

2022

North Carolina CPS Social Worker Self-Efficacy with Legal Aspects

Michelle E. Bates
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Michelle E. Bates

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Lakisha Mearidy-Bell, Committee Chairperson,
Social Work Faculty

Dr. Earl Smith, Committee Member,
Social Work Faculty

Dr. Thomas McLaughlin, University Reviewer,
Social Work Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2022

Abstract

North Carolina CPS Social Worker Self-Efficacy with Legal Aspects

by

Michelle E. Bates

MSW, Fayetteville State University, 2014

BA, Fayetteville State University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Work

Walden University

May 2022

Abstract

North Carolina has the infrastructure to investigate the allegations of child abuse and neglect. However, the problem is that during the investigation, not all children have risk and safety evaluated. Assessing for risk and safety determines the child's immediate or future need for legal interventions. The purpose of this basic qualitative inquiry was to explore CPS social workers' self-efficacy with legal aspects when completing abuse and neglect investigations in rural counties in North Carolina. Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy was the theoretical framework used to explain the phenomenon in this study. The research questions were: (a) What are the perceptions and implementation processes of legal aspects as it relates to rural North Carolina CPS social work interventions in child abuse and neglect cases. and (b) How is self-efficacy perceived among rural North Carolina CPS social workers in the profession of investigating child abuse and neglect. A purposive sampling approach was used to recruit nine CPS social workers in rural counties in North Carolina. Through a process of open, axial, and selective coding, seven themes emerged from the semistructured interviews. These themes were: (1) legal training needs, (2) legal aspects is a complex process which contradicts policy, (3) race, class, and resources, (4) leadership and legal teams impact self-efficacy, (5) self-efficacy challenges decreases with longevity, (6) self-efficacy begins before becoming a CPS social worker, and (7) paperwork and caseload demands. CPS social workers will be able to identify new information from this study to increase their self-efficacy with CPS investigations.

North Carolina CPS Social Worker Self-Efficacy with Legal Aspects

by

Michelle E. Bates

MSW, Fayetteville State University, 2014

BA, Fayetteville State University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Work

Walden University

May 2022

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmothers Barbara Jean Vann and Lula Bell Wells.

Acknowledgments

The PhD process is a unique journey which, for me, would not have been possible without God and the support of my committee members. Because of the guidance from Dr. Terri Lewinson, Dr. Lakisha Mearidy-Bell, Dr. Earl Bradford Smith, and Dr. Thomas McLaughlin, I was able to successfully complete this journey. Thank you so much for your support and feedback.

Thank you to the faculty in the School of Social Work at Fayetteville State University who inspired me to push forward. Thank you, Dr. Terri Moore-Brown, for always telling me “You can go higher.” Thank you, Dr. Chet Dilday, for spending time with me after class to make sure I understood and mastered research and statistics. Thank you, Dr. Annie McCullough-Chavis for becoming my lifetime mentor.

Thank you to my parents, Lisa and Joseph Wells, for the countless times you became babysitters and chauffeurs for Jayden and Brea. Thank you so much for checking in on me Janett, Torasia, Karen, John, and Mary.

To the best children in the world, Brea and Jayden, you handled the busy days well and I hope you can see that this is attainable. To my husband, Joe Bates, this process was not easy, but you continuously made me feel like I could conquer anything. Thank you for pushing me and encouraging me to keep going. I love you!

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	9
Purpose.....	11
Research Questions.....	13
Theoretical Framework.....	13
Nature of the Study.....	15
Definitions.....	16
Assumptions.....	17
Scope and Delimitations	18
Limitations	20
Significance.....	21
Summary	24
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	26
Introduction.....	26
Search Strategy	29
Theoretical Framework.....	30
Self-Efficacy	30
Key Concepts	32

Self-Efficacy in CPS	32
Legal Aspects.....	34
Child Protective Services Role	37
Summary.....	40
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	43
Introduction.....	43
Research Design and Rationale	44
Role of the Researcher	45
Methodology.....	47
Participant Selection	47
Instrumentation	49
Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection	50
Data Analysis Plan.....	53
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	55
Credibility	55
Transferability.....	56
Dependability.....	57
Confirmability.....	57
Ethical Procedures	58
Summary.....	59
Chapter 4: Results	61
Introduction.....	61

Setting	61
Demographics	62
Data Collection	64
Data Analysis	65
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	68
Credibility	68
Transferability.....	69
Dependability	69
Confirmability.....	70
Results.....	70
Non-confirming Data	79
Summary	79
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	81
Introduction.....	81
Interpretation of the Findings.....	82
Theme 1: Legal Training Needs	82
Theme 2: Legal Aspects is a Complex Process which Contradicts Policy.....	83
Theme 3: Race, Class, and Resources	83
Theme 4: Leadership and Legal Teams Impact Self-Efficacy.....	84
Theme 5: Self-Efficacy Challenges Decreases with Longevity	85
Theme 6: Self-Efficacy Begins Before Becoming a CPS Social Worker	85
Theme 7: Paperwork and Caseload Demands	86

