionnaire and then analyzed in an evolving manner to explain the collective meaning of the term social justice. This process of the examination was designed to acquire a rich detail analysis embodying the child welfare social workers' understanding of the definition of social welfare and how the term applies to practice. This study presented qualitative research to explore the depth of the phenomenon providing readers a thorough understanding of the peculiarities of this phenomenon (Jamali, 2018)

Jamali (2018) presented the process for collecting the information from the participants as it allows the process to explore for a reflective meaning through in-depth conversations with

the child welfare social workers. It is the in-depth discussions presenting child welfare social workers the opportunity to reexamine their daily practice experiences and compose meaning through conversation. The choice of the research methodology of phenomenological inquiry is considered an attempt to process the interpersonal experiences unexamined in everyday life occurrences (Creswell, 2018). Tight (2016) explains this method proposes to assist with identifying the meaning of the human experience as relating to the phenomena and recognizable communal occurrence. This phenomenological study explored how child welfare social workers define and experience social justice. The foundation of this study was to gather a philosophical understanding of the meaning of the phenomena. For this study, the qualitative approach was most appropriate because it can establish a better understanding of the participants' lived experiences (child welfare social workers) with the understanding of how they formulate the definition and application of social justice to practice data. This study allowed participants the opening to express how they collect and analyze performance level data. The data collection of the components studied is valuable in qualitative research and generally defined as including the origin of knowledge, theoretical perspective, and methodology (Hansford et al., 2017).

Qualitative research questions often begin with what or how, guiding the researcher to understand how the participants' responses are relative to the topic (Abayomi, 2017). Specifically, the nature of research questions requires exploration, which is why the qualitative approach is warranted (Kapiszewski & Kirilova, 2014). The current study explored each participant's perception through their experience by basically asking how questions:

RQ1. How do child welfare social workers define social justice?

RQ2. In what way do child welfare social workers apply the concept of social justice in

social welfare practice?

Population

The population for the study was social workers who were currently or past employed as

child welfare social workers within a child welfare system. The social workers were recruited

from the social media Facebook page of the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. Eligible

participants for this study were non-specific sex orientation persons over the age of 18 who were

employed at least five years as a child welfare social worker. Though other sociodemographic

criteria (e.g., race, cultural background, education level, etc.) were collected for demographic

purposes, only the years of experience as a social worker determined whether or no   t the

person was or was not eligible for inclusion in the study.

Sample

For this study, the inclusive criteria included social workers hired as child welfare social

workers within public child welfare and family social service agency were recruited and

interviewed. Men and women of different age groups and ethnic categories who fit the inclusion

criteria were recruited to complete the interview. Child welfare social workers were able to recall

their public agency experiences and their outlooks of those experiences and the influence these

experiences formulate toward the ideas of social justice in social work practice at a public

agency. To obtain a clear description of this study, it was essential to include specific child

welfare social workers (Gringeri et al., 2013).

The study sample involved 12 direct service child welfare, social workers. Selecting past

or present child welfare social workers to complete the semi-structured interview for this study is

purposeful as they occupied the role of a social worker in a child welfare system and would understand best the process of defining the term social justice with regard to applying the term to social work practice.

Purposeful sampling is useful as the recruitment method for the participants of this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Purposeful sampling is considered a common method to use for qualitative research. The method involves the selection of research participants (Barnham, 2015) who can provide detailed information to meets the needs of the study. It is the unique experience in the respective field as basis for being purposefully selected as a participant (Barnham, 2015). For this study, the selection criteria for participants sought to include volunteers with profound experience employed in the field of social work who were able to recall and articulate personal lived experience in context to the phenomena being examined concerning the definition of social justice and application to social work practice.

The purposive sample of child welfare social workers were recruited as the researcher was given permission by the Facebook page administrator to post the invitation for the study on the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute face book page. (https://www.facebook.com/workforceinstitute; see Appendix A). The invitation flyer (see Appendix B) to the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute social media website was listed to request volunteers to participate in this research study. There was the process of selecting participants through email communication to coordinate presenting the demographic questionnaire form (see Appendix C) and the informed consent form for signature (see Appendix D). The eligible participants were contacted by the researcher for arranging the day and time of semi- structured interview.

Materials

Semi-structured interview questions were used for this study as the primary source to gather data based on receiving detailed experiences and views of child welfare social workers. An open-ended interview questions technique suggested inquiry for the participants to reveal answers about their unique expertise as a social worker in the child welfare system and how it could contribute to defining the concept of social justice and application in the social work practice. The interview questions proposed were to collect responses from the participants to provide insight from those who were having an intimate experience with child welfare social work practice and the concept of social justice as related to social work practice.

A semi-structured interview can provide an understanding of the child welfare social workers' point of view and give their voices a platform through the qualitative method of utilization of the response to the research questions. Creswell (2018) suggested semi-structured interview questions consisting of 10-12 questions with several probes can be completed in less than one hour. The interview protocol for this study was conducted and examined by the participants from the approved social media website for child welfare social workers. There are ten questions for this study (see Appendix E) with several questions probes to guide the opportunity to examine issues of defining social justice in context to applying the term to social work practice. The semi-structured interview questions asked the participants experiences defining social justice and applying social justice in practice. The child welfare social workers' perception of their daily practice experiences elicited and gathered to assess their exposure to social justice. The participants were asked to define social justice at the beginning of the interview to assist the child welfare social workers in focusing on the main topic of the questionnaire.

82

Before participation in the interview, the participants completed a demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire form was used to collect information about each participant, including gender, ethnic origin, age, and length of time of experience as a child welfare social worker. To prepare a qualitative interview for the selected participants, the author enlisted two volunteers to review the questions. The process was established to evaluate the interview schedule and examine the effectiveness of the questions. Two child welfare social workers with work experience within a public agency providing social services to children and their families reviewed the questionnaire. The author received the feedback from the two mentioned volunteer participants, made minor changes in the interview process, and rewording several sentences for clarification purposes.

Study Procedures

Participants were recruited from the social media website of the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. The eligibility criteria for participants were the two components: (1) position and (2) hired as a child welfare social worker within a public Child and Family services agency. Following the NCU IRB approval, the researcher posted the recruitment flyer on the social media website, which listed the inclusion criteria. The flyer included the researcher's contact information for interested research volunteers to contact the researcher via email or by telephone with the interest of participating in the study.

Prior to administering the interview, the prospective participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, and the informed consent sent through Qualtrics. Once completed, the online forms were uploaded and secured by the researcher. Once the forms were secured, the researcher spoke with participants via telephone explaining the study purpose, the research procedure, and confidentiality. The participants were invited to ask questions about the research

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study and procedures. Information is provided about the researcher to establish rapport and gain the trust of the participants (Merriam, 2015).

The open-ended questions were arranged to capture the participant's perception and experiences for exploring the definition of social justice and the application of the term in social work practice. The interview included a few probing questions to encourage participants to feel free to respond openly and elaborate to clarify a response when necessary (Jamshed, 2014). After the completion of the interview questions, the responses were available through the data application program. The interview question documents were numbered, so the identification of the participants was not revealed. The researcher emailed the participants to schedule a follow-up phone interview to answer any concerns or questions after the initial interview. The average length of completing the interview was 45- 60 minutes for the initial interview and 15-20 minutes for the follow-up interview.

Data Collection and Analysis

Generating the meaning and structure of information collected is a component of qualitative data analysis for this study. The process of information gathering for data can be time-consuming, disordered, and challenging. As qualitative data is text-based, the coding process is regarded as the foundation of analyzing this data (Hill & Alabri, 2013). Coding is often the process of the grouping of words, sentences, phrases, and entire statements. The process involves tracking related expressions or words stated by the participants (Hilal & Alabri, 2013). The words or expressions are conjoined in order to gain an understanding between them.

For this study, the author gathered from the interview the significant idioms and statements about the phenomenon studied, which are extracted from every transcript. Formulation of the meanings from the significant statements was created, the meanings

organized into themes, the themes evolved into theme clusters, and lastly, the themes were categorized. To highlight the specific theme/categories, a color-coded system was used to perform a preliminary analysis. An exhaustive description of lived experiences and perceptions will be written by the author to structure the correlation of the responses to the phenomena. The complete rich description was presented in the finding section. Merriam (2015) explained the creation of credible rich description is the approach to provide readers with enough information for the readers to match the context of the research to their personal life experience.

To warrant the credibility of the data collected from the information, there is a need for transparency in the coding process (Zamawe, 2015). Given the advancements in programming innovation, electronic systems of information coding are step by step, being increasingly utilized to acquire meticulousness in managing such a detailed description of information. The author used the Nvivo Pro 12 computer Qualitative analysis software application for this study to assess the data. The NVivo Pro 12 is regarded to ensure the data process is more thorough, methodically, and given adequate attention required (Zamawe, 2015). Dollah, Abduh & Rosmaladewi (2017) explained there are three principal qualitative data analysis stages the NVivo Pro 12 application is effectively used for which are to uphold transparency, achieve consistency of the labels and obtain meaningful discoveries with graphic illustrations. Creswell (2013) indicated there are strategies used to uphold credibility when examining the accuracy of the data analysis findings for Qualitative validity (Creswell, 2013).

One strategy utilized to seek validity for this study was captured through trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Outlining notes and philosophical, analytical memos written throughout the coding and grouping process was to create interpretations of the data. The method of memoing is a strategy for ensuring goodness and trustworthiness in the process of data

85

analysis. This strategy is reflexivity, whereas; there is the interpretation of data codes and categories in consideration of personal background and biases. Maxwell (2013) presents memoing serves to decipher and analyze data, and in doing so, the process strengthens the validity of the study.

Another ethical strategy to display trustworthiness for this study addressed credibility by checking or presenting the data's interpretation of the research participants for feedback (Maxwell, 2013). This validation technique of the data was solicited compared to the researcher's detailed results with the participants' lived experiences. The preservation of the participants' stated experiences and maintaining the context of the data allows the readers to formulate an impartial decision, offering authenticity to this study. Lastly, to strengthen the validity of the outcomes, the author enabled other researchers to render decisions about transferability with the productive, thick description technique.

Silverman (2016) explained the thick description technique utilized by qualitative researchers provides a robust and detailed account of connections to the social and cultural context enclosed in the data collection. The information gathered supports the readers, creating the relationship between the participants' daily life accounts and the hidden biases affecting their responses. Placing the participant's perceptions into the context of the data collection's cultural and social context permits the readers and researchers to construct their transferability discernment (Silverman, 2016).

Assumptions

Utilizing the semi-structured interview questions technique for this study assumed the participants would provide authentic responses based on their perspectives, values, and experiences not influenced by the impressions of other people. It is assumed the participants

understood the questions and answered the questions honestly. The interview questions were presented to the volunteer participants, and there are no advantages or disadvantages if the participants agree to or chose not to complete the interview. The responses from the participants who choose to complete the interview hopefully supplied a sufficient sample size and represented child welfare social workers who experienced being employed by a public child welfare social service system. It is was anticipated the participants understood and trusted their participation was anonymous.

Limitations

The study was conducted with participants who occupied past or present employment as a child welfare social worker. Focusing on the data collected from child welfare social workers in child welfare public agencies, as opposed to the gaining of insight from child welfare social workers from other categories of employment environments offer services to child and families, such as profit organizations addresses the experiences specifically from the population of the non-profit public agency. The scope of this study researched only one form of child welfare social workers from a public child welfare agency and, therefore, results should not be applied to similar contexts. This dissertation research included child welfare social workers and their focus on their responses to social justice as applied to social work practice. There is a level of differentiation between the roles and duties of the child welfare social workers. There is a possibility because of the differentiation the findings may produce varied results of the study related to the child welfare social workers of specific work capacities.

The data collection process is an additional limitation of this study. Due to the information obtained during the interview, the information is mainly dependent on the participant's willingness to share and the nature of the information limited by the participants'

87

own perspective and lived experiences. Perceptual data is stated in the eye of the beholder, the participant (Hurst et al., 2014). The interview process was the primary data gathering vehicle with then adding two additional data points: years of professional position as a child welfare social worker and the number of training completed by the interviewees.

Delimitations

With collecting data of the perspective from one category of child welfare social workers employed by a county agency, it was essential to consider one category of child welfare social workers from a county agency may vary significantly from other child welfare social workers from other employment environments. With this said, speculation is this study's result would be similar findings for another category of child welfare social workers should be discouraged.

Another possible delimitation is the consideration the study would focus mainly on how child welfare social workers defined social justice and how they are applying the term to practice. A broader scope of questions may give more insight into other complex problems when dealing with social justice and the application of the term to practice. Additionally, the sample in this study will consist of child welfare social workers who agree to participate. The data sources of the open-ended questionnaire and the relevant literature review are added to the narrow scope of this study.

Ethical Assurances

The author followed the ethical standards and guidelines of the American Psychological Association (2013). To ensure this research followed the proper protections for the participants, an application was submitted to the Northcentral University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval before the beginning of the data collection process. By doing so, the author anticipated all ethical concerns can result during the qualitative research process (Creswell,

2018). Along with the approval from the IRB, is the understanding of the obligations to respect the needs, desires, values, and, rights of all participants.

