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U.S. Southeastern Child Welfare Workers' Challenges in Serving the Haitian Population

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

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by

Cleane St Eloi

MSW, Walden University, 2015

BSW, University of Central Florida, 2010

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Social Work

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

The Haitian population has dramatically increased in the United States. Haitians face many challenges related to acculturation and adaptation, including discrimination, limited knowledge of the legal system, socioeconomic issues, and other environmental stressors that may impact family functioning. As a result of these challenges, Haitian families are at increased risk of being involved in the child welfare system. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the challenges child welfare workers face when working with the Haitian population, with a focus on workers' understanding and perception of these challenges. Ecological systems theory was used to highlight environmental stressors faced by members of the Haitian population and to explore participants' perceptions of the challenges experienced while working with Haitian families. Data were collected during 45-minute in-depth interviews with eight child welfare workers. The data were analyzed using three thematic coding cycles: the first cycle of descriptive data, the second cycle of conceptual data, and the third cycle of pattern data. The following themes emerged: (a) gaps in the child welfare system and among the Haitian population, (b) cultural knowledge, (c) ecological stressors, (d) language barrier, and (e) fear/lack of trust. The findings may be used to promote awareness of the challenges faced when working with Haitian families, promote the need for further research into how to support Haitian families within the child welfare system, advocate for positive social change through development of best practices, and enhance overall social work practice with this population.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to many individuals that have played a significant part in my life and my success. First, I would like to dedicate this study to God, who has given me the strength and courage to pursue my dream. He has always been there and guides me through life and my studies. During this journey, I had to learn to let God be in control so that I can make it through all the life challenges during my studies. Secondly, I dedicate this study to my husband, Joel Saint Fleur, and my two sons, Josiah-Alijah and Jahleel-Mitchel Saint Fleur. Reaching this educational goal is evidence of persistence, faith, love, and support. All things are possible with God's help, dedication, and persistence. Thank you for being patient and supportive of me through this journey.

I know it has not been easy, and I greatly appreciate it. I thank you very much for your love, understanding, wisdom, and encouragement. You are a blessing to me, and I am very grateful. Thirdly, to my parents, Frantz and Gercie St Eloi, who always emphasize and helped me to understand the importance of education. Mom, thank you for all the sacrifices made and suffering endured to provide a better life for my siblings and I. Words cannot express my gratitude for your support and love throughout my life. With less than high school education, I see you work very hard and always strive for more in life. You inspired me to do better in life and to reach for my dreams. Lastly, this study is dedicated to the Haitian and American societies. Both nations have made me who I am today and allowed me to accomplish my educational goal.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study and Literature Review

Overview of the Study

This qualitative study focused on challenges that child welfare workers experience when working with Haitian families. Like other immigrants, many Haitians living in the United States face challenges in terms of socioeconomics, education, poverty, adaptation, and acculturation. I used ecological theory as a framework to explore root causes of challenges child welfare workers face in serving Haitians. This study also served to address a gap in the literature, specifically the lack of research and data representing the experiences of different cultural groups within the child welfare system. The study results may increase stakeholders', policymakers', and administrators' awareness of child welfare workers' challenges and emphasize the importance of effective interventions and strategies when working with the Haitian population to enhance the social work practice in the child welfare field. The contents of this study included the following: aspects of the study problem, research question, significance and nature of the study, theoretical and conceptual approach, literature review, methodology and design, results, and implications for social change in the social work field. Furthermore, biases and ethical standards that may have impacted the study were addressed to ensure trustworthiness, reliability, and flexibility.

Problem Statement

Haitians, also referred to as Haitian Americans, are a minority group in the United States originating from Haiti. Haitians experience social and environmental challenges both in Haiti and internationally. In Haiti, Haitians face poverty, limited literacy, poor

education, employment inequality, political dilemmas, and social violence (Kirmayer, 2010; Philippi, 2016). According to Schulz and Batalova (2017), approximately 676,000 Haitian immigrants lived in the United States in 2015 compared to 587,000 in 2010, with many Haitians residing in Florida and New York. Haitians migrate to the United States for better opportunities, yet they continue to experience many difficulties related to poverty, lack of support and resources, limited English literacy, immigration status, and discrimination (Nicholas et al., 2009; Philippi, 2016; Rahill et al., 2011). As a result of these ecological and cultural stressors, Haitian families may be more likely to become involved with the child welfare system in the United States. Leidy et al. (2012) suggested that parental stress significantly interferes with parenting abilities and leads to negative consequences for children. Thus, Haitians parents may have substantial barriers to effective care for their children.

Haitians have a unique perception of the world, mental health, and illnesses (Nicholas et al., 2009; Rahill et al., 2011), which can indicate cultural differences in parenting between families in Haiti and those in the United States. Despite the increasing number of Haitians migrating to the United States each year, Haitian immigrants are generally known to be underserved (Rahill et al., 2011; Schulz & Batalova, 2017). Ecological stressors can also create challenges for child welfare workers as they strive to ensure parents' behavioral and emotional stability and promote the safety and well-being of children. Slayter and Kriz (2015) reported a lack of comprehensive data regarding immigrant children and families involved in the U.S. child protection systems and found that although approximately 9% of the children involved with child protection systems

are estimated to have a foreign-born parent, these data are considered an underestimate. According to the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) Dashboard (2020), there are no reported data representing immigrant children and families served within the state of Florida, despite the large number of Haitian families residing there.

Further, there is minimal information and research specific to the Haitian community that could equip child welfare workers with evidence-based interventions to work with this population. Due to the lack of literature representing the Haitian population in the U.S. child welfare system and the lack of evidence-based interventions to serve this population effectively, child welfare workers also face practice-based challenges in the field. Jansson (2014) explained that negative social factors such as poverty, lack of quality education, abuse and neglect, community violence, substance abuse, unemployment, and immigration contribute to challenges faced by all involved in child welfare. As a whole, these factors contribute to a lack of ecological awareness and culturally sensitive interventions to help child welfare workers engage and provide adequate services to this population.

The current study addressed the challenges child welfare workers in the United States face when working with the Haitian population. As a Haitian scholar and practitioner in the social work field, I have encountered many Haitian families who are hesitant to engage and trust child welfare workers. Slayter and Kriz (2015) explained three fears that immigrant families exhibit when working with child welfare professionals: fear of the removal of their children, fear of deportation, and fear related to views of workers as a representation of government officials. Like other immigrants,

Haitians may also experience fear of having their children taken away due to cultural values and lack of trust in the system. These fears can deepen the existing lack of trust and prevent engagement in services. Working with the Haitian population requires professionals to acknowledge specific ecological and cultural differences to serve members of this population effectively (Rahill et al., 2011). Therefore, child welfare workers must be competent and able to implement multicultural and evidence-based interventions to overcome challenges and promote social change in child welfare practices.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the challenges that child welfare workers face when working with Haitians involved in the child welfare system in Florida. I sought to address the gap in literature and lack of data regarding the importance of effective interventions and strategies when working with this population and enhance social work practice in the child welfare field. This research may provide insight into the additional support, training, and interventions that child welfare workers need to address the challenges experienced when working with the Haitian population.

Research Question

The research question for this study was the following: What are the challenges child welfare workers experience when providing services to Haitian children and their families?

Definitions of Key Terms

Child welfare: According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013), child welfare is a system established to provide services to families that promote the well-being of children. The child welfare system ensures that children are safe and have a stable environment.

Child welfare worker: For this study, this term referred to an individual working with children and families in the dependency field as an investigator, dependency case manager, targeted case manager, or counselor (see Jansson, 2014).

Family: This term has different definitions in many countries and cultures. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2006) referred to family as a group of two or more people who identify themselves as a family and, over time, assume obligations to each other as is considered essential to a family dynamic.

Haitian families: Immediate and extended family members helping to raise children in Haitian households (Kirmayer, 2010).

Haitian population: An ethnic group of people originating from the country of Haiti sharing common interests, characteristics, culture, and values (Edmond et al., 2007; Kirmayer, 2010). For the purposes of the current study, the Haitian population included individuals born in the United States but whose family origin can be traced to Haiti.

Lakay: A Haitian word meaning home but refers to a single household (Edmond et al., 2007).

Lakou: A Haitian word to describe a group of households or cluster homes in which multiple families live (Edmond et al., 2007).

Rationale for the Study

Considering the increased number of Haitian immigrants in the state of Florida, as well as Haitians' social and ecological risk factors, unique perception of the world and illness, and cultural differences, child welfare workers are more likely to face challenges in their attempts to serve and engage this population effectively. Further complicating these challenges are mental, emotional, and social stressors experienced by those immigrating to the United States in hopes of a better life (Nicholas et al., 2009). According to Pecora et al. (2010), the most vulnerable children involved in the child welfare system are those from minority households who live in poverty and have a history of involvement history with the child welfare system. As indicated by the Florida Child Welfare Department's five-year service plan (2020–2024), some of the program improvement plan's goals were not accomplished, such as safety outcome, permanency outcome, well-being outcome, treatment services, and family support (Florida DCF, 2019). This is evidence of the need for more evidence-based interventions to address the ecological and cultural factors that inhibit service delivery in the child welfare system. The current study's goal was to increase awareness of the challenges child welfare workers face when working with the Haitian population and of the need for further research to address gaps in the literature. This study may help to improve program outcomes in the social work field for better client assessment, client engagement, interventions, and service outcomes.

Nature of the Doctoral Project

I used a qualitative approach for this study. Qualitative research facilitates a better understanding of a population's experience, perceptions, feelings, behaviors, and needs about a specific topic (Rahman, 2017). In-depth interviewing is a technique that helps researchers to collect qualitative data (Chenail, 2011). Face-to-face, phone, and Zoom videoconference were offered to participants to conduct individual interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and participants' locations, phone and Zoom video conference were the preferred method. Rahman (2017) and Bolderston (2012) explained that interviewing participants face-to-face helps researchers gather data that elicit the participants' feelings, behaviors, views, perceptions, and verbal and nonverbal cues. Offering a Zoom video conference option for interviews allowed me to observe participants' body language when a face-to-face format was not feasible. All interviews were conducted at a secure and convenient location (e.g., office, home, or community venue) to ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality. In total, I conducted individual interviews with eight child welfare workers via phone call or Zoom videoconference to gather data about their experience with and perception of the challenges they face working with Haitians.

In qualitative research, the sample size of a study is often based on the nature and type of research. To recruit participants for this study, I used purposive and snowball sampling. According to Bolderston (2012), the sample size for a study including snowball sampling may be 10 or fewer participants, and purposive sampling helped me recruit participants with specific knowledge on the study's topic. I discussed the study process

with each participant, including obtaining consent and a release of information, so that

the data shared during the interviews could be used for data analysis. I used an approved

institutional review board (IRB) consent template from Walden University as a guide to

develop the consent form for this study. I informed participants regarding how their

shared information would be used in the study and how the study result was likely to

improve practice. Each participant had the opportunity to determine whether they were

able to commit to a 45-minute individual interview. I made participants aware that their

participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at

any time, and I asked participants to verbally inform me of the decision to withdraw from

the study.

I recorded all interviews to facilitate data analysis; Zoom videoconference

interviews were recorded through the Zoom app, and phone interviews were recorded

using a call-recording app. I transcribed recorded interview data and coded them using

the three coding cycles to identify common themes for data analysis. Bogetz et al. (2017)

described *code* as a word or phrase that represents a single idea; codes help researchers

identify ideas that can be categorized into blocks and patterns, and to identify themes

throughout the data set. The collected data were stored using password-protected

electronic devices such as a USB drive, phone, and personal computer. The data analysis

process was conducted within the ethical standards of the IRB and the NASW code of

ethics. The analysis of the data enables me to answer the research question and highlight

the outcome of the study. Figures were used to illustrate outcomes of the data analysis.

Significance of the Study

This study may improve social work practice by addressing gaps in the literature, increasing awareness of environmental factors to enhance successful engagement in services, and increasing service outcomes in the child welfare field among the Haitian population. As indicated by the NASW (2017), professionals must continue their education and develop new skills to increase awareness of social gaps and the need to conduct research and improve competency in the field. The findings of this study may promote awareness of the challenges that child welfare workers face working with the Haitian population and may highlight possible causes of these challenges. To effectively serve the Haitian population, child welfare workers must be aware of all aspects of the Haitian community (Slayter & Kriz, 2015). The results of this study may provide insights to improve training and support and to enhance service engagement and outcomes when working with this population. Findings may also be used to encourage and inform other research to eliminate the gap in literature.

In addition, the results of this research may serve as a tool to promote social change in the social work field among the Haitian population. Promoting social change in the child welfare field requires research to establish an evidence base about the social issues at hand. This study provided child welfare workers the opportunity to describe the challenges they face in their experience in the field serving Haitian families. In terms of policy, leaders and stakeholders may have more evidence of the challenges child welfare workers experience when addressing racial and ethnic disproportionality in the child welfare field. In clinical settings, clinicians may use this study to enhance their

knowledge of ecological and cultural factors that can impact engagement with child

welfare services and treatment outcomes among the Haitian population.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was ecological systems theory, which

was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as a new research perspective to better

understand human development. Bronfenbrenner described ecological systems theory as

a nested set of structures in which each environmental level is found within one another

and all levels influence a person's development. This approach helps in understanding the

connection between people's behavior and their environment (Burns & Warmbold-Brann,

2015). Bronfenbrenner's (1979, as cited in Paat, 2013) ecological model has five

subsystems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The

microsystem involves individuals who have direct interaction with the child or the

family. Paat (2013) explained that the microsystem helps to understand individuals'

interpersonal connections, family dynamics, daily experiences, and events. The

mesosystem refers to two or more microsystems interacting, such as families, schools,

and friends (Paat, 2013). The exosystem consists of indirect social settings or factors that

affect a child or family related to neighborhood, support system, and social resources

(Paat, 2013). Bronfenbrenner (1979, as cited in Paat, 2013) explained that the

macrosystem helps with the understanding of a person's social and cultural values,

beliefs, rituals, political ideology, and laws. The macrosystem influences the first three

levels of the ecological system (microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem; Paat, 2013).

The last level is the chronosystem, which helps understand a person's life transition and

changes over time. These ecological subsystems can impact the development and behavior of children and families (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

I chose to use this theoretical framework to focus on the person-in-environment, which can help in deepening understanding of the Haitian population. Having this understanding may lead to greater insight of the challenges child welfare workers face when working with families involved in the child welfare system, as well as the causes of these challenges. Paat (2013) explained that immigrant children are most affected by the first two subsystems of the ecological system, but that all of the subsystems influence one another. Although many studies focused on understanding the role that immigrant families play in their children's success (Paat, 2013; Schulz & Batalova, 2017; Slayter & Kriz, 2015), little research had been conducted on ecological aspects to assess the strengths and dynamics of the families. Therefore, my decision to use ecological systems theory as a conceptual framework for this study provided novel information about cultural and environmental aspects of the Haitian population using the five ecological subsystems. Using ecological systems theory (see Figure 1) for this study also helped me explore and understand whether ecological aspects unique to the Haitian population contribute to challenges faced within the child welfare system.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Family Ecology Paradigm
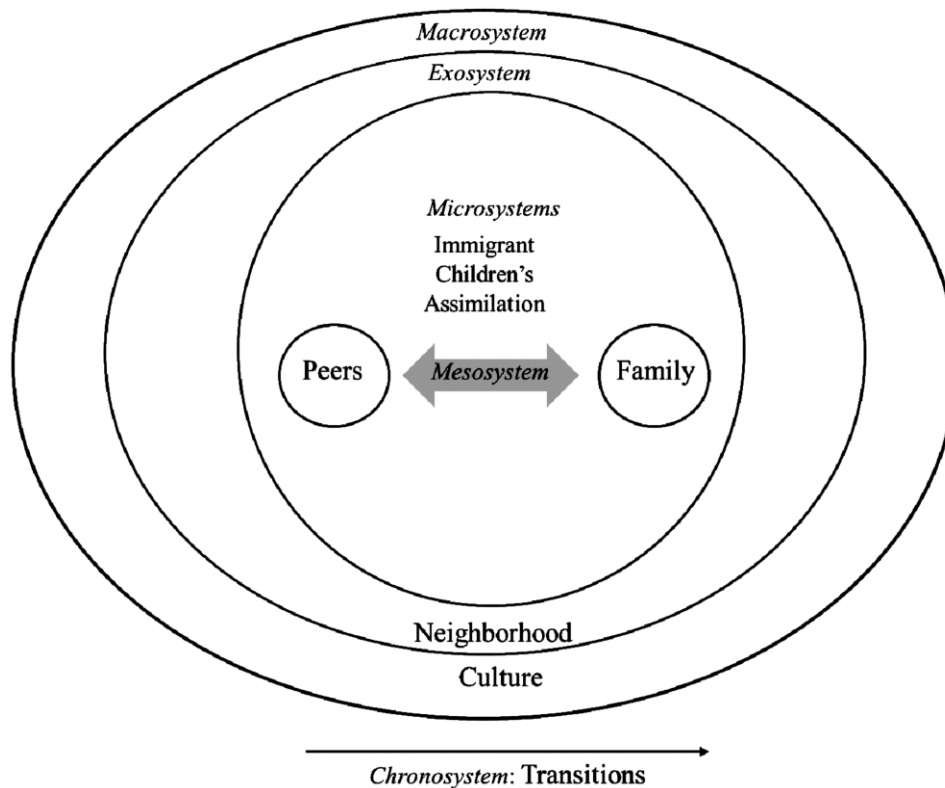
Note. "Working with immigrant children and their families: An application of

Bronfenbenner's ecological system," by Y. F. Paat, 2013, *Journal of Human Behavior in*

the Social Environment, 23 (8), 955.