Limitations of the Study.....	87
Recommendations.....	90
Implications.....	91
Positive Social Change	91
Theoretical Implications	92
Recommendations for Practice	93
Conclusion	94
References.....	96
Appendix A: Email to Directors of Social Services	104
Appendix B: Flyer.....	105
Appendix C: Pre-screening Questions	106
Appendix D: Interview Guide.....	107

List of Tables

Table 1 *Participant Demographic Information* 63

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The public issue of child abuse and neglect is of concern in many states. In the primarily rural state of North Carolina, each of the 100 counties has an office to support the investigations of child abuse and neglect. Child Protective Services (CPS) social workers are responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect (Tilbury, 2019). Available literature on CPS provides a plethora of information that supports the need for CPS social workers and the intricacies of their specific job functions which includes conducting legal aspects like interviewing skills, filling court reports, and testifying. Additionally, the available literature provides a thorough understanding of the self-efficacy of CPS social work Title IV-E students and describes the relationship between CPS social workers' self-efficacy and various job functions. However, the available literature fails to provide information about the CPS social workers' self-efficacy regarding legal aspects when conducting child abuse and neglect investigations.

There are no available research studies that detail the importance of understanding the CPS social workers' self-efficacy with legal aspects when conducting abuse and neglect investigations. I used a basic qualitative methodology to fill this gap in the literature. I used the theory of self-efficacy to align the study and to answer the research questions. I conducted virtual semistructured interviews with nine CPS social workers in rural counties in North Carolina using the GoToMeeting software. After reaching saturation, I conducted a thematic analysis using NVivo software. Because of the completion of this study, CPS social workers and those charged with creating legislation

and trainings have the information needed to produce high quality content to increase self-efficacy of CPS social workers with legal aspects. With an increase in confidence with these skills, CPS social workers will produce high quality work that creates an outcome that is most beneficial to the child and family involved and ultimately ensure that each child is safe and secure.

What follows is a brief description of the available literature which provided the basis of this study, an overview of the problem statement, and the purpose of this study. In addition, this chapter includes the research questions, theoretical framework, nature of the study, definition of key terms, and assumptions. Finally, this chapter will conclude with the scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and brief segue into chapter two.

Background

Previous researchers who examined self-efficacy and CPS social workers focused on students in the social work title IV-E program (Barbee et al., 2018). Of the many factors noted regarding a student's desire to stay or leave CPS social work, self-efficacy was cited as a reason that title IV-E students left the role of CPS social work after obtaining the role postgraduation (Barbee et al., 2018). Title IV-E students who completed the title IV-E program were more likely to have higher rates of self-efficacy and were less inclined to leave the position during their first year when compared to CPS social workers who were not in the title IV-E program (Barbee, 2018). However, if the title IV-E student left the position, self-efficacy was among the many factors listed as the

reason (Barbee, 2018). The information in this article supports the importance of self-efficacy in the role of CPS social work.

Berlanda et al. (2018) completed research which provided an understanding of working relationships of child welfare social workers across multiple departments and how this relationship impacts self-efficacy. Berlanda et al. (2018) found that trust, communication, and organizational culture were vital components of the profession that impact self-efficacy. Additionally, self-efficacy was found to increase the longer the worker stayed with the agency (Berlanda et al., 2018). It was also noted that child welfare workers who had been in the position for less than a year should be included and supported during their training phases with child welfare to increase self-efficacy (Berlanda et al., 2018). I used this article to support the importance of self-efficacy in CPS and the need for training and support to increase self-efficacy.

Berlanda et al. (2017) expanded the knowledge of how self-efficacy can be impacted if a CPS social worker remains or leaves the field of CPS. The study provided information which explained that there are four main categories that contribute to the feelings of job dissatisfaction and self-efficacy (Berlanda et al., 2017). Of these, difficult cases, trust, and respect were among the themes (Berlanda et al., 2017). Berlanda et al. (2018) postulated that CPS social workers who had been employed longer were able to cope better by using problem solving techniques while less experienced CPS social workers felt isolated and were more likely to quit their positions sooner.

Berrick et al. (2020) addressed the various legal intervention measures and the role of the CPS social worker in court proceedings. In addition, Berrick et al. (2020)

explained how the perception of the community on the court proceedings and CPS interventions intercept with a parent's decision to cooperate or not cooperate with CPS social workers. Because the author addressed the importance of legal interventions, I used this article to support the importance of legal aspects skills in CPS. However, Berrick et al. (2020) highlighted the need for more research as to how CPS social workers can increase their court proceeding skills to increase parent and community confidence.

Earlier researchers who investigated the intent to quit among CPS workers looked at factors after a CPS social worker had already left their employment position and de Guzman et al. (2020) provided information on the intent to stay or leave a position before the act of leaving the position actually occurred. In addition, de Guzman et al. (2020) postulated that the intent to stay or quit is determined by several factors to include self-efficacy. CPS social workers with fewer years of experience reported higher results of intent to quit when compared to CPS social workers who have been in the position for years (de Guzman et al., 2020). I selected this article as it furthers the importance of self-efficacy in CPS social work and the role self-efficacy has when a CPS social worker decides if he or she will remain or leave the position. However, the gaps in this literature revealed the need for further research into the role of self-efficacy with legal aspects skills which may decrease the intent to quit.