With the study of the phenomena, research process soliciting sensitive and personal perceptions to the questions through extracting meanings from answers, opinions and, statements, there is a need to protect participants with the development of trust (Creswell, 2013). The participants were presented with the objectives of the study, an understanding of the process for data collection and activities, and the participant's availability to the analysis of the data. The risk to the participants is minimal, and, the rights of the participants were considered a priority with the final decision concerning the participants' privacy was the decision of the participant.

For this study, there were steps taken to safeguard the participants' rights. There were written instructions to inform the participants of their voluntary position allowing them to withdraw and decline to answer questions at any time from the study without penalty. To encourage clarity, the objectives of the study were provided outlined and communicated in writing for the participants. The written information presented to the participants also included a consent form completed by each participant. The explanation of the process for the study activities, and the provisions made for monitoring the data collection, ensuring the safety of the participants were presented in writing to the participants. The author made available for the participants the interpretations and transcript of the data. Lastly, the author made all provisions to protect the rights of the participants concerning the reporting of the data.

Due to the sensitivity of answering questions directly associated with the participant's occupation, the participants remained anonymous, any identifying information was excluded, specifically their first or last name, when the interview was completed. In order to ensure confidentiality, the author ensured the completed interview information was not shared with any

third party and held for seven years in the private possession of only the author. To clarify, the information gathered would be used solely for research purposes of this author. Once the assessments were completed, the documents were shredded after the required length of time.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study intended to examine the social attitude toward and perception of child welfare social worker's knowledge of social justice and understanding of the application of social justice in their practice as social workers in the child welfare system. In addition to gathering the naturally felt personal opinions, the data offered new critical insights to the perceptions and social attitudes toward the term social justice as related to social work practice. Chapter three outlined the literature, methodology, and methods for this study, and the process to which the decision created the research design and process of data analysis. The study participants are child welfare social workers who assumed the role of social workers in a public child and family service agency. The ten questions were examined and attempted to meet the purpose of the study. There was the assumption of the study with the participants responding honestly to the semi-structured interview questions. Thus, the potential risk to the participant's autonomy was minimal and completed outlined in the informed consent per the IRB requirements. Chapter three concluded with a discussion of the strategies to align ethical assurance to the data gathering process.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this research was to examine child welfare social workers' perceptions of defining the term social justice and applying the concept of social justice to practice. The study problem questioned how child welfare social workers were defining the term social justice, which is an ethical standard of practice for social workers. Further concern noted was with the lack of definition for the term social justice presented the difficulty for child welfare social workers to apply the concept of social justice to practice (Bank, 2016). A qualitative study was developed, as it was essential to understand the perceptions of child welfare social workers defining the term social justice and applying the term to practice for assisting with providing services to children and families (Applewhite, Kao, & Pritzker, 2017). Purposive sampling was used to select prospective participants who met the criteria and were identified as a child welfare social worker for a public service agency. Twelve adult female child welfare social workers volunteered as participants for the study. The participants provided their opinion in an interview consisting of open-ended interview questions. The researcher coded and entered the data into the NVivo Pro 12 software to assist with the content analysis. This chapter will provide a discussion, evaluation, and results of the findings from data generated by two research questions examined through the lens of the conceptual framework of child welfare social work practice:

Q1. How do child welfare social workers define social justice?

Q2. In what way do child welfare social workers apply the concept of social justice in social welfare practice?

The information organized of this chapter addresses the research questions, along with providing the personal account experience of the participants enlisted for this research study. The information gathered revealed prolific, detailed accounts of the opinions of the participants in their own words of their subjective experiences and feelings concerning their perceptions

91

defining social justice and its application to social work practice. The information was compiled by thematic analysis in which the themes were similar and differing among the participants. The themes will be discussed at length in the forthcoming sections.

Trustworthiness of the Data

In seeking to establish the trustworthiness of this qualitative study, various techniques are used to support the degree of validity. For this study to reach trustworthiness, the findings are to have value (Fabber, 2018). Along with the evaluation for validity, with qualitative research, there are categories of triangulation/credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to measure the consistency of how the data represents the intentions of the research (Mcleod, 2018).

Credibility. The first criterion, credibility, for this study was determined with the use of an open-ended questionnaire created on the Qualtrics online application. The researcher's findings were credible for this research through the themes which emerged from the participants' words. Also, to achieve credibility, there was an in-depth process of examining child welfare social workers' perceptions for defining the term social justice and the application of the concept to daily practice (Creswell, 2014; Trochim et al. 2016). The Qualtrics questionnaire presented analytical options included overall visual results. A final sample size of 12 was appropriate for a qualitative single case study, and data saturation was achieved to reflect the target population with the data saturation was seen when repetition responses occurred (Smith, 2017).

Transferability. There is an intended audience for this study concerning the transferability. A quality sample assured the Transferability of data from the only proposed individual from a social worker population, and child welfare social workers with a minimum of 6 years of social work experience working in the child welfare system (Levitt et al., 2017). The

92

interest of this subject matter is generally limited to child welfare social workers employed in a child welfare agency. The sampling for this research was purposive, with the prospective participants recruited by the advertised area (child welfare social workers past or present employment in a public agency) (Gergen, Josselson, & Freeman, 2015). It is practical to suppose the results and following suggestions are beneficial and worth to other public service personnel whether the standard of practice is based on social justice or not (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014).

Dependability. Dependability demonstrates that the data could be reproduced by other researchers performing similar studies through consistent and constant data (Amankwas, 2016). Dependability, additionally, authenticates the particular conditions are compelled based on the purpose of the study due to conditions changing ever so often (Connelly, 2016). For research, dependability fortifies the conclusions over some time and corroborates the consistency of the facts (Patton, 2014). The researcher created the techniques in the planning process and established a decorum by outlining the process used to support reader confidence in the researcher's interpretation and veracity of the data.

For this study, data dependability was confident based on the uniformity of the questions asked to the child welfare social workers and their responses to the interview questions (Creswell 2014; Trochim et al. 2016). Discussion between the researcher and each participant established to examine the implications of the collected data and the possibility of an impact on the research. The ethical assurances and confidentiality were kept; hence, the data findings' trustworthiness was assured by data saturation, which occurred after the 12th participant. The participants were ensured anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Also, to ensure the data analysis's trustworthiness, the interview responses from the participants were reviewed, organized, and

examined first by the researcher and second, imported to NVivo Pro 12 to obtain insights by using commonalities and referencing information which may be helpful to analysis.

Confirmability. Confirmability verifies, there are no opinions or biases of the researcher (Amankwaa, 2016). The researcher transcribed the participants' interview responses to reduce the possibility of personal opinions in the data collection. Job classification was checked with each participant's data to ensure their response was accurate to their knowledge of the study's purpose, which left minimal probabilities for researcher bias to occur. The 12 participants shaped the confirmability with the research study. Critical to the research study is reflexivity as it is related to the reflection of what transpired during the collection and analysis of the data. During in-depth interviews, the participants described their perceptions and experiences with defining social justice and how they assume to incorporate the concept in their daily practice when assuming the duties as a child welfare social worker. The study participants included in their discussion their ideas to improve their success as wells as the client's success in the child welfare system. The research findings of this chapter's reports are based on an analysis of the following data sources: semi-structured interviews.

Results

The perceptions from child welfare social workers in defining and applying the term social justice to practice were collected for analysis for this study. Two main research questions steered this qualitative research. The informed consent form was provided to the 14 potential participants. Two of the proposed 14 volunteers did not complete the demographic survey yet and failed to contact the researcher to complete the semi-structured interview. Potential participants who did not confirm employment as a child welfare social worker or were under the age of 18 were excluded from the study. Purposive sampling was used to obtain

94

participants; correctly, the recruitment letter was distributed on the National Social worker professional Facebook page to obtain participant who had or held positions as a child welfare social worker in a public agency. After the contact with the potential participant, the researcher provided the individual with the link to the Qualtrics link to compete for the demographic survey and informed consent. Once the informed consent was completed, the researcher contacted the participants to schedule a semi-structured interview conveniently for the participants. All participants interviewed over the telephone using the same nine questions. The semi-structured interviews with the child welfare social workers were conducted to explore the child welfare social workers' perception of social justice in defining and applying the term to practice.

The 12 recruited volunteers answered nine open-ended questions on their perceptions to better understand the position of a child welfare social worker to uphold providing services to clients under the ethical standard of social justice. The questionnaire and interview responses were transcribed and uploaded into NVivo Pro 12 coding analysis of themes. In all, 66 codes were identified. For this dissertation, the study results were presented in the narrative method. The themes were grouped for thematic content data analysis to code and categorize emergent themes for research.

Demographic Characteristics. The final sample included 12 participants who reported race/ethnicity as Caucasian/White (3), followed by African American/Black (7), and Hispanic or Latino (2). The participants identified as female (12). The participants held a master's degree (11), followed by a bachelor's degree (1), and one participant declined to answer (1). The ages of the participants ranged from 34 to 76 years of age, and the frequency tables for the demographic characteristics can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant demographic information n=12

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Education	#Years practice
Female1	53	Black/African American	Master's Degree	11 - 15 years
Female2	53	Hispanic/Latino	Master's Degree	21 - 25 years
Female3	56	Black/African American	Master's Degree	21 - 25 years
Female4	76	Black/African American	Master's Degree	21 - 25 years
Female5	53	Black/African American	Master's Degree	21 - 25 years
Female6	56	Black/African American	Master's Degree	26 or more
Female7	67	White/Caucasian	Master's Degree	26 or more
Female8	35	Hispanic/Latino	Master's Degree	6 - 10 years
Female9	51	Black/African American	Master's Degree	26 or more
Female10	39	White/Caucasian	Bachelor's Degree	6 - 10 years
Female11	57	White/Caucasian	Master's Degree	11 - 15 years
Female12	55	Black/African American	Master's Degree	11 - 15 years

Note. *Participant numbers have been used in place of names to protect anonymity.*

Once the data was collected and transcribed, it was placed in a text Microsoft word document. The file contained the participant information was securely placed in a protected folder with a password. The NVivo Pro 12 was the qualitative software application used to analyze the data. The NVivo Pro 12 provides an essential tool for organizing data with a coding structure which assists with organizing data and creating codes (Mina, Anderson, & Chen., 2017). For the study, the NVivo Pro 12 was proficient at examining the specific word, phrases,

96

and themes for the 12 interviews. The reliability and validity of the research findings and themes were established with the use of the NVivo Pro 12 application.

Additionally, through the NVivo Pro 12 application, the researcher was able to create an overview of the research questions aligned with the subsequent semi-structured interview questions (see Table 2), leading to coding the responses to arrange the themes. As a result, the first research question had two thematic categories with a total of 19 sub-themes; and the second research question had three thematic categories with a total of 17 sub-themes. The themes discovered with the highest number of references from the analysis were considered significant themes. The other noteworthy themes receiving fewer references were identified as the sub-themes of the research and were included in the study to provide all perceptions share during the interview by the participants. The themes created after gathering the information from participants are categorized under the specific research question (see Table 3).

Table 2

Alignment of Research Questions to Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Research Questions	Semi-Structured Interview Questions
RQ1. - How do child welfare social workers define social justice?	Q.4: How did you develop your perspective on social justice in relation to child welfare practice?
	Q.5: Define the term social justice in the context of child welfare practice.
	Q.6: Has your perspective on social justice changed having gained professional experience as a social worker in the Child Welfare System?

97

RQ2. - In what way do child welfare social workers apply the concept of social justice in social welfare practice?

Q.1: Are you aware advocating for social justice is an ethical standard of practice for Child Welfare social workers stated by the National Association of Social Workers?

Q.2: As a Child Welfare social worker, do/did you consider your role to apply social justice to your practice?

Q.3: Did you receive training of the concept social justice as applied to the role as a child welfare social worker?

Q.7: What does/did the application of social justice look like in your practice?

Q.8: Are there challenges associated with applying social justice to child welfare practice?

Q.9: How have/did you sustain your commitment to social justice in practice?

Table 3

Themes and Sub-Themes from Research Questions

Research Question	Themes	Sub-Themes
RQ1. - How do child welfare social workers define social justice?	Social Justice Identity	Personal/professional amalgamation services and resources Productive lives Equity and equality respect Family rights Understanding/Empathy Opportunities Progressive decision making Basic necessities Privilege Client Dignity Education/Awareness Humility

98

		Ethnicity
		Attitude
RQ2. - In what way do child welfare social workers apply the concept of social justice in social welfare practice?	Advocacy Values Privilege	Promote social, economic, political, and cultural equality Demonstrate cultural competence Reflective thinking/Attitude Influence to inform and educate Considering exposure to poverty Changes in policy and legislation/power Coalition building and action Persistence in work Forward thinking Trainings Opposing Bureaucracy Consulting with other Colleagues

Research question one. The research question one was, how do child welfare social workers define social justice? Results from the interviews were used to examine the question. From the interviews, the participants' perceptions about the ideas of defining social justice revealed 25 common words. The recurrent words were respect, equality, and rights. Personal/professional amalgamation was one emerging theme. The participants reported the balance between the professional and personal reflection of the term social justice as it relates to their practice. Two of the 12 participants found it difficult to define social justice based on the consideration that social justice can be perceived as a broad concept, so it was challenging to narrow the definition to one or two sentences. Of the ten interviews, eight of the participants stated their definition was derived from self-awareness and job training. Two of the ten

99

participants shared they developed the definition of social justice from self-awareness and education. The most significant result was the 12 participants stated since employed, their perception of social justice as related to child welfare social work practice has enlightened and altered their attitude for the better or worse with working with children, families, and communities.