Values and Ethics

According to the NASW (2017), social workers aim to promote the well-being of

all humans and strive to ensure everyone's basic needs are met, especially underserved

individuals. The values and principles of the NASW code of ethics that related to the

social work problem of the current study were services, social justice, dignity and worth

of a person, and competency. This study was conducted to address gaps in services,

practice, and literature regarding minority populations. In terms of social justice, studies

have demonstrated that many Haitians live in poverty and face immigration challenges

and other social problems (Cook Ross Inc, 2010; DeSantis & Ugarriza, 1995; Kirmayer,

2010; Nicholas et al., 2009).

I also sought to promote awareness of the need for evidence-based interventions

to improve child welfare outcomes for Haitian families and to address the lack of data on

Haitian families in the child welfare system. Furthermore, this study amplified the dignity

and worth of the person by promoting cultural awareness and increasing knowledge of

the identified population. Lastly, this research has the potential to educate and increase

professionals' competence in the child welfare system and other areas in the social work

field. These ethical values emphasize effective advocacy in the child welfare system.

Professionals must be competent and knowledgeable of ecological subsystems,

including the micro, meso, and macro aspects of a social problem. Ackerman (2017)

explained that advocacy for child welfare among the three subsystems (micro, meso, and

macro) involves working with the child and family by empowering and educating them,

working with the community to increase awareness, working with other agencies, and

working with the legislature and political leaders to change policies for better services to

improve the lives of children. Informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, conflict of

interest, the possibility of unethical conduct, and complications were ethical standards

considered and examined for this study. To ethically conduct the study, I assessed every

aspect of the study according to the NASW code of ethics. Possible ethical issues were

evaluated to ensure trustworthiness and credibility throughout the study.

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

For the literature review for this study, I initially searched for studies published within the last 5 years (since 2015). Due to the limited research available about the Haitian population, it was challenging to find literature with a specific focus on Haitians involved in the child welfare system. As a result, I also reviewed articles, domain-specific databases, peer-reviewed journals, and printed books from the past 10 years to ensure the saturation of this literature review. I used the EBSCOhost and Google Scholar search engines to locate peer-reviewed articles through the SOCIndex, PsychInfo, NCBI, and Research Gate databases to find literature related to this study. Key search terms used included the following: *child welfare workers' experience with Haitians*, *Haitians as immigrants*, *child welfare workers' challenges*, *Haitians in the United States*, *child welfare workers' challenges working with the Haitian population*, *immigrants and social and cultural challenges*, *multicultural interventions*, *social change*, *ecological stressors of immigrants in the United States*, *ecological theory*, *cultural adaptation and stressors of the Haitian population*, *child welfare system and service outcomes*, and *Haitians in Florida.*

Studies conducted about Haitians have focused on mental and physical health, background and hierarchy of the Haitian history, impact of disasters, and parental involvement. The search for scholarly articles about Haitians involved in the child welfare system was challenging. Only the most recent and relevant research articles were included in the final literature review for this study, for a total of 18 research articles. Five articles were excluded from the final review based on the date the studies were

conducted, geographic location of the study, and the field of practice. Most of the articles

retrieved were about the child welfare system in Haiti; I was not able to locate any

articles addressing Haitians' involvement in the child welfare system in the United States.

Overview of the Study Problem

The child welfare field has many challenges; child welfare workers have a great

influence on the quality of service delivery provided to children and families (Ackerman,

2017). Child welfare workers face their own challenges to engage with and provide

services to the families they serve; some of these challenges are specific to certain

populations or groups. Challenges in the child welfare system involve (a)

disproportionality of the representation of children of color in foster care; (b)

organizational problems such as large caseloads and high staff turnover; (c) child welfare

agencies' difficulties with providing adequate, accessible, and appropriate services for the

vulnerable families in their care; and (d) overwhelmed foster parents, many of whom quit

within the first year (Ackerman, 2017). Child welfare workers face challenging and

complex situations that may prevent them from providing effective services to specific

populations. Child welfare workers also experience challenges in the field, including (a)

lack of client engagement, (b) families' lack of trust in the child welfare system, (c)

community poverty, (d) lack of resources, (e) high caseload, (f) burnout, (g) restrictive

laws and policies, (h) undocumented immigrants, (i) and conflicts within practices (Kriz

& Skivenes, 2012).

In the state of Florida, the child welfare department works in collaboration with

local community agencies to protect the vulnerable, promote strong and economically

self-sufficient families, and advance personal and family recovery and resiliency (Florida

DCF, 2019). The state has made significant progress in addressing challenges faced in the

field, but there is a continuous need to make changes to provide adequate services for all

people regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, and economic status. According to its 5-year

service plan, the Florida DCF still has many improvements to make. The department did

not meet its program improvement plan goals due to insufficient assessment and safety

planning; low scores on case manager rapid safety feedback; and reports of case manager

challenges with supervised consultations, assessments, and safety planning. The Florida

DCF also has challenges with maintaining permanency for the initial 12 months after

children enter the foster care system and lacks evidence-based practice to serve

immigrants and a diverse population. Although Florida is one of two states that provide

training about immigration issues that may affect the child welfare system (Greenberg et

al., 2019), the state does not have any data representing immigrant families who are

served. There is a significant gap in the child welfare system concerning how Haitian

families should be served and involved in services. The existence of this gap raises

concerns about how child welfare workers can effectively engage the Haitian families

without interventions in place to address challenges specific to that population.

  The Haitian population has continued to grow in the United States (Philippi,

2016) and is currently the fourth-largest immigrant population from the Caribbean to the

United States (Schulz & Batalova, 2017). Schulz and Batalova (2017) further explained

that based on 2015 income and poverty data, Haitian families in the United States were

more likely to live in poverty compared to the overall immigrant population and other

Caribbean foreign-born populations. The Haitian population faces many social challenges such as poverty, social inequality, poor education, political problems, lack of child welfare, and many others (Philippi, 2016). As reported by Leidy et al. (2012), the four factors that impact parenting and family cohesion are acculturation differences between parents and children and the resulting power imbalance, difficulty getting involved in children's education, loss of extended family, and discrimination against immigrants based on their legal status.

Haitian immigrants face many challenges when migrating to the United States, including limited English proficiency, education, socioeconomic problems, poverty, lack of social support, cultural adaptation, employment issues, and limited knowledge of the U.S. legal system (Philippi, 2016; Rahill et al., 2011). According to Slayter and Kriz (2015), undocumented immigrants, including undocumented Haitian immigrants, can be very fearful and hesitant to receive services from the child welfare system. they may not be comfortable trusting others, and they may fear having their children taken away. These factors can inhibit the welfare of children and pose challenges for child welfare workers who work with Haitian families.

The child welfare system has limited race and ethnicity data about families served, and I was unable to locate previous scholarly work describing Haitians' involvement in the child welfare system; this demonstrated a significant gap in the literature. One reason for the limited data on Haitians may be that they are captured and accounted for under the classification of Black/African American. In U.S. culture, many Haitians are viewed negatively, which can contribute to the lack of representation in the

child welfare system and literature. This literature review demonstrated the need for

better understanding of the challenges child welfare workers experience when providing

services to Haitian families. The objective of this literature review was to highlight

evidence that supports the need to better understand the challenges child welfare workers

face when working with Haitian families and to bring awareness to this gap in literature

and the child welfare field.

Child Welfare Practice

Over the years, several social policies were implemented in the child welfare

system to promote social change. In 1974, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act

were developed to protect U.S. children. This policy was created to provide financial

resources to prevent the mistreatment, abuse, and neglect of children and requires states

to report child abuse (Pecora et al., 2010). The Indian Child Welfare Act was

implemented in 1978 to restore children's rights and safety and to prevent American

Indian children from being removed from their communities. The Adoption Assistance

and Child Welfare Act of 1980 and The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 were

also established to address concerns in the child welfare system (Pecora et al., 2010).

These two acts provide funds to support children in crisis and to provide permanency for

children who cannot reunite with their families.

The child welfare system is associated with personal and familial problems

related to education, employment, family support, disability, and other factors (Jansson,

2014). Child welfare is a system established to provide services to families that promote

the well-being of children (Florida DCF, 2019). The child welfare system ensures that

children are safe and have a stable environment. This system operates at the federal, state, and local levels. Both private and public agencies are included in the system (Florida DCF, 2019). The everyday practice of child welfare workers is to ensure the well-being of the children involved while also supporting the children's family. The word *family* has different definitions across countries and cultures. Sharma's (2013) comprehensive and universal definition of the family refers to a family as individuals connected or related by marriage, birth, consanguinity, or legal adoption, and who share a common kitchen and financial resources regularly. The welfare of children involves different ecological aspects such as physical and mental development, parenting, education, socioeconomic factors, health, mental health, and social opportunities.

The child welfare field is known to have racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparity. Black and African American people are known to be overrepresented in the child welfare system, while Asian and Hispanic people are underrepresented (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). Risk factors associated with racial disproportionality and disparity include poverty, geographic background, racial biases, and lack of access to services and resources (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). In 2000, the child welfare system began to take steps to address this disproportionality by developing and implementing interventions to address it (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016).

Ackerman (2017) conducted a qualitative study addressing social advocacy and multicultural approaches in child welfare to demonstrate how counselors can seek social justice for children. The study addressed challenges in the child welfare field and

described how professionals can advocate for social justice by using an integrated

approach. Challenges of the four aspects of social injustice in child welfare that were

addressed in the study included racial disproportionality, organizational issues,

inaccessibility of adequate services for families, and recruitment and retention of foster

parents or caregivers. The article indicated a lack of research addressing these four

aspects and served as an example to inform and empower research-based interventions

for a practical and integrated approach to social justice. Slayter and Kriz (2015)

conducted a qualitative study to increase understanding of child welfare workers'

perceptions and views regarding undocumented immigrants and to explore immigrants'

fears of working with child protection systems. Their study contributed to the literature

by providing detailed evidence of the study problem and describing an evidence-based

design and methodological approach that could enhance efforts of child welfare workers

who work with undocumented immigrants.

Application of Ecological Theory to the Haitian Population

Haitians are a group of individuals with a unique view of the world, a rich culture,

and an extensive history of challenges. Many Haitians migrate to other countries for a

better life. For child welfare workers to effectively assist children from Haitian families,

they must have a good understanding of how Haitian families function. Family plays a

significant role in the Haitian culture as it pertains to relationships, functions, and

responsibilities (Cook Ross Inc, 2010). Family in Haitian culture is extended to many

individuals and may include both immediate and extended family, friends, and neighbors

(Kirmayer, 2010). According to Philippi (2016), family for the Haitian population often

consists of parents, school-age children, extended family, and close friends. In some parts

of Haiti, the word *lakou* is used to describe a group of households or cluster homes where

multiple families live (Edmond et al., 2007). *Lakay* is another Haitian word meaning

home, but refers to a single household (Edmond et al., 2007). Haitian families prefer to

stay close to one another to help with child-rearing. For many, important decisions are

made after consulting with family, and the individual's choice may reflect family values

(Cook Ross Inc, 2010). Every family has a culture of practice that can differ from other

families. Child welfare workers must be culturally competent in these aspects of Haitian

culture and must learn from each family dynamic to engage and assist effectively. To

provide a better understanding of the ecological aspects of the Haitian population, the

five subsystems of the ecological theory were used to provide insight into the Haitian

culture and environment.

Microsystem

The microsystem looks at the most immediate environment of a person, including

familial, school related, and caregiver relationships (Paat, 2013). At the microsystem

level, children and families can be referred to as the primary entities of this study. Family

is a significant principle value in the Haitian culture; it provides the necessary foundation

for children and is the innermost and most intimate relationship within the microsystem

level (Paat, 2013). Children are often viewed as gifts from God in the Haitian culture

(DeSantis & Ugarriza, 1995; Edmond et al., 2007). Respect and obedience are

fundamental values taught to Haitian children and they are expected to show respect to all

adults and elders. Children are viewed as disobedient when they talk back to parents and

do not follow directions. Gender also plays a major role in the traditional homes of

Haitians. Girls are held at higher expectations to help with household chores compared to

boys. Children are raised and disciplined by immediate, extended, and supportive family

members and corporal punishment is a standard and acceptable form of discipline

(DeSantis & Ugarriza, 1995; Edmond et al., 2007; Elisme & Pierce, 1997). As previously

mentioned, Haitian families do not just include immediate family members but also

extended family, close friends, and a broader supportive network. Women of the *lakou*

are considered the central pillar in the home, known to Haitians as the *poto mita*n

(Edmond et al., 2007).

Single parent households are very common in Haiti. In a household with both

parents present, the men are responsible for the financial responsibilities and keeping up

with the handy work of the home. In contrast, the mother is responsible for parenting,

nurturing, education, the well-being of the children, and the handling of the family budget

(Edmond et al., 2007). In larger cities, the family dynamic may differ and be a

combination of Haitian and Anglo-American components (Kirmayer, 2010). For families

with both parents, the mother protects both her children and her partner. Due to the level

of pride held by most Haitian males, they are likely to walk out on the family when faced

with challenges (Edmond et al., 2007). The women are more likely to seek assistance for

the family within the *lakou* or outside of their support system.

Authority figures in a multigenerational household are as follows: grandparents,

father, mother, the oldest child, and finally, the next oldest child (Kirmayer, 2010). Adult

children are responsible for taking care of their parents to ensure financial stability and to

care for them when they are ill (Kirmayer, 2010). As far as racial identification, most

Haitians self-identify as Black or as Haitian (Edmond et al., 2007; Kirmayer, 2010;

Philippi, 2016). While racial identity is not a central element for this population, Haitian

immigrants do experience a cultural shift when it comes to migration to America. Haitian

immigrant children often live with family members they rarely see or whom they have

never met before. Others live with one parent, while the other parent may still be in Haiti.

The children usually have limited or no access to communicate with family and friends in

Haiti. Thus, children experience a significant change in their daily life and environment.

Families living in the United States often do not have the same level of support

compared to what they used to have in Haiti. The families may have to work many of

hours to keep up with financial responsibilities in both countries. Many Haitian families

in the United States provide financial support for their remaining family members in

Haiti and may travel back and forth between the two countries (Cook Ross, 2010). The

combination of these obligations and pressures create parental stress, can lead to lack of

involvement in children's lives and can significantly impact parenting and the behavior of

the children and family. It is ubiquitous for parents to send children back to Haiti when

they believe that they are misbehaving or being negatively influenced (Cook Ross, 2010).