While CPS social work has a primary focus of assisting children, another component of the work, according to Ferguson (2017), is assisting the families through the CPS process. Ferguson (2017) surmised that for various reasons, including unsafe working conditions, organizational culture, personal biases, and caseload demands, CPS

social workers often rushed assessments with families during the investigation which impacted the case outcome decision. Ferguson (2017) provided an understanding of the day-to-day decision-making process for CPS investigation work in the field. I used Ferguson's (2017) research to elaborate on the ability of CPS social workers to emulate their legal aspects training while conducting the investigation.

A CPS social worker's length of time in the CPS position and the CPS social worker's personal beliefs influenced if the CPS social worker would intervene with legal interventions or attempt to implement measures that would keep the family together without legal interventions (Fluke et al., 2016). This information is important as it provides an understanding of the various intervention options that can be offered to families one of which includes legal intervention. This article illustrates a need for further understanding if a CPS social worker's self-efficacy also influenced their legal interventions.

Lauritzen et al. (2018) provided a synopsis of the various techniques that CPS social workers use when making a case decision during a CPS investigation. Lauritzen et al. (2018) found that a CPS social worker's personal judgement was found to be a primary factor when a CPS social worker determined a case outcome. This information provides an understanding of what many CPS social workers are using currently to make a case decision after conducting a CPS investigation. However, what is left to be learned and missing from this research is the CPS social worker's self-efficacy when making the case decision and an analysis of the CPS social worker's other legal aspects skills used when making the case decision.

Because each child is unique and each CPS experience is also unique, screening tools are used in CPS social work to aid in the decision-making process during the investigation (McCrae & Brown, 2018). Twenty-four screening tools were reviewed during the process completed by McCrae and Brown (2018). McCrae and Brown (2018) found that the various instruments and techniques that CPS social workers are using during the investigation impacts the decision-making processes and is used in determining if the CPS social worker will proceed with legal interventions or not. McCrae and Brown (2018) did not address the CPS social worker's self-efficacy when using these tools during the decision-making process.

Pierce and Park (2017) completed a study in which they evaluated CPS social work tile IV-E students in a pre-posttest which examined CPS student self-efficacy with social work ethics and understanding of CPS work roles. Pierce and Park (2017) found that posttest confidence of completing court reports and testifying decreased when the posttest results were reviewed. Pierce and Park (2017) focused on CPS social work students and did not include long term CPS social workers after graduation. In this study, students were all from one state although there were several universities that participated in the research (Pierce & Park, 2017). There was no analysis of understanding why the confidence decreased with court reports and testifying after the internship in CPS concluded (Pierce & Park, 2017). I chose this article as there was a significant finding which showed that after training, self-efficacy with some legal aspects skills decreases. However, this article shows that there is a gap in literature as the primary focus of this literature was CPS students and not full-time CPS social workers.

Porter et al. (2019) examined the court proceeding process which is a component of the legal aspects process. Porter et al. (2019) discovered that there were various challenges with making legally sound decisions in CPS and that there are ongoing challenges with collaborative partnerships between CPS social workers and legal teams. I selected this article for review because it highlights the court processes and how the collaboration with a legal team is a key component of the legal aspects process. While this knowledge is important, the article shows the need for continued research into the self-efficacy of the CPS social worker when collaborating with other legal professional and participating in the legal processes.

Tilbury (2019) found that evidence gathering during the CPS investigation is critical and examined how evidence is heavily used during CPS legal interventions. Tilbury (2019) provided an understanding in their research of the various legal aspects skills that CPS social workers use, including evidence gathering, court reports, and testifying in court. I selected this article because it provides the information needed to elaborate on some of the legal aspects skills that CPS social workers use during the CPS investigation. Additionally, this article shows that there is a need for additional research into the self-efficacy of CPS social workers when using these legal interventions as it was not addressed within this research.

Terminating a parent's rights due to confirmed abuse and neglect is a decision that is made by a team but is heavily impacted by legal aspects completed by the CPS social worker (Wilderman et al., 2020). Wilderman et al. (2020) examined the rates of parental termination in the United States and the lasting impacts that parental termination

has on parents and their children. The termination of parental rights has lasting negative consequences and should be completed only when necessary (Wilderman et al., 2020). I selected this article because the research explored the lasting impact that parental rights termination has on children and the importance of ensuring that there is enough legally sound evidence to do so. Additionally, this article has many limitations as it did not include an analysis of the legal aspects skill used to complete the termination of parental rights.

Available research indicates that the use of legal aspects skills it at the discretion of the CPS social worker and often includes the CPS social worker's personal feelings rather than a culmination of evidence. Furthermore, the information found in available literature provides an understanding of the training that CPS social workers obtain to complete their duties and how these duties can conflict with the CPS social worker's personal perceptions and feelings. While the task of investigating child abuse and neglect can be overwhelming, the literature showed that there is a need for continued knowledge about the discipline to provide CPS social workers and others with the insight on the challenges CPS social workers face and the impact of these challenges on the children. To that end, the literature shows that there is no available research in which the researchers sought to understand the CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects during the investigation of child abuse and neglect. The available literature does not provide an analysis of the self-efficacy of CPS social workers when utilizing legal aspects skills. While there is a plethora of available research that identifies the relationship of intent to quit and self-efficacy in the CPS profession and the changes of

self-efficacy after training with CPS students, there is no available research that specifically examines self-efficacy with legal aspects skills with employed CPS social workers.