Theme: Social Justice Identity. Participants acknowledged social justice as a fundamental component of their professional and personal identities. The Social Justice Identity category incorporates themes related to the comprehensive, universal methods social justice embraces a substantial presence in their lives.

Subtheme 1: Professional and personal amalgamation. The participants discussed the convincing connections between their professional social justice work values and their values and identities. Participant 4 stated: sustaining the commitment to social justice in practice is: Stopping the model day auction block and restore family function to the innate human functioning, it is necessary for all elements of a professional capacity within America. Participant 12 expressed comparable sentiment: Being persistent in my work, educating, and being an advocate.

Subtheme 2: Attitude. The participants (n = 11 of 12) shared a belief that significant influence on the perception toward social justice as a child welfare social worker depended of the worker's attitude. Participate 7 offered the perspective of her observing not all "professionals" work in pursuit of the child's best interest, and although there is more awareness of social injustices, it appears there are workers who have their perception of duties not including a strong position of advocacy. Participant 4 elaborated on her initial response to the challenges associated with applying social justice to child welfare practice "when people are deaf dumb and blind on

purpose." The participant stated as a worker, she witnessed co-workers, supervisors, and administrators take a blind eye to services provided by the agency was not in the best interest of the clients but were regulated as compliant to the agency and government regulations. It was Participant 11 who referred to the challenges associated with applying social justice to child welfare practice as recognizing individuals who do not want to support social justice; individuals who do not want to learn. She shared during the discussion she has worked with co-workers who appeared detached from the lifestyles of the clients to a level the co-workers will not admit they have little understanding of oppressed and vulnerable populations. The participant stated she wondered how an uninformed child welfare social worker properly serve clients if the workers are unknowing to the crucial needs to advocate the equality of rights and opportunities for all people. Participant 10 responses were aligned with the other participants and added she believes the child welfare system is structured not to support justice for everyone. She stated her experience as a child welfare social worker witnessed the system support the conditioning mindset of uninformed child welfare social workers do not think critically about the understanding of oppression and the lack of self-awareness of how the attitude of the uninformed worker influences their performance toward disadvantaged clients.

Subtheme 3: Practice definition. The participants (n = 10 of 12) identified social justice as advocating for social justice as being unquestionable in their practice work (see Figure 1). Participant 2 stated: social justice is ensuring equity and equality throughout all social systems in our country, as well as awareness of the disproportionate impact these systems can have on diverse communities. Participant 11 further expounded the role of advocating for social justice in practice: Advocating for your families in all areas such as age, gender, race, religion, including helping families with obtaining access to health, housing, medical & mental health.

101

Eleven of the 12 participants described the continuing process for determining social justice by their views, approaches, and degree of social justice integration is faced with the barrier of the administration/system. Participant 7 described advocating for clients by challenging the department as a method to connect social justice values and professional practice. The participant explained she always sought to ensure children and families participated in decision making and provided more than just basic needs to "thrive" as members of society. The participant added she believed striving toward justice was standard practice based on her thoughts and attitude toward social justice and community work. "Over the years, I have witnessed the need for more education needed for instilling the concept of social justice training and education programs to assist the child welfare social workers with learning how to help clients more progressively." Participant 2 shared after 26 plus years of service; she believes the administration needs to add social justice as a compliance goal to then push for families to have services that beyond their survival instead to help them thrive on their own once the agency is removed from their lives. Participant 2 added:

> I have witnessed over the past 20 years the discussion of social justice as relating to service providers is has become mentioned when addressing a constant for instance with the children detained in the makeshift orphanages under the illegal immigration movement, the school shootings and unarmed African Americans being shot by law enforcement.

Subtheme 5: Social justice concept permeates conceptualization. A number of the participants ($n =7$ of 12) described social justice as penetrating their perspective and practice. In contrast, it was/is a challenge to define social justice as applied to child welfare social work when separating

their professional view of social justice as a child welfare social worker from their perspective. Participant 3 stated:

I am continuously seeking the information as to how to make as much impact as I can at my level at work and in my personal life. When I interact with the community, I am always aware of the social issues impacting the families I am talking with. Participant 4 went as to offer: It is a part of the air I breathe; it is necessary for all elements of professional function within America. I feel like everything I do is based on some form of social justice idea, and my approach is most often social justice work.

Subtheme 6: Awareness of power and disadvantage. Participants ($n =11$ of 12) expressed awareness of power differential and outward empathy as essential value connected with social justice work. Participant 5 addressed how this becomes evident in working with children and families:

I talk about the power child welfare social workers hold when discussing the backgrounds of many of the clients and how the backgrounds may differ from the workers hired to help the families. With the class differentiation, I talk about how it is the responsibility of child welfare social workers to support clients from the client's reality to serve the client best. I call this being an informed child welfare social worker.

Participant 7, respectively, spoke to this specific observation:

Throughout my years as a Child Welfare Worker, I have observed not all "professionals" are working in the child's best interest and although there is more aware of social injustices, it has worsened. When I witness this behavior, I have to say something. Using my understanding and empathy toward the families I serve; I believe it is my duty to something when I see this behavior to help the families and the communities. I often

103

constructively share my take on how as a privileged person and worker with power, the child welfare social workers have to use their position to benefit the families and communities. It is the way to stay informed of what best serves families who need support and services.

Participant 8 referred to the idea of taking on the responsibility for exposing poverty and lack of opportunity faced by families and communities to anyone who holds power to change the oppression children and their families served may experience.

There are questions child welfare workers can ask themselves to address equitability concerning opportunity and privilege. Participant 5 offered the questions "To consider, how did the family environment end up in this condition? Did the family receive services to satisfy the department's demands or to benefit the family's development? Where there any biases the family encountered as soon as the family was contacted by the department?" Participant 10 suggested:

I genuinely believe there is a time during a case when support services (privilege) and oppression (disadvantage) have to meet for the betterment of the families served. Being informed by asking questions and not working with them from the family's challenges and strengths to empower the family works from the power standpoint of the child welfare worker, not necessarily an unbiased position.

Table 4   *Participant Social Justice Definitions*

Participant #	Social Justice Definition
1	*None.*
2	To provide services and resources for families so the families can live productive lives.
3	Ensuring equity and equality throughout all social systems in our country as well as awareness of the disproportionate impact these systems can have on diverse communities.
4	Stop the model day auction block and restore family function to the innate human functioning.
5	Cultural respect, ensuring children's voices are heard and they are participants in the process/decision making, that families rights are respected and upheld.
6	All clients need to be treated with respect and understanding. The families need to be listened to, supported and encouraged in the complicated job of parenting. The children need to be protected and guided through their development. All cultures and lifestyles should be respected.
7	Includes making sure the children get equal opportunities, participation in decision making, and that they are provided with the basic necessities needed to thrive as members of society.
8	Equitability in regard to opportunity and privilege.
9	To do whatever is appropriate to help the child in remaining with the parent/s, removing the child/ren from the parent/s or care givers, returning the child/ren to the parent/s to the caregivers.
10	Social justice in child welfare include: first, doing no harm and treating clients with dignity and respect while working in a bureaucratic system that oftentimes isn't just.
11	Advocating for your families in all areas such as age, gender, race, religion including helping families with obtaining access to health, housing, medical & mental health.
12	Being educated, having an understanding of society' and knowing the world we live in. The obstacles and injustices in terms of how the system and society are setup.

Subtheme 7: Human/ family rights. Several of the participants (n = 10 of 12) depicted family rights as a critical value to defining social justice as applied to child welfare social work practice. Participant 2 offered (social justice) is to provide services and resources for families so the families can live productive lives. Participant 5 described her perspective on the rights of children and families as focused on being a critical value of her child welfare social work practice stating:

> all clients need to be treated with respect and understanding. The families need to be listened to, supported, and encouraged in the complicated job of parenting. The children need to be protected and guided through their development. All cultures and lifestyles should be respected.

Research Question two. The question was presented to examine how child welfare social workers apply the concept of social justice in social welfare practice? Results from the participant interviews and the NVivo Pro 12 software were used to analyze this question. Based on the data analysis, 27 common words were discovered. The identified used words were competence, informed, critical, and reflective. The emerging themes concerning perceptions about competence were (1) advocacy, (2) values, and (3) privilege. The research question two centered on the child welfare social worker's perceptions concerning the level of understanding toward applying social justice to child welfare social work practice. The most prominent finding is 11 of 12 participants reported to not receiving training of the concept social justice as applied to the role as a child welfare social worker. There were 7 of 12 who reported they received the on-job training on the subject of social justice yet, the training was not directed toward helping the participants understand the concept of social justice as incorporated in practice. As a result, the participants explained they did not believe they were informed as to provide the best

106

supportive services to children, families and communities. Research question two focused on the child welfare social worker's perceptions concerning the application of social justice to practice. Participants stated occasionally challenges developed, and it was difficult to provide clients the idea of social justice due to the inequalities and racial disparities in America.

Participant 10 reported the difficulties while providing services in the best interest of the children and families. Participant six expressed while employed, she found individuals who do not want to support social justice along with individuals who do not want to learn. Participants three and seven mirrored each other by stating there were system-related barriers with not ensuring social justice as an object of action for the clients, which proved difficult for a mandatory effort by child welfare social workers.

Theme: Advocacy, Values, and Privilege

For the participants, advocacy within the system is the aspect of applying social justice to practice after defining social justice as related to practice. It is values influencing the practice of the participants and comprise themes identified by participants; these core values are not stagnant, preferably are actively applied to the ongoing social justice concept as applied to child welfare social work practice.

Subtheme 8: Promote social, economic, political, and cultural equality. Participants (n =10 of 12) described equity or objectivity as crucial components of how they define and apply social justice. Participant 12 stated: the idea of equity is connected to organizing services and actions to help reduce or diminish the obstacles and injustices in terms of how the system and society are setups. Participant 1 expressed her disappointment in attempting to apply social justice:

107

Social justice didn't apply to all equally. Across the board, race and ethnicity played a massive part in what I experienced, which became an obstacle to applying social justice in practice. The obstacles became overbearing for me and being so overt to me; it was the reason I decided to leave the Child Welfare system." It was added by Participant 1 everyone is not treated equally even in the child welfare system; there is not the innocent until proven guilty. "Most families were guilty and had to prove their innocence, depending on their race and ethnicity.

Participant 8, respectively, explained an obstacle to obtaining equality (including but not limited to health, education, rights) is the department and employees not considering the inconsistencies in daily social justice practice.

Subtheme 9: Practice with and against the system. Participants (n = 9 of 12) expressed an understanding of social justice causes (education, mental health, housing, and medical) and how to serve clients and communities through various systems. Eleven of the participants answered they were aware advocating for social justice is an ethical standard of practice for Child Welfare social workers stated by the National Association of Social Workers.

All twelve participants reported as a Child Welfare social worker, they considered your role in applying social justice to your practice. Participants reported duality working for the system and against the system towards a higher level of equality and justice. Willingness to oppose the system was stated by Participant 7. Participant 7 described there were many times as a CWW (Child Welfare Worker), she had to go above and beyond to do the best for the family and child which included going against the direction of the department by challenging the department for a youth in foster care who needed particular placement which was costly and necessary. The participant proudly stated she won the case. Respectively, Participant 2 perceived

108

child welfare social workers practice diligently to provide resources to the children and families while the administration is more concerned with compliance yet, compliance objectives are not centered on social justice for the families. Participant 10 described a comprehensive method to addressing systemic concerns:

Raised in the housing projects, I was a teen mother, and I received TANF, I believe I had more in common with most of my clients. I considered myself able to commit to trying to make a change and working with the city and county government agencies focused on the wellbeing of children. As a child welfare social worker, I believe the focus is the children and family's access to resources and services to engage the communities while promoting social, political movements to increase the social justice in child welfare while working in a bureaucratic system often is not just.

Subtheme 10: Serving the underserved. Participants (*n* = 10 of 12) described self-awareness and on-job training as a method for learning how to apply social justice concepts to children and families from the underserved communities as a systemic approach to addressing social justice through child welfare social work practice. Participant 4 described this aspect as a general principle of child welfare social work practice as necessary in all elements of professional function within America. "It is a value I have had toward serving the unserved and underserved children and communities since I entered the workforce as a child welfare social worker. Participant 6 explained her approach to applying social justice to practice for communities as respecting families' and community values. The participant explained this may mean doing whatever is appropriate to help the child remain with the parent/s, removing the child/ren from the parent/s or caregivers (who need removal) and, returning the child/ren to the

109

parent/s (when the environment is safe) all of the information listed helps to build social justice in communities.