Gender roles of Haitian families may shift in the United States due to financial

responsibilities, lack of support, and adaptation to the new culture, but some aspects may

remain the same.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem is a combination of two or more microsystems (Paat, 2013).

When two or more familial, school, individual, or church systems interact with each

other, they form the mesosystem (Balcazar et al., 2014; Paat, 2013). The *lakou* aspect of

the Haitian families is a support network formed to help and help raise children. In

Haitian culture, it is believed by most that it takes a supportive network to help raise

children (Edmond et al., 2007). In the *lakou*, immediate family, aunts, uncles, cousins,

grandparents, extended family, some close friends, and neighbors live together to help

support one another. Most Haitian parents influence their children's peer interactions

tremendously, indicating whether they feel that a potential friend is a good influence on

their children. Kirmayer (2010) also noted that Haitian parents are known to be

overprotective of their children.

Religious affiliation is another aspect of the mesosystem that provides a support

network for children and families. There are three major religious practices in Haiti:

Protestant, Catholic, and voodoo. All three religious practices have a significant influence

on one's view of illnesses, the world, relationships, and daily life. Based on the family's

belief, parents expect their children to behave and carry themselves in certain ways.

Haitian families from religious groups are more likely to seek spiritual advice from

spiritual family or leaders before seeking outside or professional help (Kirmayer, 2010).

The religious beliefs within Haitian culture are complex and often misunderstood by non-

Haitians. Thus, when migrating to the United States, Haitian families must locate their

preferred religious community in order to build a support system; this process may take

time. Religious subgroups often consider themselves as family and members often support each other. Some families may go years before connecting with a group that they can consider as family, while others may even connect with a different religious group. Many others remain connected with their religious group of origin in Haiti and continue to support each other, even traveling back and forth to Haiti to do so.

Another important of the mesosystem is the school system. Education is crucial for Haitian families. Although there is a significant gap in the Haitian educational system, it is one of the keys to hierarchy within the culture (Kirmayer, 2010). Additionally, there are several differences in cultural beliefs about education between Haitians and Americans. According to Kirmayer, Haitians place put complete trust in teachers and the school system and believe that it is the school's responsibility to ensure that children are thriving. Haitian teachers, for example, may discipline children for their behavior at school. Haitian parents believe that children's educational level or placement should be based on educational experience rather than age, in contrast to the American education system which places children based on age (Cook Ross, 2010). In American culture, parent's involvement in their children's education is an essential element in the academic success of their child. However, Haitian parents living in the United States demonstrate a lack of awareness of the impact of their involvement in their children's education (Cook Ross, 2010; Philippi, 2016). Philippi described challenges related to Haitian parents' lack of involvement in their children's education at a community school in South Florida. Based on a report conducted in 2014, only a third of Haitian parents have ever attended a meeting at their child school (Philippi, 2016).

Exosystem

The exosystem consists of indirect interactions with social settings and factors on a local, state, and government level, which may impact the mesosystem or aspects of the individuals involved (Paat, 2013; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2014). Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the Western hemisphere; most of the population lives below the poverty level (Philippi, 2016). The population faces many sociocultural difficulties such as poverty, violence, limited resources, lack of adult literacy, limited access to education, unemployment, income inequality, and political dilemmas (Edmond et al., 2007; Kirmayer, 2010; Philippi, 2016). In the United States, many Haitian immigrants live in impoverished neighborhoods, work minimum wage jobs, lack access to literary materials in their native language, and lack knowledge of community resources and American culture (Philippi, 2016). Haitians often have great distrust in the Haitian government due to the extensive history of exploitation in Haiti (State University of New York, n.d). They also do not like to question authority figures (Cook Ross, 2010; State University of New York, n.d), though this may differ for some Haitians living in the United States. Due to their immigration status, many fear being deported and having their children removed from them. Haitian families may not trust authorities or individuals working with the government (Cook Ross, 2010; State University of New York, n.d).

Macrosystem

The macrosystem refers to laws, social policies, and regulations that directly impact community, state, and local resources. These resources include the educational system, health system, political system, local and state resources, economic system, and

more (Paat, 2013; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2014). As immigrants in the United States,

many undocumented Haitians continue to worry about their immigration status and

potential for deportation back to Haiti. There are limited social policies that protect

Haitian immigrants in the United States, which creates constant and intense worries for

undocumented families. Temporary Protective Status (TPS) is one law that President

Barack Obama passed in 2010 to provide temporary authorization for non-documented

Haitians after the 2010 earthquake; the TPS extension expired in January 2021, and the

future remains unknown (U.S. Citizen Immigration Services, 2019). Immigrant children

are both less fortunate and socially disadvantaged as they enter a new environment with

different cultures and rituals, while immigrant parents are also less privileged in

exercising their rights (Paat, 2013).

Chronosystem

The chronosystem helps to understand the life transitions of individuals over time

(Paat, 2013). For child welfare workers to have a good understanding of a child or a

family, it is essential to assess the child's developmental stages and life experience of the

parent(s) or family. Philippi (2016) explained that it is also vital to have a good

understanding of parent's background, including life experiences, education,

socioeconomic status, and social network, which can help form a secure connection with

the parent and more effectively involve them in services. This level of understanding can

help workers to assess assimilation, acculturation, and adaptation level of the family.

Often, Haitian immigrant parents are English learners (Philippi, 2016); therefore, they

may not be as fluent in English as their children. Limited English proficiency can create

conflicts and a shift in parental roles in the home. Considering the exposure of the children to the new culture, the children may adapt more rapidly to the host environment than the parents (Paat, 2013).

Johnson et al. (2016) completed a qualitative study to seek a better understanding of low-income mothers, primarily Hispanic mothers, view their role in their children's education. The study results revealed that low-income immigrant families are less involved in their children's education and that the main barrier to that involvement is a lack of English proficiency. The study demonstrated reasons that social workers and advocates should educate parents on the importance of involvement with their children's education well-being and educated professionals on possible barriers. In 2016, Philippi conducted a qualitative study to gain a better understanding of the challenges that Haitian parents face when becoming involved with their children's education. The article provides information about historical and cultural aspects of unique to Haitian Americans, with a focus on linguistics, parental involvement, rituals, and more. Some key barriers discussed include a lack of information, inexperience with school programs, and differences in cultural expectations.

Leidy et al. (2012) conducted a mixed methods study to address the lack of research on positive parenting amongst Latinos. They explained the impact that stressful events have on parenting abilities and described how these situations can lead to negative consequences for children. The article also provided evidence of the ways that socioeconomic status can affect positive parenting. Rahill et al. (2011) conducted a case study to assess cultural factors that may affect Haitian clients' treatment, and provided an

excellent example of how awareness of these factors can positively affect services and

engagement. Due to limited data and the nature of this study, further research is needed to

build reliability and validity of the described intervention strategy. However, the work

was informative and acknowledged that further research is needed to ensure strategy

effectiveness. Another study which contributed to the literature was conducted by

Nicholas et al. (2009), who conducted a qualitative study to address depression amongst

Haitian American adolescents. The study focused on the process of culturally adapting an

evidence-based cognitive-behavioral therapy intervention. The authors discussed the

Haitian culture and talked about the adaptation challenges that Haitian American

adolescents experienced relating to mental health.

Role of Race and Ethnicity in Child Welfare

The term race is used to describe a group of people with similar morphological

features, taking into account skin color, hair type, face and skull shape, and genetic

ancestry (Santos et al., 2015). Ethnicity refers to a nation or a group of individuals with

similar cultural characteristics. Ethnicity focuses on different aspect of individuals' lives

including kinship, religion, language, shared territory and nationality, and physical

appearance (Santos et al., 2015). Ethnicity is known to many researchers to help make

significant distinctions amongst racial groups beyond physical appearance (Philippi,

2016). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), racial classifications are based on

regional origin; for example, Black race refers to individuals of African origin. The U.S.

Census Bureau identified five racial categories to collect data: Black/African American,

White, American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Asian Pacific Islander and only two ethnic

groups, Hispanic or Latino, and Not Hispanic or Latino (2017). Racial classification data in the United States is constructed based on sociopolitical aspects and has contributed to many social challenges and confusion (Philippi, 2016).

Racial identity may differ between cultures and some people may identify with more than one race. To fully understand race, one must investigate the history and origin of the human species. Taking a more in-depth scientific look at race and human origin, Eleanor Scerri, an archaeologist at the University of Oxford, worked with 22 other anthropologists, archaeologists, geneticists, and climatologists to review the originality of the human species. Their published study indicates that the *Homo sapiens*, the human species, were localized in a different part of Africa (Scerri et al., 2018). The authors indicated that *H. sapiens* has an evolving pedigree with deep African ancestries that have evolved or migrated independently to different regions. In addition, Jared Diamond's 1994 work indicated that before the European colonization of Africa, there were five human races: Blacks, Whites, Pygmies, Khoisan, and Asians already living on the continent. Therefore, the classification of Blacks as the only people of African origin contradicts the scientific ecological theory of the human species.

Due to the complexity of human racial evolution, it is not surprise that there exists confusion and problems with today's racial classifications. Santos et al. (2015) reported that in order to accurately collect data on racial classification, it is essential that such data is obtained only via self-report. To address the problem of racial classification in the United States, the Census Bureau (2018) made changes to the survey questions that collect racial classification data for 2020. Considering race and ethnicity, Haitians often

refer to themselves by their ethnicity (Haitian) and see themselves as Black, not African

American. They consider themselves to be different from other Black people as they are

the only members of the Black population who speak Creole (Philippi, 2016). Thus,

classifying Haitians as African American demonstrates a lack of cultural awareness and

cultural competency within the child welfare system.

Application of Theoretical Framework to Promote Social Change

Ecological systems theory was implemented as the framework to understand child

welfare workers' knowledge of ecological aspects of the Haitian population. Knowledge

of the ecological subsystems of children and families may help social workers to provide

culturally sensitive interventions, implement individualized treatment, and improve

service outcomes. Professionals should strive to increase their knowledge and cultural

awareness of the Haitian population in efforts to improve social work practice.

Knowledge of this theoretical framework may also facilitate social change in the social

work field to eliminate four major social inequalities: racial disproportionality,

organizational issues, inaccessibility of adequate services for families, and recruitment

and retention of foster parent caregivers. Due to the continuous growth of Haitian

immigrants in the United States, understanding of the challenges that child welfare

workers face when working with this population may also be helpful to create change in

the social work field and the child welfare system.

Analysis of the Literature

Due to the limited availability of literature on this topic, it was difficult to identify

articles addressing the primary social problem of the study. To handle this challenge and

ensure that adequate and reliable information were gathered for this literature review, I included both qualitative and mixed-methods articles. There were many articles about child welfare, immigration and child welfare, the involvement of other ethnic groups in the child welfare system, ecological systems theory, parenting, and Haitian culture and health. On the contrary, I was unable to locate any articles regarding the involvement of Haitian families in the child welfare system.

While much research has been conducted addressing mental health, acculturation, adaptation, medical health, and education of the Haitian population, I was unable to locate any focusing on the child welfare system. Nevertheless, research has been done to more broadly address social challenges in the child welfare system, the impact of immigration on child welfare, ecological challenges for immigrants and minorities, multicultural interventions, and more. I reviewed articles by researchers such as like Nicholas et al (2009); Rahill et al. (2011); Landale et al. (2011); Slayter and Kriz (2015); Edmond et al. (2007); Paat (2013); Leidy et al. (2017); Philippi (2016), and Toro (2012) to gather evidence-based information to inform this study. To emphasize the strengths and weaknesses of this body of research about the Haitian population and child welfare, articles were analyzed based on time period conducted and content relating to the purpose of the study. Currently available data can provide tools to enhance research, practice, and interventions and serve as the basis for future research. These previous scholarly works contributed significantly to this study by bringing awareness of the need for further research for the Haitian community.

In conclusion, child welfare is a social concern involving children, parents, and family members that affects many individuals. The family has a significant impact on the well-being of children; ecological stressors can inhibit parents' ability to parent their children effectively and may lead to involvement with the child welfare system. Further, there are local and national challenges in the child welfare system that impact practice intervention. Haitian Americans in particular, face many environmental and social challenges, both in Haiti and in the United States. The ecological systems theory approach helps to provide context to different aspects of Haitians' environment in both countries. I analyzed the currently available literature to better understand the root causes of challenges that child welfare workers experience working with Haitians. I also described literature on race and ethnicity within the child welfare system to indicate the need for additional scholarly work addressing the lack of representation of Haitians in child welfare.

Summary

In this section, I described the child welfare system, an overview of the Haitian population, the role of race and ethnicity in child welfare, and the application of ecological systems theory as they relate to the study problem. Due to the unique ecological and social stressors faced by Haitian immigrants, child welfare workers face challenges to effectively engage and provide services to the population. Ecological theory is used to help understand the roots of these challenges, ecological and cultural stressors, and child welfare workers' competence in providing evidence-based and culturally sensitive interventions to enhance social work practice. The evidence discussed provided

context to ecological level stressors that greatly impact the Haitian population. The

evidence also revealed a lack of literature focused specifically on the needs of Haitian

families. To help address this social problem, section 2 will address the methodological

approach used for data collection for this research project.

Section 2: Research Design and Data Collection

As a result of the Haitian population's unique perception of the world and cultural and ecological stressors (Nicholas et al., 2009; Rahill et al., 2011), child welfare workers face challenges in providing adequate assistance to Haitians involved in the child welfare system. Limited information regarding Haitian families involved in child welfare services led to a gap in the literature regarding the development of effective evidence-based interventions to serve the Haitian population. The purpose of the current study was to explore the challenges that child welfare workers face when working with Haitian families. In this section, I describe the research design and methodology used for this study, including a discussion of sampling methods, participants, data analysis, and ethical procedures.

Research Design

I explored the challenges that child welfare workers face in engaging and providing services to the Haitian population in the state of Florida. This study addressed the gap in the literature and the lack of data on this population to promote effective interventions and strategies in the child welfare field for Haitians. The study question guiding this study's data collection and exploration was the following: What are the challenges child welfare workers experience when providing services to Haitian children and their families?

A basic qualitative method, also known as a generic qualitative method, was used to gather data that provided in-depth understanding of child welfare workers' experience when working with Haitians. The basic qualitative research method is an approach that

enhances understanding of participants' views and interpretation of their experiences, construction of their world, and meaning gathered from their experiences (Kahlke, 2014; Merriam, 2002). Similar to other qualitative methods, the basic qualitative method is used in the social and behavioral sciences to address the need for better understanding of intentions, experiences, behaviors, feelings, perceptions, and culture to bring awareness and address social injustice by eliminating power control (Erickson, 2011; Kahlke, 2014; Rahman, 2017). The basic qualitative method can be used in a study by following one of two approaches. The first approach can be derived from one or more of the established qualitative methods to provide enriched descriptive information of the study problem and to reflect the study design. Under this approach, the basic qualitative method is known for its use of the three coding cycle, which consists of open codes, categories, and thematic data analysis (Lim, 2011). The second approach is derived from the stand-alone approach, which is not guided by a set of explicit theoretical ideas from other qualitative methods (Kahlke, 2014; Merriam, 2009). For the current study, I used the first approach to provide enriched details of the phenomenon under study and to implement the three coding cycle of data analysis.

A qualitative design was used to gather detailed information to better understand the challenges that child welfare workers experience when serving the Haitian population. The selected design of the study ensured that data were collected using an in-depth interview approach to gather detailed information of the participants' perceptions, experiences, thoughts, and beliefs (see Chenail, 2011). The interviews included open-ended questions and focused on the participants' awareness, interpretation, perception,

and knowledge of the challenges that child welfare workers experience when providing

services to Haitian families. Rich and detailed information was gathered about the

phenomenon of study to enhance understanding of the challenges child welfare workers

experience when working with the Haitian population.