Problem Statement

In 2017, 674,000 children in the United States were victims of child abuse or neglect and of this, over 1,700 children died (United States Children's Bureau, 2018). Although many of the deaths related to child abuse or neglect were unknown to child protective services (CPS) agencies, at least 27% of the children had previous CPS involvement prior to death, and available studies show that this has increased steadily over the past five years (United States Children's Bureau, 2018). Additionally, available data shows that approximately 60% of the cases in CPS have safety and risk addressed during the investigation (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). Therefore, understanding the process of the CPS investigation is paramount.

When a CPS agency is notified that a child is alleged to be abused or neglected, a CPS social worker is assigned to investigate the allegations and is responsible for gathering evidence that supports or disproves the allegations (Tilbury, 2019). Moreover, it is the cumulation of assessing for safety and risk, evidence gathering, and other skills CPS social workers use in their decision-making processes (Whittaker, 2018). As such, it is possible that a child can receive adequate services for his or her needs which can include no intervention, support services, or removal from an abusive or neglectful home (Tilbury, 2019). In North Carolina, investigations of child abuse and neglect primarily rely on the expertise of the CPS social worker (North Carolina Department of Health and

Human Services, 2016). Based on this, the inference can be made that a CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects has an impact on the investigation of child abuse or neglect process.

As an effort to decrease child fatalities in North Carolina, legislators approved Rylan's Law in House Bill 630 to improve CPS social workers involvement with children and families involved with CPS agencies in North Carolina (North Carolina General Assembly, 2017). However, minimal research is available about a CPS social workers' self-efficacy with legal aspects when investigating child abuse or neglect in North Carolina following the approval of Rylan's Law in House Bill 630.

According to Bandura (1977), a person's perceived self-efficacy impacts the person's commitment to complete a task. Bandura (1977) defines self-efficacy as the perceived ability to exert the skills needed to effectively execute a set of competencies. One current issue in North Carolina is that, of the 49 states that have reported child abuse and neglect data, North Carolina continues to have 32 children who die each year as a result of child abuse and neglect, which ranks as the 19th highest rate when compared to the 48 other states who have reported data (Administrations for Children and Families, 2016).

The problem is that in North Carolina, only 60% of the children and families involved in CPS had safety and risk reviewed during the process which is of concern because safety identifies immediate abuse or neglect while risk refers to abuse and neglect which might occur later (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). Additionally, within the state of North Carolina, 70% of the counties that

intervene in child abuse and neglect are rural counties (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Available research provides information explaining that many rural counties lack the resources and support needed to complete tasks related to CPS and other social work services (Lee, 2016). Therefore, understanding a CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects in rural counties in North Carolina is important. This information can be used to inform legislators, judges, attorneys, state administrators, agency directors, supervisors, social workers, parents and caregivers, and other interested parties on the CPS social worker's training, staffing, and other needs. This information can increase the quality of legally supportive CPS investigations which can help decrease child fatalities in North Carolina, while also increasing the available supports needed for rural CPS social workers completing legal aspects.

Purpose

The purpose of this basic qualitative inquiry was to understand the CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects when completing investigations of child abuse or neglect in rural counties in North Carolina. Currently, there is a gap in research as there is no available research that addresses the CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects during investigations of child abuse or neglect in North Carolina. Available self-efficacy research about CPS social workers focuses on Title IV-E students, CPS social workers outside of the United States, and CPS social workers in locations other than North Carolina in the United States (Berlanda et al., 2017; de Guzman et al., 2020; Pierce & Park, 2017). These research measures addressing CPS social worker self-efficacy do not provide an understanding of CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal

aspects during the child abuse and neglect investigation in North Carolina after the implementation of Rylan's Law into HB 630. I used a basic qualitative study to address this gap in research by analyzing the CPS social worker's self-efficacy when utilizing legal aspects skills while conducting child abuse and neglect investigations. In this study, I provided an analysis of how CPS social workers identify their self-efficacy and then use their self-efficacy when examining safety and risk of children in child abuse and neglect cases. I completed interviews with nine North Carolina CPS social workers from rural counties to gather information that increases the understanding of CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects.

North Carolina has 100 counties, and each county has a department of social services which employs CPS social workers (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Of the 100 counties in North Carolina, 70 counties are rural and the remaining 30 counties are urban (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services is based in an urban county that provides the training to all 100 department of social services (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). I recruited the participants for this research within the rural counties and ensured that they were dispersed to ensure that participants reflected the diversity of other CPS social workers within the field. With this information, interested parties will be able to understand CPS social worker's self-reported self-efficacy which has the potential to highlight needs that are being met and any unmet needs that are necessary to be filled to increase the North Carolina CPS social worker's self- efficacy with legal aspects. Furthermore, I highlighted

the unique needs that CPS social workers in rural counties have and the services and supports that are needed in these counties.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions and implementation processes of legal aspects as it relates to rural North Carolina CPS social work interventions in child abuse and neglect cases?
2. How is self-efficacy perceived among rural North Carolina CPS social workers in the profession of investigating child abuse and neglect?