Subtheme 11: Reflection/Introspection. The 12 participants appeared to reflect on the experience obtained employed as a child welfare social worker and how they sustained their commitment to upholding the concept of social justice when applying to practice. Reflecting on her experience of defining social justice and applying the concept to practice, Participant 3 stated she made sure she worked to preserve a respectful working relationship with her clients and the community served. She stated she believed her understanding of social justice, along with her personal experience of injustice, comprises her level of empathy toward her clients and the environment from which they live. She stated her belief is child welfare social workers perform the duties presented by the agency because it is what expected yet;" there is the eve nagging wonder if what is done I enough to give the family the resource needed to survive without the assistance from the agency". Participant 3 added there is no certainty the resources will make an everlasting effect on the family to maintain a positive process lifestyle, so in essence, there is no guarantee social justice is accomplished. Participant ended with stating until the agency establishes a method to measure practice actions pertain to the outcome goal of social justice, there is the question of how social justice is defined and apply in social work practice. Participant 2 also stated it is essential for child welfare social workers not to exhort their authority on clients and the community as perceived due to the agency makes many decisions for families are not also seen in favor of the families. In portraying power-driven behavior toward the families, Participant 2, Participant 5, and Participant 7 agreed the concept of social justice is lost as the power-driven behavior displays no respect toward the community served. Participant 2 stated she includes the children and families in the decision making concerning the steps are

110

taken to ensure the "families have a voice." Participant 2 expressed her idea of obtaining social justice for her clients is for child welfare social workers to emerge in knowing and understanding what the family perceives is needed to better their wellbeing.

Very similar to Participant 2, Participants 7 and 10 revealed social in-justice is built throughout the Child Welfare public system, so child welfare social workers must become educated and stay informed of the inequalities the children, families, and communities face daily. Participant 10 clearly stated there are employees at the agencies are not interested in making social justice a mandatory entity of practice and will provide the bare necessities to families allowed by the agency. It is imperative as a responsible community service provider to step above the low-level thresholds to seek services above the average mark to be a better person and an informed child welfare social worker. "Ignoring the need to rise above mediocrity will only serve to continue the families and communities to live within the historical realms of discrimination and bias, which often leads to the in-justice".

Subtheme 12: Lack of Administrative support. Participants 1 and 5 stated from their experience as child welfare social workers, the public agencies in which they were employed did not design mandatory action goals with compliance outcomes as duties for the staff. Even with the National Social Workers Association implementing social justice as a guiding principle for social work practice, the participants do not believe the agency has "really" taken action to address the lack of implementing the concept of social justice in practice. Participant 7 remembers when she had questions concerning what was "best for the client," she was directed to follow the compliance goals presented by the agency. When she sought further support for families with needs not listed in the goal categories, her inquiries were not addressed. Participant 8 considered the agency did not ensure creating specialized training, curriculum, and practice

111

protocol as it would have to adjust the injustice the system does not address. Participants 8 and 10 mentioned separate yet; the administration did not appreciate similar situations when overtly challenging the decision of the agency, and they both reported receiving scolding for their voicing opinions outside the common practice of the agency. The reporting participants perceived the agencies were not prepared to address the need to support child welfare social workers with support services to apply social justice to practice. In this research study, there was evidence of a lack of organizational support for child welfare social workers.

  Subtheme 13: Abuse of Power. Several participants observed abuse of power by child welfare social workers toward clients. The participants shared the child welfare social workers presented their power by showing dominance when managing the cases. This display of power was exhibited in several manners. Participant 2 said the agency most often provided services to families did not solve the problems of the family slightly extended "band-aid" attempts keeping the families oppressed and in need of assistance. Participant 2 stated the idea of giving the family the bare minimum resources may have helped the family survive the trauma suffered yet; the family was held to limitations as the services did not encourage empowerment for the families to thrive and liberate the families to function entirely on their own. Participant 9 explained the agency instituted compliance goals for child welfare social workers to follow when offering services to clients. The participant shared she has witnessed child welfare social workers refusing to involve clients in decision making and arranging resources not necessarily best serving the needs of families rather complying to the expectations of the agency's goals and outcomes. Controlling the resources available to clients, as perceived by the participant, is the notion of holding power to decide what is in the best interest of the client without involving the client's insight to the best practice to reduce or diminish the trauma the client encountered. Participant 10

112

recalled such the abuse of power when called to mind she was often forced to perform particular duties may have served the system compliance yet, failed to meet the needs to address the social and environmental obstacles faced by the family.

Subtheme 14: Action/Interventions - System Oriented. There are numerous actions and interventions focused on child welfare social work practice concerning social justice in social work. The actions include advocating or clients, coalition building, working against and with the system, and raising knowledge about social issues about child welfare.

These findings associate to and affirm the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) advocacy competencies (NASW, 2018) while emphasizing those specific practices deemed relevant in child welfare social work practice. With doing so, the standards described developing skills, taking on new roles not historically associated with child welfare social work practice, and the willingness to adopt new policies and protocol not addressed in the professional training provided. The participants also described the typical systemic approaches/interventions by organizing leadership responsibility in agencies establishing community initiatives.

Furthermore, the participants described the systems' acknowledgment of incorporating the standards in the concept of social justice for training all community service providers in social justice work. The participants reliably bring insight to the properly developed understanding of privilege/underserved, ethnic diversity competence, and the commitment to change to the agencies employing the standards as well as the community served. Morgaine (2014) pronounced micro/macro social work framework with compelling underpinnings to social justice. Morgaine's conceptualization of micro/macro social workers as foundational to social justice applies to the work of the paradigms in leadership positions as well as to the agency-based interventions identified by the current study. The idea of working against the system

113

involves a lack of knowledge, indifference, misunderstanding, and even resistance from staff/administrators, along with suspect concern from community members. Participants 7 and 9 noted their work to pursue social justice for clients requires their going beyond on their own time and not being financially compensated for doing more work when going the extra mile.

Moreover, the participants recounted their expanded roles when assuming the duty to apply the social justice concept to practice. Participant 2 described judiciously contemplating ethical considerations when evaluating whether or not to advocate for a client seeking to become a single adoptive parent for deceased relative's toddler. Participant 11 expressed ethical considerations to her systemic work responsibilities when involved in social, political movements are not addressed in the ethics code. Morgaine (2014) offer of a reflective approach to the ethical aspects of system focused approaches permeated the participants' discussion of the ethical qualities of their work as did the complex, vague ethical issues related to boundaries, and personal and professional roles.

Subtheme 15: Performance/Intervention-Client Focused. The integration of performance and client-focused intervention is clearly illustrated in the current study. Eleven of the 12 participants shared their activities for addressing the context and marginalization in practice with clients. Much of the literature on social justice in social work focuses on the expansion of conventional social work roles, systemic interference, and advocacy. A focal finding of the current research is how the concept of social justice can be applied in practice by the endorsed activities offered by the participants. The finding underlines the framework presented by McLaughlin, Gray, & Wilson (2015) concerning the capacity for social justice intervention and the credence client-focused services are significant and often an undervalued aspect of social justice with social work practice. As well, the participants acknowledged

114

empathy and upholding the rights of children, families, and communities as mechanisms of social justice work with clients. The participants described incorporating necessary social work practice skills with the activism of social justice. The results of this study indicate focusing on marginalization, training on self-advocacy, empowerment with an empathic understanding of the effects of injustice, and a strong emotional association with the experience of clients and communities. Balancing the role between systemic obligations and personal beliefs toward social justice in service interventions is the key element to fostering the improvement of social advocacy within social work practice. The three-dimensional created approach of knowing the system, reflective practice, and collaborative approach, as exampled by McLaughlin, Gray, & Wilson (2017), stresses the point of how to facilitate social justice within social justice practice.

Subtheme 16: Critical Reflective Understanding. The first research question asked participants to define social justice. The participants were also asked in research question two, to describe how social justice is applied to social work practice. The results of this study, based on the personal experience and professional perspective of the voluntary participants, pungently reinforced the connection between social justice and social work. There was a consensus amongst the participants to endorse cultural consciousness, cultural competence, knowledge of injustice associated with social issues, and reflective thinking as essential to defining social justice to child welfare social work practice. A variant number of participants expressly referred to the influence of the conceptualization of client-based focus to include a more global perspective and vis versa. There was explicit commentary from the participants who addressed the principles of client-driven services while identifying the core facet of social justice support for community-oriented programs. The findings of Arguello, Baiocchi, & Wolf (2018) supports the connections between social work and promoting social justice. The authors identified

115

"empowerment" as an essential component of social justice and a principle intently associated with the social justice principle. The perception of empowerment is related to the participants' viewpoint on empowerment and addressing marginalization. The results of Arguello and colleagues' research need further review in terms of the limitation of insight to other geographical assessments, sample recruitment, and interpretation. The findings, nonetheless, suggest social work's fundamental commitment is to social change values influencing human wellbeing and social justice. The authors suggest the focus of empowerment is not just the importance for individuals, but also the broader experience of underserved communities in society.

Subtheme 17: Social/Political Advocacy. The participants agreed the importance of engaging, encouraging, and empowering in social and political advocacy. The participants perceived an essential focus of advocacy as the crucial lobbying for ongoing, culturally sensitive, and competent educational on the job training. The current study offered the description of participants expressing the understanding of taking the position as liaisons in non-profit and professional organizations, government offices, and community to lead social and political advocacy. Participant 7, for example, described working actively to receive support from her supervisors and upper administrators to advocate a safe environment for a client. She explained she had to attend over ten meetings to address her decision to support the client.

Along with the meetings, the participant stated she wrote several letters to the administrative team explaining her need to support what the family considered the best interest of the client. The participant shared the department was not willing to support the decision based on the financial cost was not supported by the department's policy. After four months of continuously challenging the department and with the support from the client's attorney, the

116

participant stated the court ordered the placement fo the child. The participant stated it took much time out of her day for four months to advocate for the client's placement, but it only encouraged her to fight for social justice stronger. Participant 11 shared her determination to work actively in the child welfare agency along with donating hours to a local non-profit charity advocating to improve programs for at-risk teens programs. Participant 5 described working with local community stakeholders lobbying to improve hosing issues related to teenage pregnant mothers and providing accessible mental health services.

Several participants expressed difficulty separating personal political opinions for social advocacy from the child welfare social work system policies and protocol. Participants 3, 6, 8, and 9 described the process of connecting their political beliefs from their personal lives with their professional positions encompassing duties and responsibilities not necessarily in agreement with the personal philosophies. The participants ~~did~~ expressed knowledge child welfare social work practice of integrating social justice across personal values, actions, and critical perception pervading their professional identities as child welfare social workers.

Subtheme 18: Encouraging empowerment. The participants characteristically (n =10 of 12) encourage empowerment in their direct work with clients with a specific focus for helping clients develop self-advocacy skills. Participant 4 recalled her approach to empowerment:

> As a worker assigned to the teen unit, I provided an abundance of information to their rights: did you know you could apply to attend college while in foster care and receive special allowance as a foster child? Or, did you know you can apply for a California ID so you can apply for a job while under the ward of foster care? I believe some teens are more familiar with navigating through life's milestones and would not have to take the initiative to take on the duties by themselves when they are at home and guided by their

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parents or caregivers. For foster teens, I made a point to step in and make sure they knew how to speak up for themselves to reach their personal goals.

When working with African American families, Participant 4 spoke to the idea of empowerment with helping clients understand social justice does not always cover all ethnicities. With the knowledge of disproportion percent of African American children removed from the care and supervision of the parents/caregivers compared to children of other ethnicities who received intervention from the child welfare agency. The participant added there are formal federal and state investigations addressing the disproportionality of African American referrals that resulted in the removal of children compared to the rate of referrals of families from other ethnicities. Participant 2 defined social justice, which speaks to empowering clients: "(Social justice) includes making sure the children and families receive equal opportunities, participation in decision making, and they are provided with the bare necessities needed to thrive as members of society." Participant 11 suggested a definition of social justice similar in comparison to Participant 2, stating: "Advocating for your families in all areas such as age, gender, race, religion including helping (empowering) families with obtaining access to health, housing, medical & mental health."

Subtheme 19: Understanding Empathy. Personal and professional values are associated with the discussion of empathy when defining social justice as applied to social work. There were (n=10 of 12) participants who described how the value of empath is evident when interacting with children, families, and the communities. The idea of empathy is explained by Participant 3 by saying when she interacts with communities, she is always aware of the social issues impact the families. Participant 6 described the ability to listen, understand, and explain at the client's level to reach some level of understanding a situation from the client's point of view.

118

Having some connection to the client's point of view based on their background and lifestyle can reduce being judgmental and help provide an unbiased assessment.