Purposeful and snowball sampling were used to recruit eight child welfare

workers for the study. Snowball sampling is a method used when recruitment of

participants may be challenging and is conducted through a referral process. According to

Bolderston (2012), snowball sampling can be used to obtain a sample size of 10 or fewer

participants. I contacted potential participants and screened them to determine their

eligibility for participation. Criteria included at least 1 year's experience working with

Haitian families, a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and willingness to participate in a

45-minute interview. Six participants chose to conduct their interviews via Zoom; two

chose to participate via phone. A face-to-face option was offered but was not selected by

any participants. Video interviews were recorded with the Zoom app and were transferred

to my computer with an encrypted USB, and phone interviews were recorded using a

call-recording app. Individual interviews were conducted at a secure location convenient

to the participant (e.g., office, home, or community location) to ensure privacy and

confidentiality. Rahman (2017) and Bolderston (2012) explained that face-to-face

interviews allow researchers to gather data that elicit participants' feelings, behaviors,

views, perceptions, and verbal and nonverbal cues.

To ensure data collection occurred ethically, I explained the study process to each

participant and obtained their consent and a release of information prior to each

interview. To develop the consent form for the study, I used examples of IRB-approved consent forms from Walden University (Office of Research and Doctoral Services, n.d.). The consent process informed participants of how their information would be used to address the study problem and improve social work practice. Each participant then decided on their availability and willingness to commit to a 45-minute individual interview. Participants were made aware that their participation in the study would be voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Methodology

Qualitative data were collected via semistructured in-depth interviews. Data collected during each interview were transcribed and coded to identify common themes. Collected data were stored using password-protected encrypted devices such as a USB drive and a personal computer. The data analysis process began with descriptive coding of the data content to identify common patterns. The data were then coded through three coding cycles to identify common themes. Tables and figures were used to illustrate the data analysis and the findings of the study. All data were obtained according to the ethical standards of the IRB and the NASW code of ethics.

Participants

Eight participants were recruited for this study. All participants were child welfare workers with at least 1 year of experience working with Haitian families in southern Florida. All study participants were made aware that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Instruments

Researcher

The instruments used to collect the data for this study were myself as the researcher, the participants, and the qualitative interview questionnaire. I served as a vital instrument in the study and was required to have adequate skills to ensure the success of the data collection process. During data collection, I observed, took notes, talked to individuals, recruited participants, and conducted the interviews. I was responsible for the data collection process; therefore, I built trust, engaged participants, and planned for the data collection. As an interviewer, I needed to have excellent interview skills. A researcher with good interview skills has technical competence, interactive competence, attention and steering, communication abilities, and self-awareness of previous knowledge and personal biases (Chenail, 2011). I created an open atmosphere to help involve participants in the discussion.

The participants were the primary source of information that was used to answer the research question and address the study's problem. Participants answered questions based on their experience, perception, understanding, and willingness to share challenges faced when working with Haitian families. In qualitative research, participants' attitudes can play a significant role in shaping the data collection. Although it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide an atmosphere in which participants feel open and comfortable, the participants must also be willing and have a favorable view of the research to provide accurate information (Chenail, 2011; Laureate Education, 2016).

Interview Protocol

An interview protocol was developed to guide the interview process during data collection. A questionnaire is often used as an instrument for data collection in research (Trigueros et al., 2017). This instrument consisted of open-ended questions and other prompts to gather information from participants. According to Trigueros et al. (2017), although open-ended questions provide detailed information, they are time-consuming and should not be overused. My interview questions were developed based on the research question, findings of the literature review, and the theoretical framework (see Appendix).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an essential part of research because it aims to elicit meaning from the data collected (Bengtsson, 2016). The data analysis process for the current study involved coding, categorizing, and identifying themes. I transcribed interview recordings verbatim before beginning the coding process. Coding, a term also known as *decontextualization*, is the process of identifying meaningful units that represent the context of the study (Bengtsson, 2016; Bogetz et al., 2017) described a code as a word or phrase that represents a single idea. The coding analysis process aimed to identify common information by categorizing similar codes. The transcript data were coded using the first cycle of descriptive data, the second cycle of conceptual data, and the third cycle of pattern data. I incorporated tables and figures to provide visual aids that enriched understanding of the results of the study. The data analysis and subsequent results were then used to provide insight into the challenges that child welfare workers face when

working with Haitian families and contributing factors to these challenges. The study

results may also increase awareness of the need for evidence-based approaches and

interventions that can be beneficial to the social work field and address the current gap in

the literature.

Conducting a study that demonstrates evidence of the problem and the importance

of the study was a primary goal of this current research study. All concepts of the current

study were aligned with each other to ensure trustworthiness and to ensure that the study

was conducted ethically and transparently. The study's design and method reflected the

need to explore the challenges that child welfare workers face when working with Haitian

families and addressed the gap in the literature. The literature review informed and

provided evidence of the stated problem of the study. The design and method were

aligned with the study's primary research question to gather information that helped

answer to answer it. An open-ended interview guide was used to explore child welfare

workers' perceptions, understanding, and experience of the challenges faced when

working with the Haitian population. Ensuring validity of the current study was crucial to

eliminate biases and doubts. The validity of this research was demonstrated through the

selection of an appropriate study design, study tools, data collection procedures, and data

analysis process to answer the research question and address the problem of the study.

The results of this study were presented in ways that ensured transferability for future

research. The transferability of this study was also demonstrated by providing a detailed

process of how the findings were retrieved and evidence of how the findings could be

implemented in future studies and practices to address similar concerns. According to

Northcote (2012), reliable and transferable research has sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the knowledge gained is trustworthy, valuable, and relatable to the real world in an unbiased manner. I made every effort to ensure that the results of this study were trustworthy. To ensure transparency and credibility, I explained every step of this study in the method and data analysis section. This process helped me enhance the dependability of the study.

Ethical Procedures

It was crucial that every aspect of this study was conducted in an ethical manner. According to Kim (2012), the ethical aspect of research is critical; it helps determine acceptable and unacceptable behavior during research. A major challenge faced during this study's literature review was the limited literature on the involvement of the Haitian population in the child welfare system. Due to the limited information available, all information reported in the study had to be accurate and honest. To comply with IRB guidelines, I made every effort to demonstrate respect for privacy, to establish honest and open interactions, and to avoid any misrepresentation of the participants involved in the research. I discussed the informed consent with participants to ensure they were well informed of the purpose and nature of the study, confidentiality, their rights, and the process of data gathering and implementation of the study findings. Participants were encouraged and given the opportunity to read and consent to their participation in the study, and I provided them with a copy of the consent form. I informed the participants that their decision to participate in the study was voluntary and they may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. I kept participants' information secured and

confidential after I completed the data collection. I will retain all data for a minimum of five years, as required by Walden University, in a secure, password protected location. I took all measures to provide a safe environment and to not pose any harm to the participants. Participants' personal information and identifiers were safeguarded and were not revealed in the findings of the current study.

As a Haitian student researcher with experience in the social work field, I was careful to assess my personal beliefs and biases while conducting this research project. Due to my experience working at a child welfare agency and with several other community agencies, there was a possibility that I would encounter participants who knew me. Therefore, I took steps to ensure that my role as a researcher was clearly explained and that boundaries and expectations were made clear to every participant to ensure consistency and truthfulness in the study. Fortunately, none of the participants were known to me. Additionally, I practiced self-awareness throughout the study to avoid personal influence. As explained by Sanjari et al. (2014), researchers must be mindful and take steps to eliminate possible influences on participants' autonomy. Throughout the study, I monitored myself for biases, including personal experience, professional experience, connection to the population, and interaction with the participants that could have influenced the outcome of the study. There were also several potential barriers that may have limited data collection and the outcome of the study. One barrier could have occurred if participants were not comfortable being fully open during the interview and instead, withheld vital information that would provide greater insight. The other barriers

include participant's withdrawal from the study and difficulties recruiting adequate

participants. If presented, these barriers could have greatly impacted the study results.

Summary

This current study was designed to gather data to better understand the challenges

that child welfare workers face when working with Haitian families. The study was

conducted in accordance with IRB standards and the NASW code of ethics. The

methodology and the approach used to recruit participants and to collect data and analyze

the data emphasized the study's validity, reliability, and truthfulness. Potential biases that

could have impacted the study were also considered. The next section provides additional

details on the data collection process and discusses the current study's findings.

Section 3: Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the challenges that child welfare workers face when working with Haitians involved in the child welfare system in Florida and to address the gap in the literature and the lack of data representing the Haitian population in the child welfare field. Understanding the challenges child welfare workers experience is essential to advocate for effective interventions and strategies to work with Haitian families and to enhance social work practice to better support workers and help decrease challenges. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted to explore the challenges that child welfare workers experience. The guiding research question of the study was the following: What are the challenges that child welfare workers experience when working with the Haitian population?

To collect data for this study, I interviewed eight child welfare workers with a minimum of a bachelor's degree and at least 1 year of experience in the field working with Haitian families. The interviews were conducted and recorded through Zoom videoconference or through telephone calls and a call-recording app. Following the interviews, I manually transcribed the recorded interview data. According to Oluwafemi et al. (2021), the transformation of spoken words into text is vital in qualitative research to understand and analyze the collected data. After transcribing the collected data, I began the coding process of the transcribed data. The coding process was done manually using the three coding cycles and was also supported by the use of NVivo software to help identify common themes. For the second step of the coding process, data were imported into NVivo to check for accuracy and to cross-examine the themes identified

through the manual data analysis. Both techniques (manual and NVivo) resulted in the same themes. Section 3 includes a discussion of the recruitment methods, data collection techniques, data analysis techniques, validation procedures, limitations, and findings.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data Collection

Upon receiving IRB approval, (Number 12-22-20-0481156), I began the recruiting process for the study. I chose to use purposive sampling and snowball sampling to recruit participants for the study. To begin the recruitment process, I reached out to eight child welfare agencies in Florida via email and telephone to ask for their assistance in recruiting potential participants. Four agencies responded, three agencies declined the invitation, and one agency contact person expressed their inability to help recruit participants but was willing to participate in the study. Additionally, I visited local agencies to hand out flyers and called other nonlocal agencies to recruit participants for the study. However, none of these additional agencies were able to help with the recruiting process. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, few local agencies' physical buildings were open to the public. The recruiting flyer was also posted on the Walden University participant tool web page to help recruit participants. In addition, I obtained access to publicly available information from the Florida Health Department database, which contained contact information of registered child welfare workers who could serve as potential participants. I sent email invitations weekly until eight participants were recruited for the study. Several social workers responded to my recruitment efforts and expressed their interest; however, only five followed through and completed the

interview process. One participant was recruited through a referral from another participant, and two other participants were recruited through a local agency contact list. The time frame for the recruitment process for this study was about 6 weeks.

All interested participants were provided with the study information via email or phone conversation. Once I determined that interested participants met the study criteria, I emailed the consent for the study to the potential participant and scheduled their interview based on their availability. Before the interview started, I received a signed consent form from each participant, reviewed the consent form with each participant, and answered any questions the participant had. I explained my role to the participants and that my goal was to collect data about their experience without my input.

Participants were able to decide the method used to conduct the interview (face-to-face, phone, or Zoom). Six participants chose to interview via Zoom, and two participants chose to interview via phone. Five interviews conducted through Zoom were video and audio recorded; the remaining Zoom interview was only audio recorded. Participants interviewed via Zoom were notified when the recording of the interview started. Participants interviewed via phone were made aware that the interview would be recorded as soon as they answered the scheduled phone call. A phone app called Call Recorder was used to record the phone interview. All recorded audio was transferred to a secure computer with an encrypted USB drive. Notes were also taken during the interview process. After the interview, I emailed each participant a copy of the consent with my signature on it. I thanked them for their time and participation in the study. I informed them of the next steps in the study, such as receiving a password-protected

transcription of the interview to review, and to inform them of the results of the study. No

compensation was given to participants for taking part in the study. All data collected,

such as consent, audio and video recording, and transcriptions were stored on an

encrypted USB drive. The study data will be stored in a secure location for 5 years as

required by Walden University.

The minimum time frame for each interview was about 1 hour, except for one

participant who completed the interview in 30 minutes. When the scheduled 45-minute

interview time was reached, participants were made aware and were asked if they wanted

to stop or continue with the interview. Seven participants volunteered to continue past the

scheduled time to complete their interview.

Instruments

The instruments used to collect the data were me as the researcher, the

participants, the Zoom videoconference app, the Call Recorder app, and a semistructured

open-ended interview guide. The participants had many years of experience in the child

welfare field, and they provided data about their experienced challenges to help answer

the research question. Additional information about study participants is available in

Table 1. The interview guide helped me explore the participants' experience in the field,

experience with the immigrant population, experience working with Haitian families,

challenges experienced working with Haitians, and competency to manage the challenges

(see Appendix).

Table 1

Participant Background Information

Participant	Degree	Years of experience in child welfare	Population served	Type of work	Experience with working immigrants	Years working with Haitians	Settings
P1	MSW	22	Multi-cultural families.	Case manager	Yes	2 years of direct contact	School, community
P2	BS	20	Foster care; children	Foster Care Parent and Recruiter	Yes-indirect, administrative	Indirect service.	Administrative office
P3	MSW	Many years. Number of years not reported.	Elderly and children	Counseling, case manager, and school social workers	Yes	1 year	school
P4	MSW	25	Elderly, youth, and families	Therapist, case manager	Yes	25	Community
P5	MSW	20	Diverse and multicultural population		Yes	20	
P6	MSW, LCSW	20	Diverse population	Case manager, Dependency, PCI, counselor,	Yes	15	Multiple setting
P7	MSW	5	Adolescents	Inpatient-Mental Health	Yes	5	Inpatient-mental health
P8	BSW	5	Young adults, children and families	Dependency case manager, case manager, and data analyst	Yes	5	Dependency, and healthcare

Note. The following abbreviations are used in Table 1: MSW – Master of Social Work; LCSW – Licensed

Clinical Social Worker; BSW – Bachelor of Social Work; BS – Bachelor of Science.

Data Analysis Procedure

   To prepare for data analysis, I manually transferred all collected data to a Word

document for each participant; this took about 4 weeks. Babbie (2016) reported that

manual transcription helps researchers to have a greater understanding of the reported

data. I also took notes during my review of the audio and video recording. Throughout

the transcription process for each participant, I went back and forth between the audio

and video of the interview for accuracy. Every participant was permitted to review the

encrypted transcription of the individual interview by email for accuracy and originality

of the participant's response. I followed up with each participant via email or phone call

to confirm that they received the transcription. Then, I began the coding process, which

took an additional 4 weeks. As stated by Sandelowski (1995), data analysis helps to

provide an understanding of all data by identifying key factors in participants' stories and

content using codes, categories, and themes. I used three thematic coding cycles

(descriptive, concept, and pattern) to organize my coding process. Thematic coding is

described as the process of identifying, analyzing, and reporting pattern themes from a

text (Gnatow & Mihalcea, 2018). To begin the coding process, I organized the content of

the transcribed data in a Word document using a table with one row with the interview

questions and another row with the participant's response. This process was repeated for

each participant. The first coding process involved the identification of codes based on

the description of the content of the transcript, known as the first cycle of descriptive

coding. The second coding process, known as the first cycle concept, identified codes

based on the context of the content of the transcription. The final coding process, second

cycle pattern, was based on patterns across all participants' responses. Then, the codes were categorized into groups with similar meaning and themes were identified. For the descriptive coding cycle, I used the comment subtab under the Review tab in the Word document to create initial codes. Then, I created a spreadsheet with rows labeled as note, memo, first cycle descriptive, first cycle concept, and second cycle pattern. I copied and pasted the first cycle descriptive codes in the comment subtab into an Excel spreadsheet under the row labeled as first cycle descriptive. All descriptive codes from all eight participants were copied and pasted under that row. After that, I started the first cycle concept coding process. The codes were sorted into alphabetical order. Subsequently, I used the data tab to group the codes into categories based on similar text and provided a count of each category. Figure 2 shows the data analysis process of codes, categories, and themes identified from the data collected from the interviews.