I designed these research questions in a qualitative format to understand self-efficacy through the experiences of the CPS social worker. Primarily, I used the research questions to understand those legal aspects experiences unique to CPS social workers in rural counties in North Carolina. Because I focused on self-efficacy during the investigation of child abuse and neglect, CPS social workers who met the criteria to participate in this research were able to speak to their experiences in this area. I designed the interview questions to illicit as much information as possible to best answer the research questions.

Theoretical Framework

I used Albert Bandura's (1977) theory on self-efficacy to explain the CPS social worker's worldview. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as the perceived ability to understand a task and belief that one could complete the task with favorable outcomes. Bandura (1977) assumed that if a person perceived that an outcome would not be favorable, then the confidence that the person had in completing the task would be

diminished and the likelihood of the person completing the task would also decrease. In contrast, Bandura (1977) also assumed that if the person's perceived self-efficacy is positive, the effort in completing the task would be higher resulting in more favorable outcomes. Barbee et al. (2018) and Berlanda et al. (2018) provided an understanding of how self-efficacy can be used in research when examining CPS social workers' self-efficacy.

According to Barbee et al. (2018), the position of CPS social worker requires those employed in the field to have a thorough background in the skill sets needed to successfully execute the requirements of the position. Further, Barbee et al. (2018) provided information that supports the importance of specialized training which enhances the CPS social worker's self-efficacy with completing the required tasks and duties of the position. This information supports Bandura's (1977) explanation of self-efficacy and how self-efficacy is influenced by obtained skills. Additionally, Berlanda et al. (2018) supported this information by expanding on the importance of self-efficacy in assisting CPS social workers as identifying as a qualified professional in the field and becoming a positive contributing member of the community. This information supports that CPS legal aspects requires unique skills which can directly impact CPS social worker self-efficacy. To gain an understanding of the information, I used semistructured interview questions to allow CPS social workers an opportunity to expand upon perceived self-efficacy with legal aspects and the factors that impact self-efficacy. I applied the primary principles of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 2,

to the interview questions in order to understand the CPS social worker's confidence or self-efficacy when using legal aspects skills.

Nature of the Study

Alignment is a critical component of the research process. Methodology is not determined based on preference but rather with what aligns with the purpose, problem statement, and research question (Johansson, 2019). In qualitative research, the researcher assumes no directional relationship between two or more variables and assumes that there is more than one reality that can exist (Johansson, 2019; Mohajan, 2018). Among the various traditions of qualitative research, there are several unique approaches. Selecting the correct approach is a critical component of alignment (Johansson, 2019; Mohajan, 2018). Basic qualitative research is used to understand meanings and values that people assign to experiences (Mohajan, 2018). Researchers use this approach to focus on what can generally be learned from participants through observations and interviews (Patton, 2015). When using a basic qualitative approach, information collected should be reflective of the community and be reliable, trustworthy, and transferrable (Johansson, 2019).

I used a basic qualitative approach to align the purpose of this study because the focus was to understand from the perspectives of the CPS social workers. By utilizing a basic qualitative approach, CPS social workers were able to share pertinent information as it related to their perspectives of self-efficacy regarding legal aspects during child abuse or neglect investigations. Consistent with basic methodology, in this study, I collected interview data from CPS social workers in North Carolina. I thematically coded

the interviews by using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Through a process of open, axial, and selective coding, various themes were derived from interview data using a constant comparative thematic analysis. I collected the data through virtual semistructured interviews using the GoToMeeting software with nine North Carolina CPS social work investigators in rural counties. I transcribed these interviews using the NVivo software and I used the NVivo software for the thematic analysis.

Definitions

Caretaker: An adult over the age of 18 providing care to children under the age of 18 (Kobrick, 2017).

Child abuse: The willful infliction of emotional, physical, or sexual harm resulting in bruises or digression in development (Kobrick, 2017).

Child neglect: The willful intent to create an environment that is harmful to the overall wellbeing of a child or to withhold necessities such as medical care, education, food and water, or proper supervision (Kobrick, 2017).

Child protective services: A department within the Department of Social Services responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.b).

Child protective services social worker: A social worker employed in the CPS department responsible for investigating child abuse and neglect allegations (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.b).

Legal aspects: A set of processes used in a CPS investigation which includes interviewing, gathering evidence, drafting court documents, testifying, and consultation with an attorney or legal team (Tilbury, 2019)

Self-efficacy: The theoretical approach and defined as the process of reviewing learned skills and previous experience to determine if one can complete a skill (Bandura, 1977).