Subtheme 20: Cultural Perception. Participants commonly (n = 11 of 12) shared a substantial value in recognizing the need to acknowledge culture, the appreciation of culture, the willingness to learn about the culture, and a certainty of the importance of cultural competence in social work practice. Participants associated the word respect with culture. Participant 6, yet potently stated: All cultures and lifestyles should be respected. Participant 5 shared understanding of the dignity of clients' cultural identification with their environment helps with engaging with the community. Participant 2 described the association between culture, social justice, and social work practice:

> As a child welfare social worker, I believe how the client provides me their cultural identification forces me to release my interpretation of the client. Their identification guides me to interact and concentrate on providing the services are specific to the idea of the client and not the stereotypical concept of providing cookie-cut services fit any and everyone.

Several participants linked the recognition of the cultural identity of clients as helping with developing global awareness and questions the worker's worldview of social justice within social work practice, the idea of how to limit the imposition of own bias and diminishing the power of the system.

Subtheme 21: Revolution/Adaptability. The participants (n= 7 of 12) description to critical thinking of the much-needed new approach to address the historical lack of strategies to address social justice within social work practice summarizes different ways to provide services to meet the need of the clients. Participant 1 quoted the words of Frank Zappa, an American

119

multi-instrumentalist musician, composer, and bandleader: "Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible." The participant stated working with clients in an alternative method from the common strategies is a process to meet clients at their level of functioning.

On all accords, the children and families often require help addressing services of mental health, educational, medical, and shelter. Participant 10 shared recognition for specific needs of clients and the communities, which often lead to innovating methods for arranging services as every client and most communities have particular characteristics demand to do things differently within the same system. Several participants added the notion of advocating the specific needs for clients, and communities can develop the ability to think and act out the box while contemplating the mandatory compliance obligations set by the government and agency. Participant 7 provides similar thoughts yet added the perception of adaptability as the active process of how meeting the needs of the clients and communities a learning tool is actually to adapting social justice to social work practice. The participant eluded to approaching every referral with an open mind and never assuming you know everything about the family or the situation. Having a visionary approach to referrals develops and defines social justice as related to the referral. Assessing your performance along the process and the success of the outcomes for the clients is the best responses and learning tools available.

Subtheme 22: Systemic historical deficiencies. Participants generally (n = 8 of 12) noted social work practice has not traditionally served many minority communities well. The participants described addressing the practice of social work and social justice with historical deficiencies when attempting to meet the needs of culturally diverse children and their families. Participants 1, 7, 9 and 11 considered the ability to think critically in reference to the importance for conducting business differently as essential to maneuvering through the historical and

120

cultural context of social justice within the social work practice. Participant 7 stated when considering how social justice is intertwined with social work is analyzing whom the clients serve and do not serve and how to improve the system for the betterment of clients and communities. Participant 11 pondered how to approach the deficiencies when noticing the obligations from the agency ay did not coincide with the best interest for the families based on the evolution of family dynamics and culture of the communities served. Participant 1 provided an example of such deficiency when assessing the neglect of parents on how to rely on older siblings to assume a high percentage of personal time supervising the younger siblings:

> As a worker, I understand that family members have to sacrifice their time to accommodate the needs of the entire family. There are historical impressions that the agency subjects the families to that as a child welfare social worker, I have needed to adjust my thoughts and plan of action to service the family as best as possible. In adjusting my plans, I have found that I am not longer held to the historical deficiency of the agency, and I am no longer participating in the idea of oppressing the clients and communities I served.

Theme 23: Resistance and Conflict. The participants (n= 11 of 12) reported the continuum of experiences with resistance to providing services curtailed to respect and protect the rights of the clients and communities. The participants acknowledged the challenges in their professional positions and personal lives. Participant 2 stated: The administration does not center program development on social justice for the families. Participant 7 shared: "Throughout my years as a Child Welfare Worker, I have observed that not all "professionals" are working in the child's best interest." Participant concluded: "The conflict that arises when attempting to provide services to clients when the Systems/Bureaucracy that I work in making it hard." Participant 11

121

recognized the challenges of working alongside individuals who do not want to support social justice; individuals who do not want to learn. She reported, "Even if they see injustice, there is a lack of pursuit to formulate a plan or give a voice to the need for making the critical decision to find methods to address the challenges and reduce the inherent conflict of applying social justice to social work practice."

Subtheme 24: Lack of Social Justice training as related to child welfare social work practice. A more significant percentage of the participants (n = 9 of 12) presented the significant challenge for applying social justice to child welfare social work practice is the concept is to provide in professional training. Participant 6 stated though she did not receive social justice training, she sustained her commitment to social justice in practice by transparent communication with clients and consulting with other colleagues and friends to assess her performance for applying social justice since there is no compliance category for social justice application to practice. Participant 12 perceived social justice as a "thought of action" with no plan for "steps of action." Not having any training appeared to lessen the thought the concept of social justice to actively advocate to impact the dynamics of the family. "I find that being persistent, educating myself, and wanting to be an advocate strengthens my tactics to 'walk the walk and talk the talk of social justice for clients and communities."

Subtheme 25: Social justice in child welfare social work practice. The participants revealed social justice, as applied to social work practice, is genuinely a useful tool for helping clients and the communities. Participant 4 stated:

I am saying the progress of "doing right by people" is the urgency to see change for families and communities and in the system, by the way, business is done. Even with the idea of obligation to the duties and responsibilities tied to the position, I see more

122

workers and administrators leaning toward making sure families are served based on the needs of the families first and the agency second.

Participant 10 described the concept of social justice as recognizing in practice workers perform long hours without compensation to ensure the effectiveness of social justice. The participant recalled several cases when she worked beyond the "call of duty" to make sure the families received all services could help uplift the families to function actively without the assistance of the system. The worker stated observing families excel beyond what was expected made the worker confident the extra hours worked was time well spent. The participant added remaining focused on the concept of justice for the family is sufficient social work and should and can be a fundamental principle in practice.

awareness of disproportionate impact　　**helping family's access services, resources**　　**obstacles**　　privilege

restore family function to the innate human functioning　　rights　　**to protect**　　*no racism*

ethics　　guiding　　**good**　　*responsibility*　　advocating

communities　　**fair systems**　　harm reduction

children's voices heard　　*equitability*

activism　　cultures/lifestyles respected　　equality

rights respected and upheld　　*progressive*

Informed Social justice social work is　　*competence*

removing child from the parent/s or care givers　　productive lives for all

providing basic necessities needed to thrive as members of society　　*understanding*

social movements　　education　　**child remaining with parent/s**

change　　freedom　　opportunities

participant (s) included decision making process　　empowerment　　*returning child to the parent/s or caregivers*

advocating while working in an unjust **bureaucratic system**　　**treating clients with dignity and respect**　　social attitude

families **supported** and **encouraged**

Figure 1. Word frequency-semi – structured interview for defining and applying social justice

123

Evaluation of the Findings

Research question one evaluation. Research question one was how child welfare social workers define social justice. The participants represent Morgaine's' (2014) appeal for social workers to approach understanding the concept of social justice as applied to social work practice genuinely. The results of this study further support cited theoretical articles on social justice. Richards-Schuster, Espitia and Rodems (2019) stress the critical significance of integrating values into policy-driven child welfare social work practice. The participants for this study conveyed integration continually, making values a prominent guiding principle of their professional experiences. The findings relate to and affirm the NASW ethical standard competencies (Dahl, 2016) while highlighting those practices the participants deemed relevant in their professional practice. The participants depicted the development of new skills, assuming roles uncustomary to the role of child welfare social workers and undertaking the readiness to learn practices and perspectives not delivered in professional training.

Research question two evaluation. Research question two was about the application of the term social justice to social work practice. These findings reinforce Danso's (2015) framework concerning the spectrum of loci for social justice intervention and the belief individual-level and global services are a critical and regularly unacknowledged aspect of social work. Davis and Reber (2016) maintained child welfare social workers committed to social justice could link to their commitments by focusing on both systemic interventions or conventional and individually focused work. The participants in the study convincingly support the method of the flexible, multi-disciplinary approach to social justice work within social work practice. The participants communicated the concepts for integrating crucial social work skills with the social justice mission. The findings from this research indicate examining

124

marginalization, communication self-advocacy, and cultivating empowerment are fundamentally based on an empathic understanding of the effects of injustice and a reflective emotional connection from experience gathered from the agency, clients, and the communities. The literature has addressed connections between child welfare social work, social justice, and the spectrum of micro/macro identities (Bywaters, 2015; Ackerman, 2017). The results of this study particularly reinforce the connection between child welfare social work and social justice. The participants advocated the importance of cultural consciousness and competence, awareness of human rights, and commitment to addressing injustice associated with cultural identities.

Summary

Chapter Four provided a synopsis of the perceptions and lived experiences of social workers identified as child welfare social workers who worked within a public child welfare agency. The historical association of the working relationship between social justice and social work is the accumulation of attitudes, values, beliefs, and perceptions, such as advocacy, empathy, engagement, and culture (Bywaters et al. 2015; Hailes et al. 2010; Hill et al., 2016; Stoeffler, 2019) and spanned over generations since the early 1920s (Evans, 2018). From this analysis, the attitudes and perceptions emerged as meaning-laden concepts affect the relationship with and the work performance of child welfare social workers. The implications are significant in the interviews with mention to the perceptions of how systematic racism and micro/macro social work approach affects the application of social justice, alliance building, and the engagement between the child welfare system and clients. The finding of this study concurs with the literature and corroborate the importance of child welfare social worker's experiences in determining and a better understanding of social justice within social work practice (Chechak, 2016; Davidson, 2017).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine child welfare social worker's perception of the definition for social justice and the application of the concept of social justice to practice. Current trends of advocacy link the correlation between social work and social justice despite previous research proposing there is no presentable frameworks create cohesiveness between both entities present common understandings of a social justice definition or social justice application in social work practice (Bent-Goodley and Hopps, 2016; Cross and Hershkowitz, 2017). Prior research identified social justice as a mandatory standard for practice within social work practice including child welfare social work practice; yet the literature indicate lack of agreement as to how social workers to define and apply the term to practice (Morgaine, 2014; McLaughlin, Gray, and Wilson, 2015); Henderson, Majors, and Wright, 2019) and the need to explore these phenomena. The results of the research were gathered from the purposive sampling of 12 participants.

The association of social justice with social work can present conflict between personal and professional values, inconsistent performance actions, and disagreement of intervention tactics for child welfare social workers. The specific problem examined by this study was the conflictual perceptions of the concept of social justice when applied in social work practice. The study findings indicated child welfare social worker's perceptions about defining the term social justice, which included unique words to define the term ranging from equality and equity to rights and respect, empathy, and understanding to humility. The findings for research question two suggested there are disparities with a commitment to apply to term once defined to practice. There were fluctuating responses to how the term is applied seemingly from the distinction between the professional obligation to acknowledge the concept of social justice for clients and those participants who stated they advocate justice for the clients based on the professional

126

obligation and personal value (Figure 1). There were disagreements as to how to the application of social justice to practice due to the lack of support from the administration and lack of training of the concept of social justice as applied to the role of a child welfare social worker. Participants acknowledged there is the challenge to advocate for clients which is stressed by the agency due to no direct guidelines on how to achieve justice as a congruent measure derived from an action plan with specific outcomes for each action performed .

127

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The problem addressed by this study stemmed from how the child welfare social workers define social justice and how the perceptions of social workers determined how to apply the concept of social justice practice (McLaughlin et al., 2015). This chapter connects the overall dissertation by amalgamating and summarizing the experiences of the participants. Chapter 5 presents the findings and results from Chapter 4, along with implications recommendations for practice, and future research will be examined. This study called for exploring child welfare social workers' perception of the experience working within child and family welfare agencies. Research called for examining the concept of social justice perception by child welfare social workers, the difficulties concerning social justice related to social work practice and how the child welfare social workers manage through the difficulties to provide best practices for clients (Bhuyan et al., 2017; Davis & Reber, 2016).

A qualitative method of research used semi-structured interview questions to examine the perspectives of child welfare social workers employed by child welfare agencies. Twelve child welfare social workers currently or previously employed by a child welfare agency between the ages of 34 and 76 voluntarily participated in the study. There was an average of 17. 5 years of professional experience between the participants. The participants, except for one, held master's degrees. All of the participants conveyed their position held the duty to maintain direct contact with diverse communities. The final analysis presented data with two significant themes, one per research questions and a total of 36 subthemes.

This study added to literature the daily work experiences of child welfare social workers, as it provides an understanding of the professional and personal experiences of child welfare social workers. This study will be constructive to administration and stakeholders, providing

information on progressive social justice social work policies and protocol. With the additional information for understanding the phenomenon, this study offers to the social welfare profession foundation the values and beliefs aligned with social attitudes toward social justice best help child welfare social workers become informed social justice child welfare, social workers. The anticipation is for this study to help the child welfare systems process with the knowledge of social justice behaviors to eliminate injustice for clients and communities served by the system. There are recommendations for practice and future research, offering practical opportunities to develop a sound understanding of the child welfare social work experience within the child welfare system.