Figure 2

Data Analysis Process

Codes:1282	Categories:40	Themes:5

Validation Process

  Several strategies were implemented to ensure the validation of the data collected. First, participants were encouraged to be open and honest with their responses.

Confidentiality of their identity was discussed to help them be comfortable. Second, I

observed the participants' verbal cues such as their tone and openness to share

information of their experience, and notes were taken of my observations. The data

collected from the observation helped me analyze the participants' interest in the study

and openness to share their experience working with Haitian families. The last step was

the transcript review process. All participants were notified by email when the

transcription of their interview was completed. An encrypted copy of the transcription

was emailed to each participant with instructions. All participants were encouraged to

review the transcription and provide feedback as needed to ensure the accuracy of the

data. Four participants responded via email and confirmed accuracy. Multiple attempts

via email, text, and phone call were made to reach the other four participants. Two of

those participants confirmed that the transcription was accurate, but the other two never

returned my attempts to confirm the accuracy of their interviews.

Challenges

During the study, several challenges arose. I was hoping to recruit participants

from child welfare agencies throughout Florida, but there was little success in getting

agencies to assist with the recruiting process of the participants. Many local agencies'

physical buildings were not open due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I had limited access to

contact local agencies. In addition, because of the pandemic, participants' location and

availability, face-to-face interviews were not convenient for any participant. As a result,

the recruiting process took longer than anticipated. Furthermore, although I provided

instructions on the importance of the participants' revision of the transcribed data, not all

participants provided feedback due to challenges related to COVID-19 and having busy schedule. Participant 4 reported loss of family member.

During data collection, one participant was at times short with some of the answers. Another participant was noted to be more willing to provide detailed information about the experience working with the Haitian population during an initial phone conversation when I explained the purpose of the study. When I informed the participant that the interview would be recorded, the participant seemed hesitant to share personal experience working with Haitian families. I explained and emailed a copy of the consent form to the participant and assured that identity of all participants will not be identified in the study. The participant asked questions about the confidentiality and the storage of the data. I was able to answer the questions and ultimately, the participant decided to move forward with participating in the study. However, during the interview, the participant seemed to be careful with some answers, limiting the information shared. Much detailed information shared in the original conversation with the participant was not shared during the interview. This participant also did not respond to the request of the review of the transcribed data. All other participants seemed to be more open sharing their experiences.

Limitations

The current study included only eight participants. To better generalize the study's outcome, nationwide participants are needed to gather more accurate data. In addition, the participants were recruited just from the Southeastern of the U.S. Participation of child welfare workers around the United States could have provided more

diverse data of the challenges child welfare workers experienced when working with Haitian families. Larger sample size and having participants from different states in the United States could also help see what other states are doing to address child welfare workers' experience, such as policies, support, resources, training, education, and cultural competence.

Findings

In the study, I focused on getting an in-depth understanding of the following: the participant's experience in the child welfare field, their experience working with immigrants and Haitians, challenges experience when working with Haitians, differences in challenges compared to other minority groups, knowledge of working Haitian culture, ecological stressors, competency to work effectively with the population, and support from management. I also addressed the participants' perceptions of interventions needed to address the challenges they reported. I focused on their feelings, perception, and understanding of the challenges in the field and amongst the Haitian population. The findings of the study highlighted multiple challenges within the child welfare system and the Haitian population. The findings also demonstrated a connection of the challenges the child welfare workers experienced with ecological stressors among Haitians. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated major needs in the child welfare system to assist Haitian families effectively. A language barrier was reported to be a major challenge that creates misunderstanding between workers and the families. Lack of cultural and social inclusion was noted among the Haitian population and the child welfare system. Lastly,

fear/lack of trust was identified in the findings as a challenge that majority of the child

welfare workers experience when with Haitians.

Participants' Experience

In this study, eight social workers experienced in the child welfare system were

interviewed to share the challenges of their experience when working with Haitians. The

first three interview questions focused on understanding the participants' experience in

the child welfare field, their educational background, population served, years of

experience, experience working with immigrants, and the Haitian population. The

participants demonstrated extensive experience in the child welfare field. Most

participants had several years' experience working with the Haitian population. As this

study did not focus on personal demographics or location in Southeastern U.S., most

participants were from areas in Southeastern in the United States with a concentrated

Haitian population. The participants were a diverse group including child welfare

workers who identified as Hispanic, Caucasian, African American, Haitian-American,

and Haitian. Although the ethnic background of the participants was not a focus of the

study, having a diverse group did enhance the quality of the data. The participants also

have diverse experience in the child welfare field, which offers various perspectives on

the challenges experienced working with Haitians in the child welfare system. For

example, participant 2 described self as having experience working with Haitian children

on an administrative level. During the interview, the participant further reported having

minimal hands-on or direct with Haitian families. Hence, the participant supervises

workers that work with Haitian children, stating: "I have not had a Haitian in my home

per se, but I see them coming into the office. We work with them just like every other child that comes in the office." The seven remaining participants all had direct experience working with Haitian families.

Findings to the Research Question

The other in-depth interview questions focused on answering the research question. The findings of the study highlight several themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes include gaps in the child welfare system and the Haitian population; ecological stressors' role in the challenges experienced by child welfare workers; cultural understanding in providing services to Haitians; language barrier, and fear/trust (See figure 3).

Figure 3

Study Themes
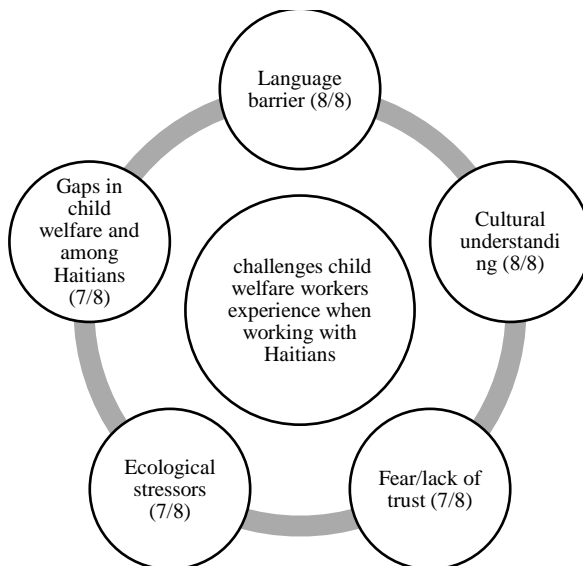
Note. The numbers (8/8), (7/8) reported on this figure represent the number of participants out of the total eight who reported challenges in each theme category.

Gaps in Child Welfare System

The data analysis further revealed many lacking areas in the child welfare system and the Haitian population. The identified gaps in child welfare are lack of cultural understanding/knowledge, lack of resources, lack of effective intervention (intervention and time), lack of Haitian workers, and lack of training specific to the Haitian population. The first challenge the participants reported is the lack of cultural understanding and knowledge. Of the three non-Haitian participants (1-3), two expressed a lack of understanding and knowledge as a significant barrier to serving the population effectively. Although they know about the Haitian culture, they expressed challenges understanding the barriers specific to that population, creating challenges for them to

work with the population. The two non-Haitian workers not only experience the challenges but, also express lack of understanding the roots of the challenges. Participant 1 stated:

> I wish I had more awareness and understanding of the Haitian culture to understand this so that in that family that I have, I can have awareness more and make sure I am doing the right thing. So I felt, I didn't do much for her.

Participant 2 discussed the experience as, "I probably can't even … I don't even know really or really comprehend until I'm told but, it's like, if we can just connect and communicate, I think it would be very beneficial…. we need education and understanding." The other non-Haitian worker demonstrated a lack of awareness of the other child welfare workers' challenges. This lack of awareness of the challenges could be due to different reasons such as not working directly with Haitian children in care, working at an administrative level, and lack of experience working with parents/families in the field. The participant works with only foster care children.

The other five participants reported lack of cultural understanding of the Haitian culture in the child welfare system. Participant 8 explained the lack of cultural understanding as:

> those needs are not adequately being addressed as in I do not believe that the child welfare system is ready to address those needs… They kind of at times bunched the Haitian community with African American community when it is two different communities.

Participant 6 explained that "ever since then, I understood that we do more harms than good when we rush to remove without understanding the culture norms." Participant 4 stated: Unfortunately Department of Children and Family serves a good purpose for certain cases but, what they don't realize is by coming in the house and threating the family in the presence of the child; they don't realize the damage that they're causing.

Lack of Resources. Lack of resources is another challenge child welfare workers experience when serving the population. The Haitian population was described as underserved by seven participants, who reported that the resources available in the child welfare field are not geared to serve and address the needs of the Haitian population. The services available were reported to be ineffective in addressing the population's needs. Participants also mentioned a lack of leadership, representation, community agencies, and resources to serve the population. As previously discussed several literatures such as Philippi (2016), Kirmayer (2010), and Edmond et al. (2014) highlighted the lack of resources as a barrier to the Haitian population**.** The following statements from five participants in this study demonstrate the challenges faced regarding the lack of resources to provide efficient services this specific population. Participant 1 explained the challenges with lack of resources to serve the population, stating:

> my experience has been that the other groups African-Americans, and the Hispanic, Latinos, I see many support agencies; I see a lot of services but, I don't see that for the Haitian community. Maybe it's me; I haven't found them. I am pretty good at looking for agencies. I wish there was more for that community. I wish there was more… more politicians; I don't know, government agencies,

government representation. I do not see that. I do not see the Haitian community

being represented.

Participant 3 explained the challenges relating to lack of resources serving the Haitian

children as "some of the challenges arise from as far… and, lack of resources as well

just." Participant 6 discussed the need for more resources as:

More resources available to not just hum… to the Haitian community in a sense

that they comfortable in; resources that hum… that helps with financial resources,

housing, food distributions, not just what they don't want. Not just the food they

don't want. More stuff like house renovation, more media attention.

Participant 7 discussed the challenges to lack of resources to serve clients with mental

health needs by saying: "there's not too many child welfare organization or program that

focuses on to say African-American, Hispanics, let alone the Haitian... It's very limited in

that aspect. They have different needs in the mental health community". Participant 8

stated: "We need to find more quality service providers for the Haitian community and

not just assigned those providers because they fit a check box like 'ok, they're Haitian

speaking counseling, check.'"

Lack of Effective Intervention. Lack of effective interventions to serve the

population is another challenge child welfare workers experience when working with

Haitians. As described by several participants, the lack of effective interventions has

resulted from the lack of cultural understanding of the population to create services that

address the population's needs. Time in service is a factor connecting with ineffective

treatment. Six workers reported that time in service is not enough to work and see

changes with Haitian families. Participants reported that working with Haitian families require longer treatment time than other groups to educate and engage in services. Minimal treatment outcomes were reported due to limitations on insurance, program interventions, and service expectations. The participants explained that services for the Haitian population need to include education about the child welfare system, services, and the worker's role. Furthermore, all the child workers discussed challenges engaging families in treatment. Seven participants explained that due to the lack of trust in and fear of DCF; it is very difficult to engage families who need services.

Lack of Haitian Workers and Lack of Training. Five participants explained the impact of the lack of Haitian child welfare workers in the field as part of the intervention challenges. Two participants explained that they were the only worker of Haitian descendent worker at their respective agencies. Three other participants reported that there are limited Haitian workers in the field due to lack of hiring and high turnover rates. Lastly, a lack of training to prepare workers to work with the population was also reported amongst participants. One participant reported that having personal experience and educational experience (being part of a cultural study on Black populations) had increased the knowledge and competence to work effectively with the population. Five participants explained that they received general cultural training but none specifically about the Haitian population. Participant 1 stated, "I can't think of anything." Participant 3 explained that lack of training is a challenge as she learns on the job and via peers' support. Participant 3 stated, "This specific population, honestly, I've not received any training." Participant 6 reported to have received cultural competence training but none

specifically to work with the Haitian population. The participant stated, "Life! (Laughing) but wait, I will say this, it's not easy. On the job training one besides that, I have great parents. My dad is so… my dad is still like Hait… a raw Haitian." Participant 7 described training received to help work with the Haitian population as:

> My own personal life experiences. I wish I would be lying but, technically like, I can't think of any program out there that focuses on the minority population or hum… that focuses on just different therapeutic techniques to decrease some of the barriers that frequently found in this community.

Lastly, participant 8 explained the lack of training as "I mean professionally, I receive the general training on child welfare. Nothing catering to… say the Haitian population. There's no specific education on the Haitian population and how to approach them through a child welfare system aspect." As demonstrated by these direct quotes, all participants reported that they receive general cultural education such as cultural sensitivity, implicit bias and cultural awareness training, and other continuing education. All seven participants with direct experience working with Haitians reported it to be challenging and overwhelming working with the population. Participant 2, a child welfare worker with administrative experience working with Haitian children reported that the cultural continuing education training received has equipped employees to work with all populations. Years of experience in the field was also identified as a variable of how the challenges experienced are managed. Participants with several years in the child welfare field and experience working with Haitians reported having increased ability to manage the challenges faced with the population.

Figure 4

Gaps in Child Welfare System
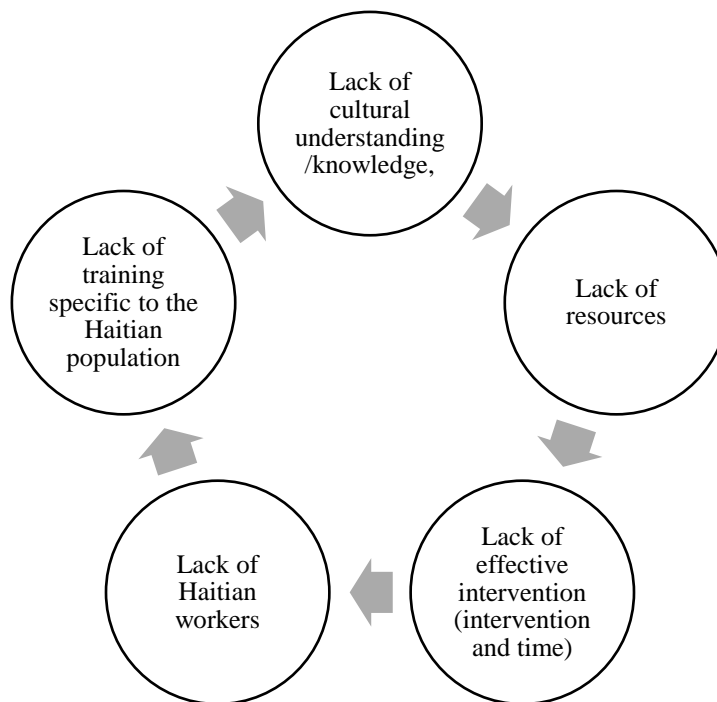
Gaps Aspects Among the Haitian Population

The study's findings reveal many lacking areas within the Haitian population, making it challenging to work with the population. The participants reported experiencing many challenges working with Haitian families due to the population's lack of education, lack of cultural knowledge/understanding, lack of engagement in service, lack of knowledge of resources, lack of cultural inclusion/division, lack of self-determination, and lack of understanding of mental health needs.

Lack of Education. Seven participants stated that the lack of education is related to illiteracy. Two participants discussed the increase of Haitians participating in an adult

education program to learn English. Illiteracy has been a significant barrier for many

Haitians.

Participants highlighted the importance of the educational need of the population.

They discussed the relationship of illiteracy to lack of cultural knowledge, limitation to

comprehend the information given in services, ability to seek services, and

socioeconomic class. Cultural subgroups (educated and non-educated Haitians) were

discussed, and the differences in service delivery amongst subgroups within the Haitian

population were also mentioned. Educated Haitians were identified to have knowledge of

the resources to and of ways to seek professional help; they were also described to be

more open-minded. Non-educated Haitians were identified to be very difficult to work

with and resistant to services.