Assumptions

Because I used a basic qualitative design, I assumed that knowledge about a CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects would be best learned from the CPS social worker's perspective. The ontological assumption is that each participant's reality is subjective and meaningful to the study. This emerged through semistructured individual interviews, and I assumed that the CPS social workers who participated provided honest accounts of their experiences. As such, the epistemological assumption is that the origin of learning occurred from the semistructured interviews with the participants within their setting. The interviews were completed virtually using the GoToMeeting software and it is assumed that the participants were be able to use the software and the virtual format did not hinder participation. Additionally, it was assumed that there would be enough participants to reach saturation. It was also assumed that the participants were representative of the CPS community within their perspective county. Finally, it was assumed that through reflexivity, bias was minimal with little impact to the study.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was to determine the CPS social workers' understanding of legal aspects in rural North Carolina and how they implement this process. This is derived from the problem which is that CPS social workers in North Carolina only review safety and risk for child abuse and neglect in 60% of the cases that are accepted for investigation (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). This focus was chosen because determining how a CPS social worker understands and then implements legal aspects skills will provide an understanding of the CPS social workers' understanding of reviewing safety and risk during a CPS investigation. Based on this, I only included those CPS social workers employed in rural counties in North Carolina and excluded those employed within the urban areas in North Carolina. Furthermore, I only invited CPS social workers who have completed investigations of child abuse and neglect as participants for this study.

Although race, culture, and class are important to the analysis of this study, the goal of this methodology was about exploring rural CPS social workers' self-efficacy with legal aspects. Presented in this study were the key factors in addressing the most important role of CPS social work, which is to use legal aspects skills to identify safety and risk of abused or neglected children. There is a possibility that the participants in this study might represent different racial, class, and cultural backgrounds and thus provide some insight into how race, class, and culture changes the lens in which legal aspects is viewed and used. However, the impact of diversity factors on the use of legal aspects skills is outside of the scope of this study.

One delimitation of this study was that there are other duties that CPS social workers complete within their professional capacity which has the potential to impact how a CPS social worker understands and implements legal aspects. Additionally, CPS social workers have personal responsibilities which also had the potential to impact how legal aspects is understood and implemented. Although the state of North Carolina provides the same training to all counties in North Carolina, the timing in which the training is taken, the trainers used for the training, and the internal policies as it relates to legal aspects varies for each CPS social worker.

A second delimitation was that demographic variables of race, class, and other diversity factors were not asked in the screening process nor on the demographic question as these were not the focus of the study. According to Lusky-Weisrose (2021), the role of culture is important in identifying potential evidence of abuse and neglect. It is likely evident that the impact of cultural perception varies in assessing child abuse and neglect cases. However, the role of self-efficacy is more likely to be examined when executing the legal components among child abuse and neglect.

I used the theory of self-efficacy for this study; however, social learning theory is another theoretical framework that is most related to this study but was excluded. Social learning theory is defined as learning that is obtained through observation (Moss et al., 2020) and is applied by examining how CPS social workers implement the legal aspects skills learned through peer to peer or supervisor training. This, of course, would have changed the focus of the study and as such, I excluded this theory.

Transferability is the ability to apply the results of a study based on the rich and thorough descriptions from that study (Korstjen & Moser, 2018). Although the scope of this study was limited to CPS social workers in rural counties in North Carolina, the study will be transferable to similar communities in other states. Because transferability is determined by the reader (Korstjen & Moser, 2018), one can only surmise that the information presented within this study will be able to be transferred to other communities. Thorough results were provided in subsequent chapters to aid in transferability.

Limitations

There were a few limitations of this study. A methodological limitation is the use of a basic qualitative design. Qualitative designs have small sample sizes. In this study, there were a total of nine participants (saturation was met at participant 9). Fewer participants could have also impacted the depth and breadth of the study as well as the dependability of the study. Dependability of a study refers to the consistency of the research and the ability for others to repeat the research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Additional limitations included the lack of CPS social workers who would be willing to participate. Based on this, the recruitment process consisted of encouraging the directors and supervisors to encourage their CPS workers to participate. I sent the flyer through email so that the directors could forward the flyer to their CPS social workers. The flyer included a discussion of confidentiality to encourage participation.

Another limitation to this study may bring insight to the lack of multi-cultural representation among rural CPS social workers. CPS social workers in urban counties in

North Carolina were not included in this study as they were not the target population. Although CPS social workers in urban counties could likely contribute to the representation of multiculturalism, the demographics of this study draws from CPS participants residing in rural North Carolina.

During the interview process, CPS social workers might divulge sensitive client information and breach confidentiality. To mitigate this, participants were reminded to uphold the confidentiality of their clients and agency. The steps that will be taken if confidentiality is breached was disclosed to participants. This included but was not limited to notifying the county director or notifying the state.

Additionally, as a former CPS social worker, I consistently used reflexivity to reflect on any biases and ensure that any biases did not have undue influence on the research process. Adding to this, due to previously holding the position of supervisor in adult protective services in North Carolina, participants were notified of this previous role and were informed that the leadership role in the Department of Social services was separate from the role of the researcher. The university email account was used to email invitations to potential participants.

Significance

This study is significant as I will provide information that will positively contribute to the CPS social work field. Specifically, I will address the understanding of how CPS social workers understand legal aspects and how they implement legal aspects. I will provide an understanding as to how their understanding, self-efficacy, and

implementation leads to the CPS social worker addressing safety and risk of children who are possibly being neglected or abused.