There were study limitations. The current research examined the perceptions of participants whose commitments to social justice through social work practice by definition have been extensive and omnipresent more so than other community service providers. Hence, the concept of social justice as related to social work practice identified in this study is perhaps difficult to identify based on the inability to identify specific certain beliefs and values determining if a worker knows to define social justice and the perception, social attitude, and behavior to apply the term to practice. Additionally, the results may have been affected by the bias related to professional orientation as child welfare social workers and social justice beliefs. While there was an effort to link bias in such a way consistent with best practices in the field (Taylor, Vreugdenhil, & Schneiders, 2017), the characteristics of the interviewer, including a significant enthusiasm for social justice as a principle of social work practice may have affected the results. Because there were no administrators in the study, a limitation was the absence of management level opinions heard concerning social justice as applied to child welfare

129

social work practice. Although the solicitation for volunteers was presented with no provocation toward a particular occupational position, there were no administrative volunteers.

It would have been valuable to have a distribution of administrators and workers to gain a variety of perceptions of the definition of social justice and its application to child welfare social work practice. Another limitation could be the participants' ability to accurately report information on their experiences as child welfare social workers. The participants were allowed to freely answer the interview questions in an informal, unhurried fashion compared to interviewing in a formal setting controlled by synchronized time allotment. The following sections of this chapter will incorporate implications, recommendations for future practice, research, and the conclusion.

Implications

The current research provides implications for the study in psychology. The context of the study is based on the research questions and limitations, while the findings and conclusions relate to the theoretical framework. The findings of this study reinforce understanding of the critical factors child welfare social workers consider values and goals. The findings also contribute to the current body of literature and can be applied to practice. In this study, there are implications for potentially positive changes in the child welfare system.

The study findings indicated the bureaucratic system could be a position of contention where the interest for meeting the needs of the communities served are concerned, and there is a comprehensive reliance on humility and understanding within the characteristic of child welfare social workers practice. Professional social work practice can be both practical and maintainable if conducted in the context of progressive relationships, and social workers interested in engaging in social justice social work practice will seek to identify and connect to provide the

130

most effective method of practice for clients. These findings supported the previous literature by Auerbach, Zeitlin, Augsberger, Lawrence, & Claiborne, 2016; Harrison et al., 2016; Kam, 2014; and Threadgill-Goldson, Riffe, & Ryan, 2013)

The first section of implications is related to research question one and concerns of the perceptions from child welfare social workers to defining social justice. The implications are derived from the catalyst each volunteer participant explained by defining the term social justice. The second section of implications is are openly related to research question two, and the child welfare social worker's perception of how social justice is applied to child welfare social work practice. The results of this research were presented to child welfare social workers to identify the influences between their personal and professional identities. Within the context of child welfare social justice work, this can take the form of discovering strengths, values, social attitudes, and critical reflective experiences underwrite practice. The participants commonly described the continuing process of professional/personal integration, which is projected as an ongoing occupation developmental process. The following implications for this research are assembled by research questions and follow the themes identified in data analysis.

Research question one. The participants were not guided by the influence of the noted undefined mandatory ethical standard of social justice when practicing social work. This movement implies child welfare social workers are progressing in the direction of continuing to work toward social justice for clients in practice despite the inconsistency and lack of direction from the professional organizations and agency administrations who refer to social justice advocacy as a requirement for standard practice for child welfare social work practice. The implication of research question one also presents the results which reinforce the research

131

findings, along with the theoretical literature, illustrates social work practice toward social justice must be managed within the context of critical reflective thinking. The social justice interventions within child welfare social work practice are fulfilled when obliged intricately with the principles of advocacy, multiculturalism, client and community-oriented practice, and cultural diversity. Throughout the participant responses, the findings reinforced the power and privilege between the relationships of child welfare social workers, clients, and the communities served. The consistency of maintaining awareness of professional and personal integrity while working with clients and communities was identified as a critical social justice intervention as well as a core aspect of maintaining the connection to uphold best practices for clients. Participant 3 shared her position as a child welfare social worker guided her to go beyond her job duties and personally seek ways to help clients and communities even when she was not at work. She reported, "Each day I think to develop new ways to approach clients because every day as a worker is different. One day I might have to meet a client at a school for a meeting if the parent finds it challenging to communicate with the school administration concerning her child's living condition affects the child's ability to concentrate at school. Being aware of the child's rebellious behavior because the home environment is in chaos, why would I not attend the meeting to help the mother explain the home situation? I am not only a worker I am I person, a parent, I understand."

The results from research question one suggested child welfare social worker's perceptions about defining the term social justice were guided by their attitude while being aware there is a professional obligation is to advocate and apply social justice to practice due to personal and professional values. The existing literature suggested child welfare social workers may be directed by their understanding of social work practice and belief that they are obligated

132

to pursue social justice (Morgaine, 2014). The inability to find a universal definition for social justice within child welfare social work practice was confirmed and illustrated not only by the two participants who failed to define the term and explained during the discussion, finding the appropriate words to define social justice was difficult because too many ideas came to their mind. Hence, they found it impossible to create one definition. Participant 1 stated she believes her perception and attitude toward defining social justice are based on her understanding or said lack of understanding of the needs of others whose lifestyle differs from hers. Participant 1 mentioned finding it difficult to put ideas into words because her judgment toward clients contrasts her work belief to is improve the lives of others who suffer from lack of shelter, and economic stability. The remaining 10 participants provided examples of their perception of the term social justice. As examples, Participant 2 stated, "social justice defined is to provide services and resources for families so the families can live productive lives." Participant 3 offered, "social justice ensures equity and equality throughout all social systems in our country as well as awareness of the disproportionate impact these systems can have on diverse communities." It was Participant 10 who included their perception of the system in the definition by stating, "social justice in child welfare includes: first, doing no harm and treating clients with dignity and respect while working in a bureaucratic system often is not just." Lastly, it was Participant 12, who included the perception of the role of the system along with child welfare social workers in collaboration with the macro environment. The participant shared the definition of social justice as being "educated, understanding society, and knowing the world we live in. The obstacles and injustices in terms of how the system and society are set up."

A pragmatic implication stemmed from this study is the understanding governmental systems could benefit from understanding how workers perceive social justice in social work

133

practice. Generating awareness of the behaviors and characteristics of informed social justice child welfare social workers amongst administrators and workers of the child welfare system creates the opportunity to achieve the understanding of how to define and apply social justice to social work practice. Since child welfare social workers perceive social justice differently, fragments of this current study establish a baseline for particular perceptions. Social injustice has had devastating outcomes for clients and communities; it is essential to acknowledge when justice is not served and to direct services to alleviate unfair practices. This research can influence curbing injustice is witnessed by workers yet, not likely to eradicate injustice overall. Even though social attitudes toward social justice can be subtle (Mathias, 2015), the actions will be apparent to the administrators, and workers who are informed and willing to acknowledge when justice is not served. With recognizing actions, the system can take progressive, positive measures toward influencing social justice behavior.

There is a pressing need to address social justice in the child welfare system to mediate negative social attitudes and behaviors. This study will be advantageous to workers who need guidance to understand the need for a change of the current protocols and practices that have impacted the lives of clients and communities for decades. Administrators could use the data to achieve the creation of a foundation to address the negative historical influences in the systematic approach toward providing services to clients and communities and establishing strategies to manage the practices. Sections of this study are produced for distribution for curriculum development, new employee hire, professional enhancement, and ongoing in-service meetings.

Research question two. The findings suggested there are grave incongruities about the process of applying social justice to social work practice. Some arguments are historical to the

134

relations between social work service providers and communities served. A significant finding suggested that racial disparities are the forefront in influencing the disagreements between social justice and social work practice. The arguments were due to the disagreement from organizations to assume responsibility and commitment for the welfare of all citizens and the agreement to what level services provided should enhance the lifestyle of communities in need. Participants 4, 7 and 9 offered sentiment acknowledging they have attended numerous training for learning of the concept of social justice advocacy yet, after the training, there is no discussion or avenues designed by the agency to direct the workers to measure how social justice is accomplished for the clients and communities.

Participants were aware of the discrepancies in how social justice is defined and applied whether the disapproval is clandestine or evident. The participants also reported experiencing similar difficulties in their experience as child welfare social workers. The current findings were constant with the findings of Crucil & Norman Amundson, 2017 and Dominelli & Ioakimidis, 2016), which demonstrated there might be differences of social advocacy when there are micro and macro practices involved if child welfare social workers try to exert their views on how to define and apply social justice to child welfare practice.

In general, the findings for research question two suggested when child welfare social workers find challenges to define and apply social justice, the difficulties are not influenced and generated by racial inequalities between the individuals/ communities and the child welfare social worker(s). Another implication is the child welfare social workers may lack direction as to how to apply the term social justice to child welfare social work practice. Advocacy of social justice for individuals and communities has become widespread across the United States. The implications concerning social justice as related to social work practice present varying views on

135

racial inequalities and social injustices in society and are affected to a degree by the influence of social media. There are organizational/community support as well as skepticism arguing both sides of social justice, but because racial differences exist, African American and Caucasian perspectives of racial inequalities and disparities concerning social justice within social work practice also exist.

Research question two centered on child welfare social worker's perception of applying the term social justice to social work practice. Several participants stated awareness of the discrepancies in how social justice is defined and applied do exist whether the disapproval is clandestine or evident. Participant 6 mentioned during the interview she considered supervision as a method which provided the opportunity for workers to share experiences from different perspectives. "Having a good supervisor allows you to talk about your professional development, along with your personal feelings about varied situations. Supervisors who are trained in recognizing social justice perceptions, attitudes, and behavior could offer effective social work practice for then presenting services best for the empowerment of clients and communities."

The participants also reported experiencing similar difficulties in their experience as child welfare social workers. The current findings were constant with the findings of Crucil & Norman Amundson, 2017 and Dominelli & Ioakimidis, 2016), which demonstrated there might be differences of social advocacy when there are micro and macro practices involved if child welfare social workers try to exert their views on how to define and apply social justice to child welfare practice. As an example, 80% of the participants mentioned discussed the discrepancies they experienced while working to serve children, families, and communities. Several participants admitted to ending their employment due to the seemingly ongoing and historical

136

racism forecasted over the community and impacted the lives of individual clients. The participants viewed the system as constituting policies and protocol for the workers to abide, which perpetrated the idea of what is in the best interest of the clients when there were situations the services did not provide what was best. Several participants also stated their experience witnessed clients of specific ethnic groups not treated with respect and equality than other ethnic groups. In general, the findings for research question two suggested when child welfare social workers find challenges to define and apply social justice, the difficulties are not automatically influenced by racial inequalities. Other noted implications are indicating the child welfare social workers may lack direction as to how to apply the term social justice to child welfare social work practice. Advocacy of social justice for individuals and communities has become widespread across the United States. The implications concerning social justice related to social work practice present varying views on racial inequalities and social injustices in society and are affected to a degree by the influence of social media. There are organizational/community support as well as skepticism arguing both sides of social justice, but because racial differences exist, African American and Caucasian perspectives of racial inequalities and disparities concerning social justice within social work practice also exist.

The implications of findings directly associated with the CST concerning the research questions are concurrent with the development of social work practice and implementation of social work policy through the perspective of micro and macro social work practice. CST suggests that child welfare social work practice for client and community organizing is viable to micro and macro practice system. The theory idealizes successful system change regarding the historical, current, and future implications for innovative micro and macro child welfare social work practice. CST's basis is aligned with social justice and social work practice by the integration of social work

137

training and curriculum development, which play a critical role in priming future social workers for identifying and addressing social injustices. The organizing must include defining social justice, developing techniques, and implementing goal outcomes for monitoring and evaluating the child welfare systems. In the past, these organizations powerfully portrayed documentation instruments used to assess the skills and knowledge of entry-level and experienced child welfare social workers. It is critical to support and prepare social workers in organizational and procedural development before assuming and during the continuum of direct contact with clients. It is meant to establish professional development to identify, implement, and maintain positioning child welfare social workers, which underwrites the policies and procedures which subjugate marginalized populations.

This research indicates addressing the changes needed within the child welfare system, which may best serve the development of a concise definition for social justice, can result through social welfare policyholders, child welfare administrators, social workers, and community leaders adopting plans for creating the profession's practice curriculum. Establishing a practice curriculum with identifying the social justice language and examining, defining, and advancing the organizational context of social welfare policies. Furthermore, implications of the critical social theory suggest child welfare systems reconstruct internal and external frameworks spearheading to eliminating historical, social work practice no longer conducive to evolving social work education programs and innovative social programs for empowering marginalized communities.

Recommendations for Practice

This phenomenological study aimed to examine the social attitude toward and perception of child welfare social worker's knowledge of social justice and understanding of

the application of social justice in their practice as social workers in the child welfare system. The significance of this research ascended from the necessity to understand how child welfare social workers define and apply social justice to social work practice. The experiences of the 12-child welfare social workers working to provide services to clients and communities were examined to obtain the awareness and understanding of the perceptions, social attitudes, and behavior influence social welfare practice. This research's findings were considered essential to the child welfare system and future child welfare social workers who choose to pursue a career in social work.