Lack of Cultural Knowledge and Understanding, and Resistance to Services.

The next category was a lack of cultural knowledge and understanding of the American

culture, rules, and laws. Seven participants described how Haitians lack of understanding

of American culture makes it challenging to engage them in services. Participants

reported that many Haitians do not know the rules and laws in America and how the child

welfare system works. As a result, they greatly fear of DCF and the police. Haitians fear

that receiving services will affect them negatively, such as increasing the possibility of

deportation or getting them into trouble with the law. Participants described scenarios to

illustrate the barriers they have dealt with when working with Haitian families.

Participant 6 described the experience working with the population as

Their bones, they didn't know their rights. There were mysterious abuses in the

sense that they were overworked and did not know that. Their lack of knowledge

was noticed. My challenge is exactly that the lack of knowing the rules.

Furthermore, Haitian families were described as resistant to receive or engage in services.

Due to their resistance to services, the population tends to be underserved and does not

get the help they need. The participants also reported a lack of community resources

available to the community. All participants reported difficulties engaging Haitian

families in services.

Lack of Knowledge of Available Resources. Another gap among the Haitian

population is a lack of knowledge of available resources. Two different aspects of the

limited knowledge of resources were revealed. One aspect explained that resources are

known among the population, but this knowledge is not shared amongst members of the

community "kept as secret." Some participants connected this fact with the division

within the group. Another aspect of the lack of knowledge of the resources is a lack of

education and service resistance. The following responses were collected from the

participants regarding the population's lack of knowledge of the resources.

Participant 1 stated:

I think lack of agencies that I'm founded to serve this community; lack of

knowing goal to go for help. Cause a lot of these communities have these

challenges, but they do know where to go to get help. Hum... this community, the

Haitian community; I am not sure where to go for help. Even though they could

be financial, housing and, immigration. They know, the other community, word

by mouth; they learn, they find out within their culture, and they know where to

go. I think the Haitian community does too but, I do not see enough of that. I

don't know why they don't branch out to find services.

Similarly, participant 3 stated:

like food banks down here, we have a lot of resources for food. But I noticed that

it's not always like informed to the public. You know what I mean? Like only

certain areas and groups know. So I think we need to do a better job informing

them as well.…we have like produce boxes that go out. But I talked to some

families like… in November and, they were like oh, I didn't even know that you

were doing that. So, I'm like… so whose telling our families what's happening?

Participant 4 discussed challenges experienced as lack of knowledge of resources and

education.

Honestly, resources and education. Let me explain that. Huh… with the Haitian

population, there are resources, but it seems like it's kept secret whereas the other

minorities; especially with Hispanics… the resources are much more shared

amongst themselves. Like, they'll… they'll tell each other. They'll help each

other. Whereas… I was amazed when I first started to work with this company…

and, when I was doing the educational program, when I was teaching my church

members here's what's out there for you; here's housing; here's education to go

back to school and get your license as a CDL license, you can get your LPN

license. I was dumbfounded how a lot of people said 'oh my God! I didn't know

about this.' And I'm like, it's right here. I don't know. It's because they don't

know better, they just lack resources and education. That would be… That would

be one of the challenges I've experienced.

Participant 5 shared that while their agency tries to offer services, they are not always

utilized:

We try to offer services … or we'll try to provide certain services closest to the

home huh… but, it's not always possible. So huh… I find that some may be

discouraged. By the lack of those specific services in their neighborhood, they're

challenged by that.

Participant 6 reported:

They didn't know where to go, and they were afraid to call for those help and

resources. So something that would have simple as, that would have been a

burden to any other… other culture who understands the system, and it is a

burden for us because we don't know where to go. My challenge is exactly that

the lack of knowing the rules.

Participant 7 stated:

I'm speaking about the majority of the Haitian population, the lack of insurance,

lack of education; hum… the lower… socioeconomic status. They all play a role

into the perception. It all plays a role into their availability; it all plays a role into

what you can actually receive in the mental health and the medical arena when

you're under that low socioeconomic status.

Participant 8 explained:

The Haitian population has this 'I don't need anything from you all.' Hum…

macho and, hum… they end up not getting as much help as they could. Hum… I

see sometimes hum… our Haitian population depending on… depending on the

case manager, they don't know.

Lack of Cultural Inclusion. Lack of cultural inclusion/division is another

lacking aspect amongst the Haitian community. Participants 1 and 3-8 all reported lack of

cultural inclusion among the Haitian population. Some participants discussed Haitians'

lack of interaction with other cultures. Haitians tend to stay amongst themselves and do

not branch out. Some participants reported it to be due to the lack of trust. Other

participants explained that the lack of cultural inclusion has resulted in a lack of cultural

and resource awareness. Participant 3 stated,

I think there are barriers with … people outside of… the population that … have

different biases and…different you know, abuse and experiences. So it just feels

there's a little bit of … there's a lack of …... of understanding from both side. So,

I think it creates this divide.

Participant 6 also explained the lack of cultural inclusion, describing that:

And it was… if you wasn't a part of that, you couldn't come in. I had to be

literally…. The person who had the job before me was a pastor. The pastor had to

introduced in to the community and let them know hum… like they said 'she's

good people.' And I had to be fluent for them to deal with me.

Participant 7 further explained this point, sharing that:

There's even a disconnect within the culture in itself when you see just how…

there's lack… a true lack of community within the culture…. You have this

mentality that hey, even though this person is kinfolk, we have the same culture,

the same beliefs but, there's still a disconnect. I can't really trust you…it's

somewhat of a division.

Another aspect of the division that was reported in the study was classism.

Classism is a cultural aspect in the Haitian culture that differentiates the educated vs. the

non-educated, the French-speaking and the Creole-speaking, and the privileged vs. the

non-privileged in Haiti. Classism was reported to still be a factor amongst the Haitian

population in the United States. Participants reported this happened between Haitian child

welfare workers and Haitian families. Participant 1 shared an experience with a Haitian

worker who was unable to provide services to a family due to classism; the worker spoke

French, not Creole. The participant explained being shocked and unaware of that cultural

factor. In addition, the same participant experienced colorism with a family. The family

denied services due to the Haitian worker's skin tone. Participant 6 explained the

classism component as "the social component of… I'm up here. Your French is… or the

people who follow that… the French concepts. You have that, the level of classism. That

you also have the… ones who are not educated."

Some participants also reported a lack of self-determination or unwillingness to

change. Many Haitians are unwilling to change their ways and still practice cultural

beliefs from Haiti. Participants described these individuals as the most challenging to

engage in services. Furthermore, Haitian cultural subgroups in the United States were

identified as Haitian-Haitians, Haitian Americans, and second-generation Haitian Americans. Participants 4-8 discussed these subgroup differences among the Haitian population. Haitian-Haitians were identified as those born in Haiti or those from families with both parents born in Haiti. Haitian American individuals were described as those who have Haitian parents, but who were born in the United States. Haitian American families were described as those where both parents were born in the United States. Finally, a second-generation Haitian is someone whose parents were born in the United States, who was also born in the United States themselves. The second-generation Haitian families are those with parents that are second-generation Haitian American. The participants reported that there were no differences in perception and mentality between Haitian families and Haitian-American families. One participant explained that Haitian Americans tend to carry similar habits in the family, particularly resistance to mental health. Hence Haitian Americans were explained to be more receptive to services than the Haitians.

Culture Assimilation. Cultural assimilation was another factor discussed. Non-assimilated Haitians were identified as being very difficult to provide services to. Participants reported more challenges with non-assimilated Haitians due to their unwillingness to change and tend to want to do things their way (lack of self-determination). They described that unassimilated Haitians tend to lack knowledge of American culture, lack of knowledge of the child welfare system, resistance to service, and lack of awareness of resources.

Lack of Understanding of Mental Health Needs. The last challenge experienced with the Haitian population is the lack of understanding of mental health needs. Two participants described challenges that Haitians had with expressing their emotions. Several participants discussed the lack of language to express their feelings and parents' emotional disconnection with themselves and their children, which created significant difficulties when working with the population. The participants also expressed Haitian parents' lack of understanding of the importance of mental health needs. Trauma, perception, and religious beliefs were explained as impactful aspects of the population's receptiveness to mental health services. There is a significant gap in understanding the significance of mental health within the population, especially when there is a history of trauma. Again, differences in cultural subgroups within the Haitian population were discussed. Haitians and first generation Haitian Americans were reported to have similar beliefs and perceptions of mental health and tended to be more resistant to mental health services. In contrast, second generation Haitian Americans tended to be more receptive and understanding of mental health needs. Participant 2 explained the challenge as: "I noticed that kids don't always have the language to express how they're feeling" and:

> I think because of the trauma being so normal, it also has hardened a lot of our parents. They present very angry, very like cold, and I know that's probably not who they are deep down but, they just been through so many things.
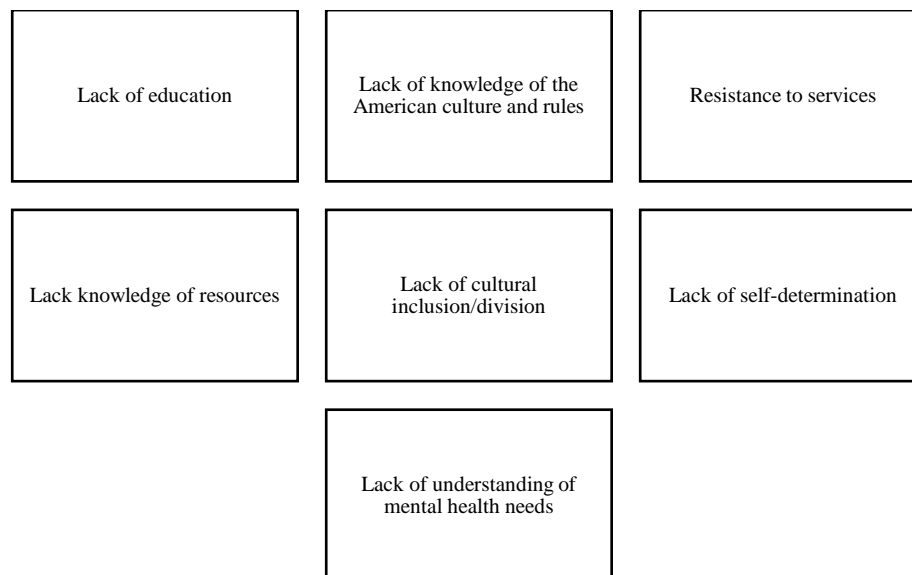
Participant 5 described personal observation as "You know, they do have feelings but, we don't think of them as they're human but, we see them as kids. We don't see them as a person."

In addition, participant 7 reported the barrier with the lack of understanding of mental health with the population as:

> In the parents' mind that if you have those things, you shouldn't have no stress. So I find that to be an interesting dynamic. That seems to be … a trend, despite the generation that has passed since…. At least in my experience, when you ask an older Haitian how do they feel, they don't really know how to answer that. They will be just like, oh I'm fine; I'm not tired. There's no like true definitive answer like on their stressors or anything that's pressing them. So, it's like this mentality that I can't really show, portray or convey that stress; so therefore that's gonna transcend to my teen, to my child that they don't have any stressors."

The participant further explained that Haitian parents huge lack understanding that their teens have feelings and emotions, and when teens do try to communicate about mental health, they are met with conversations about religious or spiritual aspects. Participant 7 described the experience working with Haitian families to address mental and their religious views as

> whenever you talk like about the mental health, I always get the religious or spiritual aspects of it. Like, I'm just gonna pray about it, I don't want to do any medication, I don't want to do any of this.

Figure 5

Gaps Among the Haitian Population

Lack of education	Lack of knowledge of the American culture and rules	Resistance to services
Lack knowledge of resources	Lack of cultural inclusion/division	Lack of self-determination
	Lack of understanding of mental health needs	

Fear/Lack of Trust

Fear and lack of trust were reported as a major barrier by seven participants. Seven participants reported significant challenges that prevent families from engaging in services due to fear of deportation and having their children taken away. The participants reported not knowing the root cause of the fear for the child welfare system, but thought that factors such as immigration status, life experience, past history with DCF, stigmatism of Haitians in the United States and, lack of knowledge of rules and laws may have been contributing factors.

Participants 1 explained the fear and lack of trust as "…she has [issues] trusting not just me but, an outside agency. Even having someone who speaks her language; the same color of their skin coming in their home with me, providing the best possible services, she is still hesitant."

Participant 3 stated:

> I noticed that there's a lot of fear. So there's a lot of fear with getting services for counseling even because our families, a lot of them are immigrants. They so afraid that if they say something then they're gonna be deported. Or if they get help for their children then that could be… that could go on record… they fear that perhaps that could get them in trouble… there is this collective fear among immigrant populations. They're so afraid to open up or seek the services or the support"

Similarly, participant 4 explained that:

> The fear of the police, the fear of DCF, the fear of authority period. That's one of their biggest fears. I think the reason there's such fear, I feel like no one really take the time to explain and educate them about it."

Language Barrier

The data analysis demonstrated language barrier is a significant challenge that child welfare workers experience when working with Haitians in the child welfare field. All eight participants reported facing challenges communicating effectively with Haitian families. Although some of the workers spoke the same language, they still identified language as a barrier. The participants also reported that language barriers affect the families' ability to comprehend information presented and limit parents' ability to communicate with teachers, counselors, workers, and service providers. Several participants discussed the negative impacts the language barrier imposes on Haitian families, workers, and services. (See figure 6)

Participants 1 and 3 explained their inability to communicate effectively with families and provide adequate services. Participant 2 described language as a barrier to build rapport and engage the children in care. Additionally, participants 4-8 described negative impacts of language barrier related to misunderstanding of families' needs, ineffective intervention and services and, Haitian families' fear and lack of trust in the child welfare system. Six of the participants talked about challenges to convey messages through translators. These participants reported that translators are often not educated on the service or the field and can be biased, influencing parents' decisions to accept assistance. Participant 4 stated, "the thing that stands out the most is the language barrier." Participant 7 explained, "I would say as far as the interaction, it is different. Especially if there's a language barrier, so I tend to use the language line a lot to make sure there is no like breakdown in communication."

Participant 8 reported that "not all immigrant populations are catered to as far as language barrier, meeting the need of language barriers, meeting the need of services that are culturally related." Participant 8 further explained that,

lot of medically needed cases, you know, have it been a Haitian person, a Haitian case manager at the hospital, some of the cases would never come to child welfare because there was a language barrier. They perceived as if they're being accused of something. They were unable to accurately communicate to a PI or to a doctor. Then, it turns into 'oh she doesn't know how to… she or he doesn't know how to take care of this medically needy child, so we need to take this child away.'"

Figure 6

Language Barrier
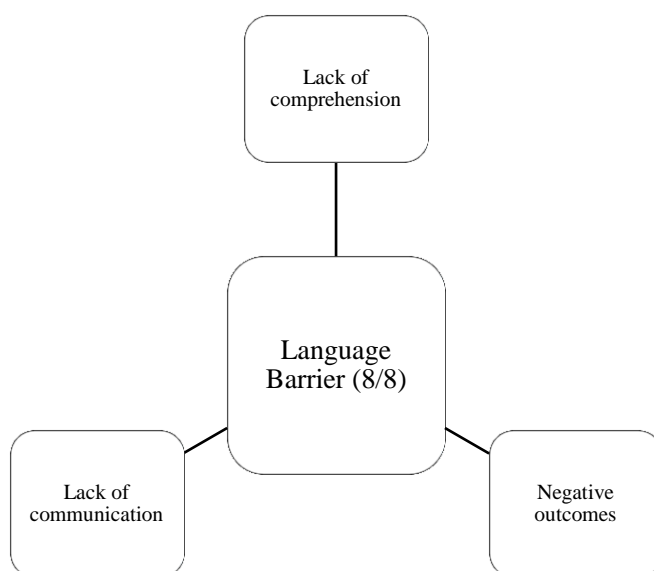
Cultural Knowledge

Cultural knowledge was identified in the data analysis as a critical component to work effectively with the Haitian population. All eight participants reported cultural knowledge as a key component to effectively provide services to the Haitian Population. Throughout the study, the participants with knowledge and understanding of the Haitian demonstrated a greater ability to engage and successfully assist Haitian families. Understanding the Haitian culture helped the workers understand the barriers experienced when working in the field with Haitians. Six participants discussed abilities to engage Haitians in services despite the challenges they face. Five participants explained that educating Haitian families is crucial to engage the population in service and to have positive outcomes. Child welfare workers with less knowledge of the Haitian culture have limited knowledge of the barriers and have many more challenges engaging the

family. This may also be associated with the lack of trust and cultural inclusion with other groups. Haitian child welfare workers reported having cultural knowledge and understanding help managing the challenges experienced in the field. Five child welfare workers were of Haitian background. Those workers explained that having personal experience with the population has dramatically helped them work with the Haitian population and engage them in services. Participants highlighted the need for training specific to the Haitian population to overcome the barriers due to the population's perception, cultural and family values, view of mental illness, and ecological stressors (See illustration in figure 7).