Available research does not detail North Carolina CPS social workers' self-efficacy with legal aspects during child abuse and neglect investigations; thus, I filled this research gap. Available research, however, does detail the importance of legal aspects in CPS (Berrick et al., 2020; Ferguson, 2017; Lauritzen et al., 2018; Porter et al., 2019; Tilbury, 2019). There are currently no available qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods studies available that specifically detail the problem of CPS social worker's self-efficacy and preparedness with legal aspects in North Carolina. The research that is available about CPS social worker self-efficacy in CPS address the self-efficacy of Title IV-E CPS students, self-efficacy differences between new and older CPS social workers in Italy, the relationship between self-efficacy and the intent to stay or leave CPS social work, the relationship between job dissatisfaction and self-efficacy, and leadership and organizational culture and the relationship with CPS social worker's self-efficacy (Barbee et al, 2018; Berlanda et al., 2017; de Guzman et al., 2020; Pierce & Park, 2017). Therefore, this study is an original contribution to the field. As noted by available literature, self-efficacy is an important component in CPS social work.

Therefore, by conducting this study and focusing on CPS social work self-efficacy with legal aspects skills, rural communities like those in the focus of this study, now have the knowledge and information needed to understand the role of self-efficacy. Additionally, this study showed how CPS social workers use their self-efficacy when investigating cases. With this information, training and legislation can be developed in a

manner that supports the self-efficacy or confidence of the CPS social worker particularly when support structures are limited in rural communities.

Understanding CPS social worker's self-efficacy of legal aspects during investigations of abuse or neglect is important. If a CPS social worker lacks the understanding of the legal implications of the investigation and does not feel that he or she has the adequate legal aspects skills to thoroughly conduct an investigation of child abuse or neglect, then the potential of life-threatening harm to the child alleged to be maltreated increases (Ferguson, 2017). In reverse, the CPS social worker can erroneously remove a child from a home which has the potential to cause harm to the child and family (Ferguson, 2017; Wilderman et al., 2020). Therefore, this study will detail policy and trainings for CPS social workers which can focus on how to implement legal aspects and address safety and risk to mitigate abuse and neglect for the vulnerable children in rural North Carolina.

With information obtained from this study, CPS social workers will be able to complete self-reflection and engage in open dialogue with their supervisors for training needs. Additionally, this can create a dialogue with DSS leadership and trainers on CPS legal aspects training needs. With increased confidence, CPS social workers can complete a more comprehensive investigation which will increase the number of children assessed for safety and risk. In addition, the number of children who die from child abuse and neglect can potentially decrease. With renewed confidence in their positions, CPS social workers will be equipped with the skills that they need to maintain employment

and reduce turnover. Overall, the study has the potential to positively impact individuals, communities, and county and state levels.

Summary

The scope of this study focused on CPS social workers in rural North Carolina and their understanding and implementation of legal aspects skills. The problem is that in North Carolina, CPS social workers only addressed safety and risk in 60% of the CPS cases involving child abuse and neglect. I used a basic qualitative design to answer the research questions which were (a) What are the perceptions and implementation processes of legal aspects as it relates to rural North Carolina CPS social work interventions in child abuse and neglect cases? and (b) How is self-efficacy perceived among rural North Carolina CPS social workers in the profession of investigating child abuse and neglect?

Self-efficacy is the theoretical framework developed by Bandura (1977) which provides an explanation as to how individuals determine if they can successfully complete a task. This theoretical framework best aligned with this study and all other frameworks were thus excluded. I used the GoToMeeting platform to complete virtual semistructured individual interviews. I used the data software NVivo to complete data analysis. As it relates to transferability, I provided a detailed analysis with rich descriptions.

Although several limitations existed in this study, due to the smaller sample size of nine CPS social workers, significance did occur as saturation was reached. The results of this study detailed the information needed to review and update applicable policies and

trainings for CPS social workers. This can increase the number of CPS investigations that address safety and risk and increase the accuracy of case decision outcomes. In Chapter 2, I will provide an overview of the available literature that was reviewed as it relates to CPS social work, self-efficacy, and legal aspects.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

CPS is an organizational structure comprised of trained CPS social workers who investigate allegations of child abuse and neglect (Gupta-Kagan, 2020; Kobrick, 2017). Notably, each state in the United States identifies these workers by different titles; however, the objective of the work completed remains the same (Gupta-Kagan, 2020). For the purposes of this document, the social workers in this position will be referred to as CPS social workers. A primary objective for CPS social workers is to protect children from child abuse and neglect while attempting to maintain an intact family (Kobrick, 2017). This objective has been a withstanding priority for several decades (Kobrick, 2017).