There was one major theme along with 16 sub-themes supporting the recommendations for practice. The first and second recommendations for professional and personal development and cultural competence were consistent for appropriate perception, social attitude, and behavior development for child welfare social work practice. This recommendation was backed by prior research, which has shown productive and ongoing training, child welfare social workers developed an awareness of social justice within social work practice. Active professional development is necessary to support child welfare social workers in implementing social justice strategies with knowledge of social justice attitudes and behavior. The knowledge is useful to assimilate with the values and beliefs promoting social justice informed child welfare social work practice (Windsor, Shorkey, & Battle, 2015), which can create a foundation for a standard definition of social justice to social work practice. The third and fourth recommendations were for child welfare social workers to successfully acquire knowledge and strategies of alternative social work practice through professional development to promote social justice supported by the themes associated with the second research question. The prior research has demonstrated with administration providing consistent, ongoing support training; there is a benefit to child welfare

139

social workers, and in time it may be less challenging to identify practice application for social justice advocacy with clients and the community (Thrift & Sugarman, 2019).

Professional and personal development. The results to Research question one and two indicated the integration of ongoing professional and personal development. This study's results appeal to child welfare social workers not to ignore the connections between their professional and personal identities (Loakimidis and Dominelli, 2016). Within the context of social work practice, the findings revealed values, knowledge, and critical reflective thinking contributing to practice. The participants commonly described without question the process of professional/personal integration as an ongoing career developmental process (Yu et al. (2016).

Cultural competence. The results of this current study conjoined with the theoretical literature convincing child welfare social work practice must be conducted within the context of cultural competence. The findings based on the participants' responses reported the intentions of social justice interventions as sufficient when bound indivisibly with the principles of cultural diversity awareness, empowerment of individuals and communities, and multiculturalism (Liang et al., 2019).

Professional/personal integration training. A significant finding of this study supported the need for ongoing training integrating professional and personal development, ensuring a successful career. The participants identified connections between their professional and personal lives within the context of social justice perceptions, social attitudes, and behaviors. There was recognition from the participants of critical experiences and the values and beliefs contributing to their performance. Each participant described the ongoing progression of professional/personal integration as an occupational, developmental process stressing a commitment to professional/personal integration gathered in an educational setting, and the

140

beginning of employment is a benefit to professional development and inclined towards social justice commitments within the course of social work practice (Barak, 2020). Specifically, training programs can engage trainees to identify values generate their perception and attitude supplementary with professional work and discover methods to live the values along with their career choice as a child welfare social worker.

Social justice intervention training. The participants mentioned limited formal training of social justice with child welfare social work practice. The idea of providing training related to defining and applying social justice and individual and community interventions under the guidance of the agency and supported by the administration may prove beneficial to cultivating social justice value to child welfare social work practice (Cicmil and O'Laocha, 2016). The results of this current study provide suggestions for both individual and community-level interventions and the development of system driven advocacy skills.

Recommendations for administrators. One recommendation for administrators of the child welfare system is to develop intervention measures for monitoring child welfare social workers' ability to understand, recognize, define, and apply the concept of social justice to practice. All of the participants in this study had lived experiences and formulated perceptions concerning social justice of their role as child welfare social workers. Existing research suggests lack of a uniform definition for social justice is a significant hindrance for child welfare social workers to apply social justice intervention to practice (Collins et al., 2015; Diemer et al., 2016; Gair, 2016; Kreivinienė, & Rimkus, 2016; Krings, Fusaro, Nicoll, & Lee, 2019). Based on the findings of this present research and existing past research, administrators should create and sustain an encouraging environment will engage child welfare social workers to assist the workers with working effectively with clients and communities (Harrison et al., 2016).

141

Another recommendation is for administrators of the child welfare system to arrange continuous mandatory professional development training for all staff on informed social justice child welfare social workers, defining and applying social justice. The 12 participants interviewed for this study stated there is a need for a check and balance procedure to get feedback from the clients to assess the effectiveness of the services empowering and uplifting the life status. Five of the participants reported there are administrators not knowledgeable in social justice actions may reduce the barriers and hardships affect the client who places the workers at a disadvantage when attempting to reach the goals of betterment for clients. The child welfare system could offer to the child welfare social workers, workshops, seminars, and classes customized to meet the clients' needs to reduce the oppressive societal impediments through the increased presence of social justice.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this review present several implications for future research. The findings offer suggestions examining social justice social work training programs can benefit the development of measurement instruments to assess social attitudes and social justice practice behaviors. Detained reporting standards for learning outcome evaluations could benefit future studies interested in researching social work training viewpoints, which could contribute to distinctive competencies. The learning outcomes could purposely offer clarity for interpreting meaningful data useful to enrich measures for social justice characteristic outcomes. Such outcomes are considerable, knowing there is a level of the scarceness of research on this topic.

In concurrence with the measurement of social justice characteristics for child welfare social workers, future research exploring the evaluation of worker's social justice competency from clients should be explored. Child welfare social workers are perceived as in an

142

authoritative position compared to the client and communities served; therefore, it is essential to consider if the system is upholding oppressive structures. By constructing not only self-reports but also professional work performance evaluations and client worker service reports to measure the social justice competency of the worker. Lastly, future research examining the lack of social advocacy action by child welfare social workers or systematic barriers obstructing child welfare social workers engagement in social justice practice is relevant as it is a must for workers to have the opportunities to perform in an empowering environment to practical impact the professions to advance social justice. It is also suggested future studies carefully examine the attitudes and behaviors of supervisors and their roles with promoting the social justice values and beliefs in the process to re-establish the management styles elicit uninformed social justice perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Social justice interventions/reflective thinking. One of the first findings of this study is the participants commonly identified the concept and application of social justice as an essential intervention skill and tool for practice. Both participants 3 and 9 reported the idea of understanding the concept of social justice and recognizing the need to intervene with providing services may not necessarily agree with the system's formalities but agree in the best interest of the family's well-being. Participant 9 added that she considered herself knowledgeable about what services it takes to advocate for clients and families living within the lower social and economic level. She stated, "All clients need to be treated with respect and understanding. The families need to be listened to, supported, and encouraged in the complicated job of parenting. The children need to be protected and guided through their development. All cultures and lifestyles should be respected." Future research can address this affirmation. By doing so, researchers suggest the collaborative efforts for child welfare social workers, clients, and

143

communities identify the relevant outcomes along with suggesting public agencies develop one working definition for social justice to then create an outcome to guide direct practice for child welfare social workers.

Micro and Macro perspectives. This current study advances the field of research in child welfare social work by exploring the perspectives of the participants selected to examine defining and applying social justice to social practice. Participant 12 shared "being educated, having an understanding of society' and knowing the world we live in; I recognize the obstacles and injustices in terms of how the system and society are set up to either help or hinder individuals and communities. Future research can contribute to social work practice to the concept of social justice by exploring client and community perspectives on social justice in child welfare social work training and individual and community.

Cultural competence and adaptation. Cultural competence was identified as a core aspect of child welfare social work practice as related to the concept of social justice. The results of this study support research to address cultural competence, especially the advancement and adaptation of practices. 1, 5, 8, and 10 participants referred to the cultural and ethnic backgrounds acknowledged within social work education and practice as the importance of diversity training. Participants 6 and 12 offered specifics to the skills for cultural competency helpful to child welfare social work practice with clients and communities. The combined list offered the beliefs of the worker's awareness own values, culture, and biases and awareness of working to control the worker's own biases and recognizing how the biases may affect the interactions with clients and communities. With the awareness Participant 12, it is listed knowledge of institutional biases based on race and economic levels preventing specific communities from receiving services. The participant shared it is essential to acquire culture-

144

specific knowledge to adopt strong cross-cultural relationships despite the cultural and racial differences to acquire the aptitude and the flexibility to adapt and increase empathy to diverse environments. Participant 6 explained the adaption to understanding diverse environments is the willingness to become a supporter to clients and communities differ from the worker along with developing the skills of verbal and nonverbal communication helpful to mediate across and beyond cross-cultural differences and conflicts.

Child welfare social work factors in the social justice context. Future research may address social work factors in the context of social justice research. The potential variables include sought after professional/personal attributes, values, individual/community issues, cultural competency intelligence, critical reflective thinking, and education/knowledge. It was the discussion from Morgaine (2014) which shared social workers alluded to the conception of social justice transpires by acts of compassion, delivered through the enactment of the social work values of respecting clients and communities, self-determination and dedication to obtain equality. To better understand the characteristics of the informed social justice child welfare social worker, several participants mentioned the need to create benchmarks in practice to monitor and measure competencies associated with social justice awareness within social work practice. Participant 9 stated she believes specific social behaviors may appear to be associated with engaging in social work practices that align with social justice. The participant shared she believes there are behaviors she considers competent to advocate social attitudes, beliefs, and the clause aligns with the undertaking the ethical standards of social work and can support the idealism of measuring social justice characteristics. The participant included in her statement without monitoring the performance of the workers there; it is not probable to know the progression of the movement to assure social justice advocacy is promoted in practice.

145

There are subjective measures for assessing the perceptions, social attitudes, and behaviors of understanding and skills acquired through education and experience measuring the social justice knowledge and behavior (Maier, R., & Sirbu, M. (2017). Participant 5, who suggested measuring social justice competencies, is imperative to building assessment standards for social perceptions and attitudes to define social justice and create the behaviors toward applying the term to social work practice. The participant suggested self-efficacies, filed evaluations, course grades while in attendance of graduate programs and professional evaluations given by clients to identify and measure the social justice competency of workers. The participants 2 and 4 offered the support with understanding operationalization of social justice perceptions and behavior with social work practice is difficult due to lack of consensus in the creation of the term social justice for reporting outcome and the not identifying specific measurements to effectively assess social justice practice perceptions and social attitudes and behaviors.

Conclusions

The term social justice is multifaceted with social, environmental influences (Shulman, 2016). Social justice in child welfare social work practice has significant challenges with the concern for the treatment of marginalized individuals and communities that do not possess equal distribution of power in society (Russell, Kerwin, & Halverson, 2018). Ricciardelli and Britton Laws (2019) suggested values play an essential role in establishing the norms for the implications and application of social justice related to the role of child welfare social work practice. The general problem is the varied definitions of social justice among child welfare social workers and how the inconsistency can bring barriers to advocacy and fair treatment (Nicotera, 2018). Researchers can identify common words combining to explain the concept

146

and term of social justice as related to social work (Mattocks, 2018). Some researcher suggested the importance of individual client relationships (McLaughlin, Gray, & Wilson, 2017) in the development of social justice within social work practice; however, other researchers suggested the importance of community/global relationships in the development of social justice within social work practice (McLaughlin, Gray, & Wilson, 2017).

The specific problem for examining social worker perceptions of the working relationship between workers and clients drew the need for the research and identified social justice as an essential principle for promoting equity interventions within child welfare social work practice. This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to examine the social attitude of child welfare social workers, which influences the perception of defining social justice and applying the concept of social justice to practice. This research study was centered around two questions: how do child welfare social workers define social justice, and how do child welfare social workers apply the concept to practice? This study's findings indicated child welfare social workers used different words and meanings to define social justice. The participants' shared the desire to promote social justice for all clients and communities by applying the term to practice. However, all of the participants gave varied applications of social justice to child welfare practice. There was no commonality generated from training or instruction from the administration, which would uniformly guide the practice of all child welfare social workers. The implications of these findings stress the importance of creating and implementing uniform social justice applications to practice.

Also, the child welfare social workers working directly with community organizations tailored their practice with actions to strengthen the idea of social justice within social work

147

practice. The findings for this study also supported Morgaine's (2014) study, which demonstrated the child welfare social worker's influence during the intervention as valuable time for creating advocacy for individual clients and community organizations. Social justice informed child welfare social workers tend to be understanding, progressive, and promote social, economic, political, and cultural equality compared to uninformed child welfare social workers in the working relationship dynamic with clients (Morgaine, 2014). The performance from the informed child welfare social worker is more stable and substantial, which aligns with the current research and Lerner (2015), indicating that child welfare social worker performances often correlate with social change and progressive perspectives toward social justice. These findings are fundamental for social work practice to include child welfare social workers in the process to ensure the rights for clients are processed, and the development for social justice continues to grow. There were implications related to the study problem implying social workers would benefit in receiving professional development social justice educational training discussing the child welfare social worker's role when working in the capacity as a child welfare social worker. The findings also suggest child welfare social workers engaging in civic duties tailed to addressing the advocacy and rights within the community and focus on strengthening their presence outside of individual client case management. As related to the theoretical problem, the findings imply child welfare social workers do play an integral role in the success for client/community services justice development and point to the necessity for clients/ community organizations to have an appropriate level of dependency to the role of the child welfare social workers.

Some recommendations for applying social justice within child welfare social work practice include (1) child welfare social workers receiving social justice awareness skill building,

(2) cultural competence awareness training tailed to build and strengthen the working alliance's ideology between child welfare social workers and clients, and (3) critical reflective thinking assessments to examine the previous conflict for pursuing social justice and how child welfare social workers assist in the future justice planning for clients. Recommendation for future research includes extending the literature by examining the micro/macro practices of child welfare within varied settings.