Furthermore, Haitians with cultural knowledge of American culture, laws, and the child welfare system are less resistant to engage in services, open to cultural inclusion, have more knowledge of resources available. Therefore, knowledgeable child welfare workers and Haitians tend to have better outcomes. In addition, those workers who receive continuing education in child welfare tend to have general cultural knowledge that helps them understand the challenges experienced when working with the population. For instance, participant 4 reported receiving cultural trainings where she traveled to other states, including Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Louisiana.

Peer support is another method that non-Haitian workers utilized to gain knowledge of the population. Participant with different cultural backgrounds reported having peer support from their Haitian co-workers and friends. On the contrary, some of the child welfare workers of Haitian descendent reported receiving minimal support, such as a lack of understanding of voodoo threats and lack of support and knowledge from

management. Two participants discussed the importance of working with organizations

that understand Haitian culture to ensure they have services to support the workers.

Another participant described how organizations' understanding of Haitian culture led to

the implementation of policies and regulations for the safety of their staff in response to

voodoo threats. One participant reported receiving great support from management and

mental health services at their workplace. The participant reported engaging in mental

health support services several times to cope with the challenges experienced. Other

Haitian workers stated that they receive support from family members to whom they are

able to vent and decompress. Self-care is another way some participants reported

managing the challenges.

Figure 7

Process to Increase Cultural Knowledge
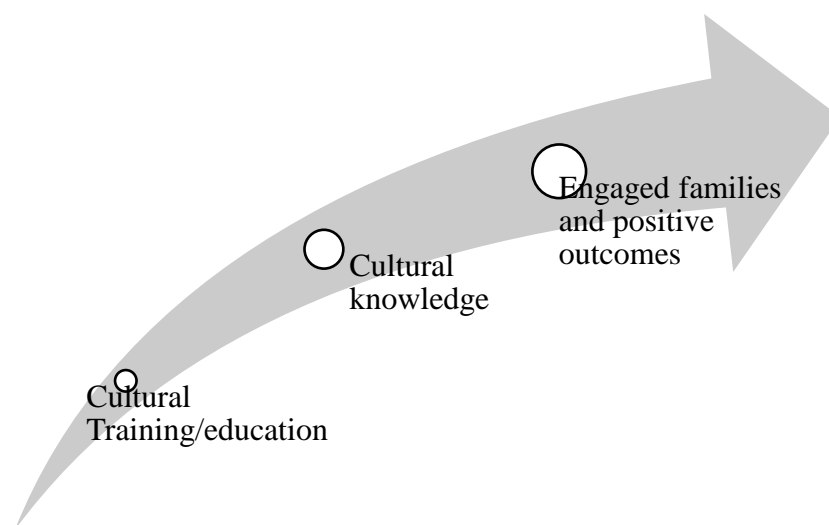
Ecological Stressors

The last theme identified in the data analysis was ecological stressors. The

findings demonstrated that ecological stressors are crucial factors in the challenges

experienced and are present in both Haitian and American cultures. The main ecological stressors identified are lack of education, low socioeconomic status, lack of resources, trauma, stigmas, and lack of representation. These ecological stressors are found on all five levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

Microsystem. Many children suffer trauma in Haiti, on their journey to America, and once they have arrived in America. Seven participants discussed cases when both children and parents suffered trauma. Those traumas included family separation, violence, losses, and surviving horrific circumstances to get to the United States. Participant 3 discussed teachers' projection on children due to a lack of cultural understanding.

Lack of education is another challenge associated with lack of trust and the fear towards DCF. Illiteracy was identified as a barrier for families in understanding rules and regulations in the United State. The parent-child relationship was also discussed as a barrier in providing counseling services to children and families.

Mesosystem. Participants discussed disconnect with the community. Participant 2 specifically described a disconnect between Haitian parents and the school system. The language barrier limits parents' ability to communicate with teachers, counselors, workers, and service providers. Additionally, Haitian families were reported to have limited support in the United States in comparison to Haiti. Extended family members are living in Haiti and the children are missing them. Haitians living in the United States was reported to have limited family support and having to care for family members in Haiti. Family values were identified by seven participants as significant components of the

population's cultural beliefs. Participant 7 discussed challenges experienced related to spiritual beliefs and the impact on the Haitian families' perception of mental health and their receptiveness to engage in mental health services when needed.

Exosystem. The study's findings demonstrated significant challenges due to lack of cultural inclusion, conflict with other cultural groups, lack of community support, changes in the community, negative media, and stigma. The participants discussed socioeconomic challenges for some families and how they create challenges to work effectively with the population. As previously discussed, the participants reported more challenges with Haitian families and individuals with limited education, lack of information in their native language, lack of knowledge of community resources and American culture, and low-paying jobs. The language barrier was identified as a challenge amongst all the participants. Although some of the workers spoke the same language, they still identified language as a barrier. The language barrier was also reported to affect the families' ability to comprehend information presented. As previously discussed, the study's findings highlighted the differences between educated vs. non-educated Haitians and assimilated vs. non-assimilated Haitians in United States. All eight participants reported that Haitians are known to be to be a religious population. Two participants reported challenges with the Haitians spiritual beliefs. One participant discussed challenges related to perception of mental health needs and the other participant talked about voodoo beliefs and practice to cope with life challenges and threating others.

Participant 7 explained:

again in the Haitian community, there's a huge spiritual part but, even amongst…

the mental health workers, sometimes they will have that taboo. Well… you know

they believe in voodoo, and it just like, that's very hum… archaic type of

thinking.

Participant 8 explained the cultural spiritual practice amongst Haitians managing

problems as:

what our people do; so they have problem, that was brought up in an FSPT

staffing. 'Why are they doing their case plan now? Why do they care now? First

thing they do is went to Haiti when we removed their child.' Well, that's what our

people do …. They go and do their cultural beliefs and you know, they believe

that's what gonna get them through.

Macrosystem. The findings revealed macrosystem challenges when working with

the Haitian population. As previously reported, the macrosystem influences the first three

levels of the ecological system. The lack of representation of the population, lack of

policies, lack of resources, lack of community service providers, and lack of

understanding of the cultural values are the challenges that the participants reported

experiencing. The participants reported a lack of political leaders representing the

population to advocate for change in services to address the challenges. Haitians are

immigrants, and many immigration policies affect their daily activities such as

employment, education, housing, finances, and accessibility to resources. One participant

explained the lack of consideration or inclusion of the Haitian population in grant writing

to implement programs in the community to ensure adequate staff and resources available

to serve the population. Two other participants discussed the lack of understanding of cultural differences and differences in needs between Haitians and African Americans. They stated that Haitians are grouped with African-Americans, and that the child welfare system does not acknowledge the different needs and values of the two populations. Due to these limitations, service providers are often ineffective and incompetent in serving the Haitian population. Lack of efficient translation services and the process of checking a box when it comes to finding qualified service providers were also discussed. Six of the participants talked about challenges to convey messages through translators. Participants reported that translators are often not educated on the service or the field and can be biased; this can influence parents' decisions to seek services.

Chronosystem. The last level is the chronosystem. As previously stated, this ecological level helps understand ones' life transition and changes over time. The chronosystem challenges reported are related to the population's experience in Haiti and the United States. Many Haitians experience trauma in Haiti throughout their journey to come to the United States. Participants' statements of their thoughts, experience, and perception of the ecological challenges when working with Haitians are detailed below. Participant 1 discussed a challenging case, stating:

> He qualifies for special education. Mom seemed to be quite aware of what next
> step to do to register the child in school, but she is at a shelter. So that I met the
> mom the next day and facilitated involvement, and that is when I realized…that
> mom could not read or write. Just the body language, just her eyes; so, I right
> away I give a package of registration paperwork, and mom just… I just picked up

on it that this mom can't read or write. I think it's because not enough I learned in

school, not enough that I know about them even though I grew up within this

community. There's a lot of unknown; there's a lot of uncertainties. I think for

me, I wish I knew more how to help them. What I do know, I learned through my

colleagues, I learned through observations, and I am learning a lot with this... This

is my first client that I have really been involved for two years and talk about

basic necessities being homeless; and that she… she is a widow. Her husband was

deported to Haiti; he died in Haiti. Three children, ages five, four, and three.

There's so many layers and plus a child with special needs. She has a little bit of

everything.

Participants 2 and 3 explained their thoughts on potential ecological stressors, stating: "If

there would be a challenge, it would be.... a challenge of... the environment. With this

family, be willing and able to foster someone of Haitian descent" and "I want to use the

word trauma because it is… they been through a lot of traumatic situations that are

appeared very normal to them." Participant 4 discussed an experience with a case where

many ecological stressors were faced:

But now, she has a major fear of DCF and because her 16 years old daughter and

her 17-year-old son identified that so now, they want to control the household….

So, because of the DCF case now, dad left the home. The dad say if he cannot

discipline his children the way he wants to, he prefers not to be in their life. So

this is a 32 years marital relationship that just got destroyed. So mom is afraid,

dad left, and now the children are controlling the household. Unfortunately, the

Department of Children and Family serves a good purpose for certain cases but,

what they don't realize is by coming in the house and threatening the family in the

presence of the child, they don't realize the damage that they're causing.

Participant 6 explained her experience and her perception of the ecological

stressors observed working with Haitians, explaining that, "Haitians when they… here,

they automatically petrified of being deported. So that's why whenever I had a Haitian

family… the parents had to pretend they were not the parents."

Social Work Ethics

Overall, through all the challenges, participants reported having abilities to

provide services to the population according to the social work ethics. The participants

demonstrated the principle of serving the population. They also reported meeting the

Haitian families where they are. Although it was challenging to work with the Haitian

population, all participants reported enjoying working with the families and being pleased

when they were able to successfully engage with and assist a family. All participants

demonstrated a desire to serve the population.

Unexpected Findings

In comparison to the reports from the seven participants who worked directly with

families, and Participant 2 demonstrated minimal knowledge of the challenges

experienced in the field. This raised the question of whether supervisors and management

understand the challenges experienced when working with Haitian families. Participant 2

appeared to have limited knowledge of the challenges child welfare workers with direct

contact with Haitian families. Participant 2 stated:

I have minimal experience working with the immigrant population…. My co-worker did the more hands-on work with the immigrant population... but my experience with them at that time was minimal. I've had hands-on with them but, I've not have tons of experience with them.

This finding may be related to the lack of experience working directly with Haitian families. Hence, this highlights the importance for child welfare administrators to have experience with diverse population to effectively support child welfare workers and understand the challenges experienced in the field when working with Haitians. Additionally, this finding may also be related to the participant's limited of cultural knowledge, lack of literature, and lack of service intervention to support child welfare workers. More research is needed on this topic.

Another unexpected finding of the study was classism as a barrier to serve the population. Several participants talked about how classism has impacted service delivery. Classism is a common discriminatory practice in Haitian culture based on education level and social class. It has created a class division in the Haitian population: The French-speaking or educated Haitians vs. the Creole or non-educated Haitians. Classism was reported to be a barrier between Haitian families and Haitian child welfare workers. It was interesting to hear how Haitian child welfare workers could not provide services to a Haitian family due to classism even as social workers in the United States. It was also reported that some families rejected services due to classism. Haitian workers, who know the culture, reported the ability to overcome the classism barrier by meeting the family at

their level. However, this strategy requires the knowledge to identify classism as it is often unspoken.

Summary

In summary, the findings of this current study answered the research question. The research question was: what are the challenges that child welfare workers experience when working with the Haitian population? Five themes were identified: gapsin the child welfare system and the Haitian population, ecological challenges, fear/lack of trust, language barrier, and cultural knowledge. The gaps in the child welfare system involve lack of cultural understanding/knowledge, lack of resources, lack of effective intervention (intervention and time), lack of Haitian workers, and lack of training specific to the Haitian population. The gaps among the Haitian population were identified as: the population's lack of education, lack of cultural knowledge/understanding, language barrier, lack of engagement in service, lack of knowledge of resources, lack of cultural inclusion/division, lack of self-determination, and lack of understanding of mental health needs. The ecological challenges reported were found on all five ecological systems (micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono). The theme of fear/lack of trust demonstrated the lack of education and knowledge of the child welfare system and the American culture amongst the Haitian population. Lastly, the language barrier was another theme reported by all participants as a barrier that inhibits Haitian families' ability to communicate effectively with child welfare workers and other professionals, comprehend information, and convey messages transparently and understandably. The findings correlated with the theoretical framework of the study, ecological system theory. Additional findings

demonstrated the impact of cultural competence to assist the population. Although

challenging, participants with cultural knowledge and understanding of the Haitian

population were more likely to engage families in services. Classism and management

limited knowledge of the challenges child welfare workers face when working with

Haitian families were unexpected findings identified in the study. The following section

will provide insight into the application of the findings that emerged from the results of

this study. The section will describe the application of the findings to professional

practice, implications for social change, and application for professional ethics in social

work practice.

Section 4: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges child welfare workers experience when working with Haitian families. The research project focused on understanding participants' experience and perception of the challenges faced when working with Haitian families in child welfare settings. Semistructured individual interviews were conducted with participants to gather data about their challenges. All participants had a minimum of 1 year of experience serving the population. The findings of this study may help address the literature gaps and help implement social change in the field for Haitian families.

Kriz and Skivenes (2012) stated that child welfare workers may experience many challenges in the field, such as (a) lack of engagement, (b) family lack of trust in the child welfare system, (c) community poverty, (d) lack of resources, (e) high caseload, (f) burnout, (g) restricted laws and policies, (h) undocumented immigrants, and (i) conflicts within practices. The current study's findings emphasized that these challenges hold true for child welfare workers working with the Haitian population. Key themes revealed from the data collected during this study included lacks in the child welfare field to serve the Haitian population, lacks in the Haitian population, ecological stressors, cultural knowledge, language barrier, and fear and lack of trust. Study participants reported experiencing many challenges that prevent them from adequately serving the Haitian population. These challenges include report of environmental stressors that impact service outcomes for the population and influence their receptiveness to services.

The language barrier is another crucial challenge that all study participants reported when working with Haitian families. In addition, seven of the eight participants reported that fear and lack of trust are barriers among the population; these issues hinder receptiveness to services and lead to poorer service outcomes. On a positive note, participants with cultural knowledge of the Haitian population reported a better understanding of ecological barriers and were better able to connect and engage with families. Although working with Haitian families and engaging them in services is a challenging task, it seems that increased cultural knowledge can improve outcomes and engagement.