The data gathered from the participants directly indicated the need for child welfare social workers (1) to learn to identify words and themes which can contribute to defining social justice and (2) developing practicum toward the application for providing services to clients and community organizations with the hope of instituting social justice in daily practice. The data revealed the participants believe the clients have suffered the injustices based on society's inability to consider others' rights, which extends beyond basic needs. The participants perceived the need for social justice intervention within child welfare social work practice and believed this to be the foundation to encourage clients and communities to strive toward equality.

There is a substantial need to develop an understanding of significant barriers when developing a definition of social justice and applying the term to practice. The experiences from child welfare social workers and the identified themes from research, support the literature documenting the need for a professional and personal contextual modified system designed with curriculum to meet the cultural aspects of micro and macro practice of child welfare social work (Campbell, 2016; Diemer et al., 2016; Henderson, Majors, and Wright, M., 2019; Lee, and McAdams III, 2019).

Marginalized oppression of ongoing racism and lack of knowledge exacerbates the challenge of creating a standard definition and, therefore, the consistent application of social

149

justice within child welfare social work practice (Lerner, 2015; Munger, MacLeod, and Loomis, 2016; Olson et al., 2013). In accord with the theoretical framework of critical social theory, notably, the historical impression of oppression stemming from the child welfare system toward identified clients and communities was expressed in the varied definitions by the child welfare social workers along with participants opinion of the inconsistent application of social justice to micro and macro practice. This study reinforced critical social theory as a relevant theory for understanding cultural impacts within the social work practice process for the clients and communities served by the child welfare system. There are significant findings of the oppressive historical practices by the child welfare systems which affects specific clients and communities today (Bank, 2016; Bent-Goodley, 2018; Keum, & Miller, 2020), and cultural factors impacting the attitudes and perceptions of professional and personal identities for child welfare social workers (Alvarez-Hernandez & Choi, 2017; Cabiati & Raineri, 2019).

In conclusion, perceptions of child welfare social workers on defining social justice and applying the concept to practice provide valuable information when addressing the significant problems of the injustice toward clients and communities served by the public child welfare system. Understanding the role of social workers, specifically the child welfare social workers' influence on social justice development can assist in progressive prevention and intervention efforts against the injustice suffered by many clients and communities encountering services provided under the guise of best practices.

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Appendix A   Permission Request
Re: Site Permission

Michelle Clinch <Michelle.Clinch@du.edu>
Fri 1/18/2019 7:28 AM
Karla-Monique Veal

You have NCWWI's permission to post. Best of luck!
Michelle

Michelle Clinch, MSEd
Instructional Design & Social Media Senior Program Associate
Butler Institute for Families
University of Denver
(503) 830-2778
michelle.clinch@du.edu

From: Karla-Monique Veal <K.Veal0992@o365.ncu.edu>
Sent: Thursday, January 17, 2019 1:19:12 PM
To: Michelle Clinch
Subject: Site Permission

Hello Ms. Clinch,

  I reached out to you September 2018 with inquiry for posting to your National Child Welfare Workforce Institute facebook page in seeking volunteer participants for my doctoral study. Thank you for your response with permission to post my study to the page. I am now in need of receiving your approval response through an email address. I am a Ph.D. student with Northcentral University. I am seeking your permission to post a recruitment notice for volunteer participants for the research I am conducting. The recruitment for volunteers is needed to interview, to collect data, and to perform all steps in the data collection process.

  The research topic is concerning the difficulty for child welfare social workers to define the term social justice and the challenge to apply the term to social work practice. I will provide on the facebook page a document with a brief statement as to the purpose of the study and my contact information. Your approval to post my recruitment request is greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Karla-Monique Veal
K.Veal.0992@o365.ncu.edu
  Doctoral Candidate
  Psychology
  Northcentral University

Appendix B: Invitation letter

Introduction letter to Participants

Hi, my name is Karla-Monique Veal. I am a doctoral student in the Psychology department at Northcentral University under the supervision of Dr. Deepa Tanksale, PhD. I am currently recruiting child welfare social workers with the minimum of five years' work experience in a public children and family service agency.

Brief Study Purpose: The purpose of the study is to understand your perspective of the definition for the term social justice and how the term applies to social work practice. The study will contribute to enhance services to children and families within public service agencies.

Location: There is a 5 question demographic inquiry allowing you to take the survey at your convenience any place where you have a computer with internet access. There is a telephone interview which is approximately 45-60 minutes.

Inclusion criteria: To participate in the research you must be over 18 years old and you must be able to read and understand English to participate in the study.

Identified Contact Persons: Karla Monique Veal researcher,

 (510) 298-9508, K.Veal0992@o365.ncu.edu and faculty chairperson

Dr. D. Tanksale, dtanksale@ncu.edu (407) 924-0904

Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Participant Number: _____

1. Gender

- o Male
- o Female

2. Age _____

3. Ethnic Origin (check one)

- o Asian/Pacific Islander
- o Black/African American
- o Hispanic/Latino
- o Native American/American Indian
- o White/Caucasian
- o Other _____

4. Highest level of education completed (check one)

- o Some High School, No Degree or Equivalent
- o High School or Equivalent
- o Some College, No Degree
- o Associated Degree
- o Bachelor's Degree
- o Master's Degree
- o Doctoral Degree

5. Hired as a Child Welfare Social Worker in a public service child welfare system.

- o No
- o Yes

Appendix D : **Informed Consent**

Introduction:

Introduction:

My name is Karla Monique Veal and I am a student at Northcentral University. I am conducting a research study on social justice and child welfare social work practice. I am completing this research as part of my doctoral degree. I am seeking your consent to involve you and your information in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. There might be reasons you would not want to participate. Reasons you might want to participate in the study include sharing your experience as a child welfare social worker. I am here to address your questions or concerns during the informed consent process.

PRIVATE INFORMATION

Certain private information may be collected about you in this study. I will make the following effort to protect your private information by keeping your identity confidential. I will use a code to identify you. No one will have access to your name and code.

Activities:

If you participate in this research, you will be asked to:

give your perception on child welfare social work practice. This should take 45 to 60 minutes.

Eligibility: The following are eligibility requirement to participate in this study:

1.   Are/Have been a Child Welfare social worker.

2.   Between 18 – 65.

3.   Understand the social justice concept.

4.   Perception of social justice integration in social work practice.

You are not eligible to participate in this research if you:

1.   No experience as a child welfare social worker.

2.   Less than 18.

3.   Lack understanding of social justice concept.

4.   Lack perception of social justice integration in social work practice.

I hope to include 12 people in this research.

185

Risks:

There are minimal risks in this study. One possible risk is the small possibility of confidentiality breach through accidental release of participants' information. To decrease the impact of these risks, participants will be assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to you if you agree to participate.

The potential benefits to others is an increased understanding of social work in child welfare social work practice.

Confidentiality:

The information you provide will be kept confidential to the extent allowable by law. I will use a code to identify you. No one will have access to your name and code to put them together.

Even with this effort, there is a chance that your private information may be accidentally released. The chance is small but does exist. You should consider this when deciding whether to participate. The people who will have access to your information are: myself and dissertation chair.

The Institutional Review Board may also review my research and view your information.

I will secure your information with these steps:

1. File the signed letter of consent and interview data in separate locations.

2. Lock information in a filing cabinet.

3. Lock the computer file with a password.

The data is kept for 7 years. Then, I will delete electronic data. and destroy paper data.

Contact Information:

If you have questions for me, you can contact me at: K.Veal0992@o365.ncu.edu or (510) 298-9508.

My dissertation chair's name is Dr. Deepa Tanksale. She works at Northcentral University and is supervising me on the research. You can contact her at: dtanksale@ncu.edu, (407) 924-0904.

If you contact us, you will be giving us information like your phone number or email address.

186

This information will not be linked to your responses.

If you have questions about your rights in the research, or if a problem has occurred, or if you are injured during your participation, please contact the Institutional Review Board at: irb@ncu.edu or 1-888-327-2877 ext. 8014.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation is voluntary. There will be no penalty if you decide not to participate or do not complete all of the interviews. You will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Compensation/Incentives: You will not be given any form of compensation or incentives for participating.

Future Research: Any information or specimens collected from you during this research may not be used for other research in the future, even if identifying information is removed.

Signature:

A signature indicates your understanding and permission of this consent form. You will be given a copy of the form for your information and records.

Participant Signature   Printed Name   Date

_____   _____   _____

Researcher Signature   Printed Name   Date
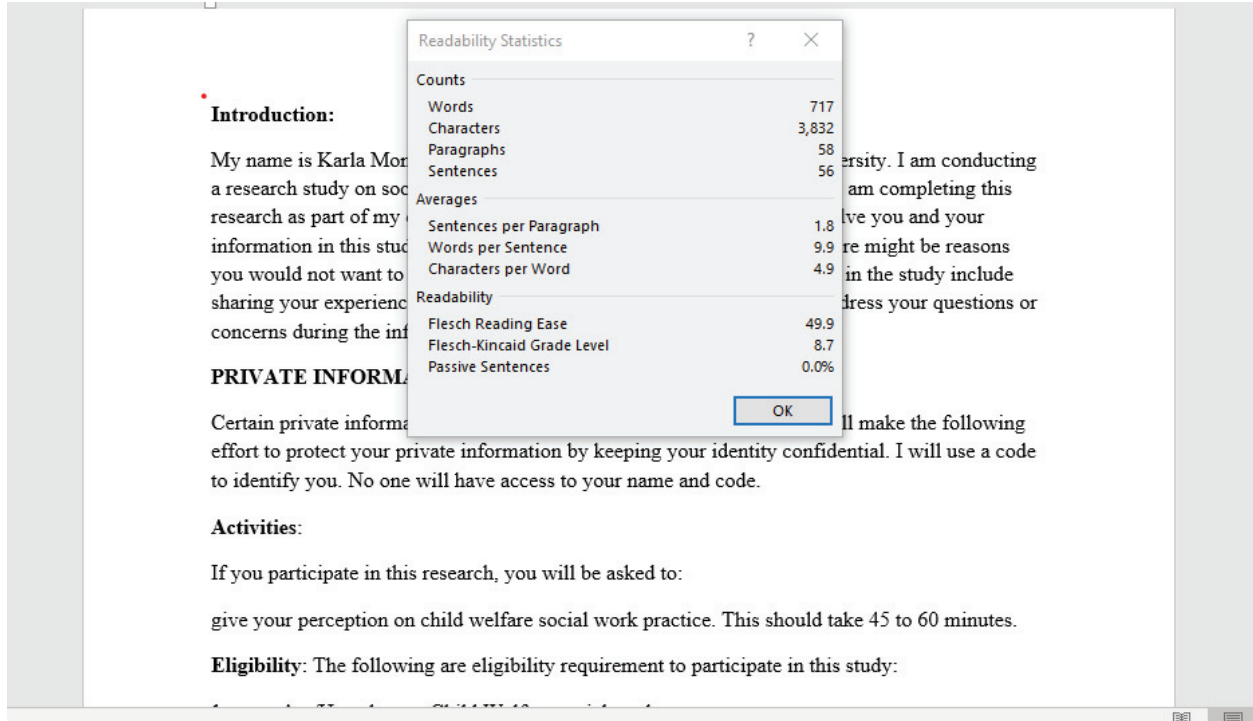
_____   _____   _____

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Semi- Structured Interview questions

1. Are you aware advocating for social justice is an ethical standard of practice for Child Welfare social workers stated by the National Association of Social Workers?
2. As a Child Welfare social worker, do/did you consider your role to apply social justice to your practice?
3. Did you receive training of the concept social justice as applied to the role as a child welfare social worker? How many trainings have you completed?
4. How did you develop your perspective on social justice?
5. Define the term social justice in the context of child welfare practice.
6. Has your perspective on social justice changed having gained professional experience as a social worker in the Child Welfare System? How so?
7. What does/did the application of social justice look like in your practice?
8. Are there challenges associated with applying social justice to child welfare practice?
9. How have/did you sustain your commitment to social justice in practice? Can you provide a brief illustration/example?

Appendix F   readability reports for Invitation and Informed Consent letters

A)   Readability of invitation email/flyer

B) Readability of Informed Consent

Introduction:

My name is Karla Mor[...] [univ]ersity. I am conducting a research study on soc[...] am completing this research as part of my [...]lve you and your information in this stud[...] re might be reasons you would not want to [...] in the study include sharing your experienc[...] dress your questions or concerns during the inf[...]

PRIVATE INFORMA[...]

Certain private informa[...]ll make the following effort to protect your private information by keeping your identity confidential. I will use a code to identify you. No one will have access to your name and code.

Activities:

If you participate in this research, you will be asked to:

give your perception on child welfare social work practice. This should take 45 to 60 minutes.

Eligibility: The following are eligibility requirement to participate in this study:

Readability Statistics

Counts
Words 717
Characters 3,832
Paragraphs 58
Sentences 56

Averages
Sentences per Paragraph 1.8
Words per Sentence 9.9
Characters per Word 4.9

Readability
Flesch Reading Ease 49.9
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level 8.7
Passive Sentences 0.0%

OK

190