The findings of this basic qualitative study may contribute to the social work field by enhancing knowledge and awareness of the issues faced when working with the Haitian community. Considering the challenges in the child welfare system and the challenges within the Haitian population, child welfare workers face complex and challenging barriers to serving the population effectively. Awareness of these challenges may help leaders, stakeholders, and service providers plan and implement interventions to support workers and to improve service outcomes for the Haitian community. Of the eight participants, only one who worked at an administrative level reported a lack of awareness of immigration issues faced by the Haitian population. The same participant demonstrated a lack of knowledge of the other challenges that participants with direct experience reported when working with Haitian families. This may highlight a need for further research to explore management level personnel's knowledge and understanding of the barriers that child welfare workers face when working with the population. The

current lack of knowledge of the immigration issues and the challenges experienced by the child welfare workers when working with Haitian families may impact service delivery to the community. In addition, the study's findings may help increase cultural awareness and empower cultural competence in serving Haitians for all child welfare workers and may increase awareness of needed support for the workers. In Section 4, I describe the application for professional ethics in social work practice, provide recommendations for social work practice, and suggest implications for social change.

Application to Professional Ethics in Social Work Practice

According to the NASW (2017) code of ethics, social work's mission is to enhance individuals' well-being to ensure their basic needs are met, especially with vulnerable populations, and to empower and seek social justice and social change. I sought to do that in the current study. Haitians are known to be vulnerable individuals who are underserved and underrepresented. The findings of this study emphasized that child welfare workers working with the Haitian population face many complex challenges that are connected with lacks in the child welfare system in Florida and among the Haitian population and ecological stressors. Social work professionals must acknowledge the problems, conduct research, and implement evidence-based interventions to address these challenges. The core values of the NASW code of ethics are service, social justice, dignity and worth of a person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. The current study's findings demonstrated the application of some of the core values and others that are lacking. Participants demonstrated competence applying the core values such as service, dignity, worth of a

person, importance of human relationships, and integrity. The lacking areas of the core values based on the study's findings were social justice and competence.

According to the study findings, the participants reported going above and beyond to serve the population. Although 100% of participants working directly with the Haitian families reported enjoying working with the population, they also expressed many negative feelings such as being overwhelmed, saddened, disappointed, threatened, and surprised in association with their challenges. On the other hand, they reported being content, prideful, and pleased when they successfully assisted a family. The workers demonstrated passion for helping the population. According to the reported findings of the challenges in the child welfare system, the workers often lack competence to work with the population and are unable to advocate for the families to seek social justice. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that the ecological challenges that the workers experience are in connection with the challenges found in the child welfare system and among the Haitian population.

The NASW (2017) code of ethics stated that social workers must seek social justice for the less privileged and bring awareness of cultural and ethnic diversity to ensure equal access to needed information, services, and resources for everyone. Considering all of the progress the child welfare system has made throughout the years, many more changes are needed, especially for the Haitian population, to address all of the barriers reported in this study. If these challenges remain unaddressed, the workers will experience burnout, the turnover rate will increase, and challenges to serve and engage the population in service will persist, resulting in continuous ineffective service outcomes

and lack of social policy. Likewise, if the challenges found among the Haitian population are not addressed, the population will continue to face ecological challenges such as lack of education, poverty, lack of social inclusion, lack of self-advocacy and motivation, continuous fear, and lack of trust. One-hundred percent of the participants acknowledged that education is an important method that may address the challenges. With education, the child welfare system and the Haitian population may become aware of the barriers, people may be empowered, and social change may happen.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice

According to the study's findings, several challenges were revealed: lacks in the child welfare system and among the Haitian population, ecological stressors, cultural knowledge, language barrier, and fear/lack of trust. Ackerman (2017) acknowledged that child welfare has many challenges and emphasized the impact the child welfare workers have on service delivery. The findings of the current study validated Ackerman's statement. The participants discussed their efforts in managing the challenges to provide the best services they could. Participants with a cultural understanding of the barriers encountered when working with Haitians demonstrated more ability to engage families in services. Education was identified as a vital component for both the child welfare system and the Haitian population. The recommendations to address these challenges are to conduct more research and implement more evidence-based programs and resources.

The NASW (2017) described competence as the continuous need to increase professionals' knowledge and skills in practice. To enhance competence in the child welfare system, more research is recommended to develop training that focuses on the

Haitian population. The training may enhance social work practice in the child welfare system by increasing child welfare professionals' knowledge and understanding of the needs and the barriers identified in the field and among the population to provide efficient and effective services. The workers may be more competent to manage and overcome the challenges. The workers may also engage Haitian families in service, educate the families regarding the purpose of the child welfare system, explain the workers' role, and build trust with the family.

Additionally, with more research, the gap in literature may be addressed and there may be more evidence-based practice to serve the population by implementing practical resources, interventions, and programs. Based on the study findings, there is a possibility that leaders lack of awareness and knowledge of the challenges that child welfare workers experience serving Haitian families. All participants with direct contact with Haitian families reported multiple challenges, but the participant with administrative experience in the child welfare system reported minimal challenges (language barrier and need for additional cultural knowledge to increase service outcome). Therefore, more research is needed to explore the leaders' understanding of child welfare workers' challenges under their supervision when working with the Haitian population. In this current study, spiritual belief was also reported to be an important aspect of the Haitian cultural beliefs. Participant 7 discussed challenges to address mental health needs due to the population's spiritual view and perception. Two other participants reported management and leaders' lack of understanding of voodoo threats to Haitian child welfare workers. Perhaps with better cultural knowledge and understanding, the

management and leaders could support Haitian workers and implement better policies that may decrease those threats. This approach may decrease the turnover rate of Haitian workers and address the challenge of limited Haitian workers to serve the population. To overcome those barriers, child welfare leaders and professionals must enhance their cultural competence and awareness of the challenges child welfare workers experience to support the workers effectively and seek social change in the field.

Six of the eight participants suggested having a knowledgeable Haitian speaker provide training to educate non-Haitian workers regarding the Haitian culture and techniques to engage families in service as strategies to increase cultural knowledge and understanding. The participants also suggested that community events such as a Haitian cultural week can be implemented to increase awareness among the workers and the Haitian community. This method may promote cultural education and empower social and cultural inclusion within the communities. Education is a powerful tool; it decreases ignorance and empowers communities and social change.

Similarly, the Haitian population needs to be educated on the cultural differences between the Haitian and American cultures, the child welfare system in the United States, and the laws. Due to the significant differences in parental roles and expectations between the Haitian and American cultures, one participant recommended that a class be implemented through immigration to educate Haitian families regarding the child welfare laws and regulations before coming to the United States. The participant reported that education of cultural differences through immigration could help decrease culture shock and challenges to adapt to American culture. The population needs to be empowered to

be motivated for personal growth and social change. They also need to be open-minded to other cultures for more social inclusion. The population's education may decrease the significant challenge that child welfare workers face due to fear and lack of trust in the child welfare system and authorities.

Lastly, to implement changes in the child welfare system to decrease the challenges child welfare workers experience serving the Haitian population, child welfare workers, management, administration, leaders, and stakeholders must be aware of the challenges to seek social change in the field. As indicated by the NASW (2017), social workers must seek social justice for the less privileged and advocate for social change. The Haitian population has endured many sociocultural difficulties such as poverty, violence, limited resources, lack of adult literacy, limited access to education, unemployment, income inequality, and political dilemmas in Haiti (Edmond et al., 2014; Kirmayer, 2010; Philippi, 2016). When Haitians come to the United States, many continue to live in impoverished neighborhoods, work at minimum wage, lack access to literacy in their native language, and lack knowledge of community resources and American culture (Philippi, 2016). Thus, these difficulties contribute to many ecological stressors. The findings of the current study revealed that ecological stressors contribute to the challenges the workers experience in the field when serving that population. The recommendations to address these environmental challenges are evidence-based programs and resources to address those specific needs of the Haitians to decrease those ecological stressors such as Haitian-Focused programs and services. In addition,

community empowerment, services and, information must be available in their native language for those in need.

Due to Haitians' perception of the world, services, resources, and programs must be tailored to address poverty, limited literacy, lack of cultural knowledge, and immigration challenges when working with Haitians. The findings revealed that Haitians have a major fear of DCF and, it is often due to the lack of knowledge of laws and policies and immigration status. Seven of the eight participants reported the lack of resources to serve and address the population's needs. The uneducated families were reported to be more resistant to engage in services; thus, this was related to lack of knowledge and fear of immigration status. To decrease poverty, lack of resources, ineffective service, restricted time in service to enhance service outcome, we must advocate for social change for this population. The social change must be done through Haitian and American society. The ecological challenges are found within all of the levels of the ecological system.

Impacts on Social Work Practice

This current study provided information on the challenges child welfare social workers experience working with Haitians. The findings demonstrated considerable needs for changes in the child welfare system and the Haitian population. With this information, I plan on using the findings to educate child welfare programs, agencies, state departments, leaders, and stakeholders to be aware of these challenges the workers experience when working with Haitian families. I will encourage child welfare professionals to conduct more research on these challenges to implement effective

evidence-based services for the population and support workers. I want to implement a curriculum to help educate workers of the Haitian culture to help them understand the barriers they may face with Haitians to help increase the population in service. In addition, I would like to use social media platforms to educate the Haitian population of the child welfare laws and regulations in the United States. I would also like to partner with other agencies serving other minority groups that have been able to bring awareness of the available community resources. Partnership and collaborations with other agencies in the community to advocate and bring awareness is a strategy that seemed to work for many other policy changes such as the Dignity for All Student Act, Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, SB 1070, and many others (Myers, 2008; O'Neill, 2012). Finally, I would like to create community events to educate the population and empower social change and social inclusion.

Transferability of the Findings

According to Grant and Osanloo (2014), a research study with a well-developed theoretical framework ensures the study's validity, transferability, and trustfulness. This study sought to explore the challenges child welfare workers experience when working with Haitian families. Transferability was demonstrated through transparency during the methodology, and the data analysis section of the study was discussed in detail to ensure that they can be applied in other studies. In this study, I made every effort to be forthcoming and genuine with all steps and procedures of the research method and data analysis to ensure trustworthiness. In moments where information of the study became overwhelmed, I took breaks to regroup. I made all possible efforts to analyze the findings

without my personal experience or knowledge. The association and relationships between variables of the study were also discussed to highlight evidence from the data. All findings of this research were reported according to the information found in the data analysis applying the theoretical framework indicated.

Usefulness of the Study

As social workers, it is important to strive to enhance the social work practice and seek social change for the less privileged. This current study serves as an initial step to address the challenges child welfare workers have dealt with for so long serving the Haitian population. This study may help to educate, advocate, and empower changes in child welfare and the Haitian population. This study sought to bring awareness to the child welfare system and the Haitian population. This study highlighted the need for adequate resources, training specific to serve Haitians and, evidence-based interventions. According to this study's findings, there are major needs for cultural knowledge among the child welfare and the Haitian population, lack of resources, and ineffective service outcome. This study may be served as a tool for further research to explore themes or areas reported as barriers child welfare workers face when serving Haitian families. Additional studies may help investigate the Haitian population and child welfare administration lacking areas to understand better how to enhance service outcomes. This study may also use to empower Stakeholders and insurance companies to be educated on the need for more time in treatment to work effectively with Haitians.

Limitations of the Study

For this current study, only eight participants were involved. Therefore, studies with more participants are needed to seek a greater understanding of the challenges child welfare workers experience across the country. Most participants came from major cities with high concentrated Haitian population in Southeastern in the U.S. Hence, conducting a national study with more participants across the United States can help gather a greater understand of the differences and similarities in the challenges child welfare workers experience in different states through the nation. A national study can also bring awareness to strategies used in different states to address these challenges.

Further research is also needed to explore communities, groups, management, leaders, and stakeholders' knowledge of the challenges child welfare workers experience when working with Haitians. One participant of the study worked on an administrative level and demonstrated limited knowledge of the challenges child welfare workers reported. Additional research may play a vital role in understanding management's ability to support the workers effectively. Many more studies are needed to implement state and national policies to support child welfare workers and the Haitian population.

Recommendations for Further Research

More research is needed to equip child welfare professionals and leaders to address the significant gap in the literature, the lack of child welfare serving the Haitian families, lack amongst the Haitian population, and ecological stressors. With new research, workers will acquire cultural knowledge and better understand the barriers. There will be more resources available, evidence-based program and service intervention,

better support for child welfare workers, education and community program to educate Haitians, more Haitian child welfare workers, and more time for service delivery. Additional research may also educate the Haitian and U.S. population of the importance to participate in studies and empower more individuals to be part of the social change. Studies with more participants nationwide are needed to enhance the accuracy of data and address the gap in literature.

Dissemination of Findings

All participants will be informed of the findings of the study. The participants will receive a summary of the findings and recommendations from the study by email. Participants will be encouraged to review the summary of the findings and recommendations of the study. In addition, upon approval of this final stage of the study, a peer-reviewed journal will be sought to publish the findings for public access.

Implications for Social Change

This study's goal was to explore the challenges child welfare workers experience when working with the Haitian population. Thus, the study geared toward the micro-level of understanding of the workers. Micro systemic level focuses on individuals, needs, and understanding. Child welfare workers are individuals working in the child welfare system (macro). Child welfare workers must be equipped with skills and have the support needed to work effectively with the Haitian population. The workers' experience and perception can play a vital role in how they serve individuals. Local agencies, organizations, and leaders (meso) must understand the workers' experience serving this specific population. With the knowledge and understanding of the challenges the child welfare workers

experience, implementation of social change may begging. To do so, communities, local agencies, and leaders have to work together. Community-based programs and resources are limited to this population. There are major gaps of lack of effective programs and interventions to promote positive outcomes. On the meso system level, local agencies, businesses, leaders and, politicians can partner with each other to educate and advocate for change in the child welfare system to better support the child welfare worker and serve the Haitian population. Then, the change can continue to be implemented nationally (macro). Policies and laws can be created to ensure funds and resources available to continue to address the needs.

For these challenges to be addressed, management, agencies, and leaders must learn of the barriers and implement changes. To effectively support the workers, management, agencies, and leaders must be willing and comfortable to address these challenges. One participant stated that it is essential to be opened to have these vulnerable and uncomfortable conversations because of the continuous division in society. The Haitian population must also be willing to acknowledge and seek for change to receive the services. As reported by the findings, some Haitians tend to be unwilling to change. For effective changes to happen, both the child welfare system and the Haitian population must take part in the needed change. Management, agencies, communities, leaders, and the Haitian population must be willing to all work together. As social workers, the NASW code of ethics encourages to advocate for social change and enhance the social work practice.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the challenges child welfare workers experience when working with Haitians. Currently, there are major gaps in literature and in the child welfare system regarding the Haitian population. The Haitian population has dealt with many challenges in Haiti and in America. To serve Haitians effectively, it is important to understand the barriers and needs. This current study sought to explore the challenges that child welfare workers experience when working with the Haitian population. Ecological system theory was implemented as the framework of this study. Basic qualitative method was used to help collect data through 10 semistructure interview questions. Purposive and snowballing sampling techniques were used to recruit participants. The data collected were transcribed and analyzed. The study's findings demonstrated that gaps in the child welfare system and among the Haitian population, ecological stressors, cultural knowledge, language barriers, and fear/lack of trust as the identified themes throughout the data as the reported challenges child welfare workers experience when working with Haitians. Lack of competency and social justice are the two of the NASW codes of ethics that the study's findings demonstrated concerns about and needing to be addressed. According to the findings, there is a great need for cultural awareness and evidence-based intervention and programs focusing on the Haitian population's needs to decrease the challenges the workers face serving Haitians. More research is needed to educate professionals in the child welfare system and the Haitian population to address the challenges child welfare workers experience when working with Haitian families.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

- Can you tell me about your experience working in the child welfare system (years of working in the field, type of work, population served, degree, etc.)?

- What is your experience working with immigrant population?

- Describe your experience working with the Haitian Population?

- What are the challenges faced when working with Haitian families?

- What is your knowledge of the Haitian culture and family values?

- How do the challenges experienced when working with the Haitian population differ from other minority groups?

- What are the ecological factors about that specific population that makes it challenging to work effectively with them?

- How do you manage to work through these challenges with that population?

- What type of support and training that you receive to help prepare and give you the skills needed to work with that population?

- How would you like for supervisor, upper management and leaders to support you to effectively work with this population to have better outcome?