Although protecting children has evolved and developed over time, there are still ongoing changes occurring to the CPS system to improve the service delivery of child protection. Beginning in the late 1970s, many professionals began to make note of the lasting and permanent effects that child abuse and neglect has on children (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). As the concern for the welfare of children expanded, so did the requirements of who should report suspected abuse and neglect, how to report suspected child abuse and neglect, and the consequences for perpetrators of child abuse and neglect (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). Over time, the federal government set forth a set of guidelines for each state to adhere to and required that each state set forth parameters on how the state will protect children from child abuse and neglect (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). As the states established their general

statutes, over time, these general statutes changed. For instance, in North Carolina, North Carolina House Bill 630 was established and then updated to include amendments known as Rylan's Law (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.a). Rylan's Law clarified the required home visitations that a family must receive while a case is active in CPS services and the supervisory oversight that must occur for not only the family, but for the CPS social worker as well (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.a). Although there is no available literature that examines North Carolina House Bill 630, what is available is the various legal aspect skills that CPS social workers employ to complete their CPS tasks.

The existing research on CPS social workers ranges in varying topics. These topics include burnout, compassion fatigue, intent to quit, agency culture, and self-efficacy. Based on the vast array of topics currently available on CPS social work, I conducted a review of the literature to identify what is currently known about CPS social work and what is still left to be learned. I reviewed the available literature and identified a gap in literature.

During the process of identifying the gap in literature, I used various search terms. I used a search strategy that consisted of keywords that were arranged in various orders to obtain relevant articles. In addition to the searches conducted for relevant journal articles, I completed a search for relevant data on various federal and state websites. Once I identified the gap in literature based on the articles that returned in the searches, I completed a review of the theoretical framework.

I identified the theory of self-efficacy as the theoretical framework that best aligned with the purpose because the purpose is to understand rural North Carolina CPS social worker self-efficacy with legal aspects during the investigation of child abuse or neglect. Bandura (1977) described self-efficacy as a complex process that occurs when an individual uses the combination of several experiences to determine the likelihood that they will be able to effectively complete a task. Albert Bandura's description of self-efficacy provided the foundation to analyze and interpret how CPS social workers explain their process and how they interpret their legal aspects processes.

Finally, I separated the literature by key concepts to identify what is known about the topic thus far in available literature. I determined these key concepts based on the purpose of the study. The key concepts include self-efficacy, legal aspects, and child protective services. After reviewing the available literature presented in this section, I identified the problem.

The problem is that in North Carolina, only 60% of the children and families working with CPS have child safety and risk addressed during the CPS investigation (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.b). During the investigatory stage of CPS, safety and risk is conducted as part of the process to determine legal interventions and case outcomes (Gupta-Kagan, 2020). Furthermore, over 25% of children who died in North Carolina because of child abuse or neglect had at least one previous involvement with CPS (United States Children's Bureau, 2018). Based on this, coupled with the fact that 60% of the counties that employ CPS social workers in North Carolina are in rural counties (North Carolina Department of Health and Human

Services, n.d.b), what was left to be understood is the rural CPS social workers understanding of their self-efficacy with legal aspects used during the CPS investigation to determine the safety and risk of children involved in the investigation.

Search Strategy

I began the search for relevant scholarly literature with keywords and concepts that I derived from the problem, purpose, and research question. I began the first search of literature with examining self-efficacy. To start, I used words that imply self-efficacy to conduct a thorough search of available literature on this topic. These search terms included *self-efficacy*, *confidence*, *mastery*, and *decision making*. Secondly, I conducted a search to examine the available literature in reference to legal aspects. I used the following terms in this search: *legal aspects*, *evidence*, *law*, *legal*, *court*, *legal skills*, *child welfare skills*, *training*, *legislation*, and *policy*. Finally, terms to identify child abuse and neglect investigations and CPS social workers included the search terms *child welfare*, *human services*, *CPS*, *child protection*, *child loss*, *child death*, *child investigation*, *social worker*, *child abuse*, *child neglect*, and *child maltreatment investigation*.

Once I developed the search terms, I used various combinations of the search terms to search the Thoreau multidatabase, ProQuest database, SocINDEX database, and Google Scholar. Within these databases, I reviewed scholarly reviewed articles within the last 5 years to explore what is known about CPS social work and legal aspects, current and future trends in the field of CPS social work, and the areas of gaps. When the search terms yielded less than 15 relevant articles, I used Google Scholar to identify articles that cited the relevant articles that were found. I used the Ulrich website to check for scholarly

reviews of the articles that I identified as relevant. Based on the cumulation of the search terms I used to examine available research, I identified self-efficacy, legal aspects, and CPS as the relevant components of this literature review.

To support the statistical data presented in this document, I conducted a search of available CPS data on the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Health and Human Services, the United States Children's Bureau, and the Child Welfare Information Gateway websites. Additionally, I searched for information concerning the current legal guidance provided to North Carolina CPS social workers on the North Carolina General Assembly website and I searched for information concerning current training on the North Carolina Social Worker Learn website.

Theoretical Framework

Self-Efficacy

Bandura's (1977) introduction and definition of self-efficacy influences the understanding the implications of self-efficacy in the role of a CPS social worker with legal aspects. Bandura (1977) provided the theoretical framework for understanding self-efficacy. Self-efficacy and the role of self-efficacy is defined as the process in which an individual examines a set of skills obtained and measures them to the abilities in which one has (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) concluded that when an individual views that he or she has the knowledge and skills to complete a task favorably, he or she will exert the effort needed to complete the task successfully. On the other hand, Bandura (1977) found that if an individual perceived the outcome will not have positive or favorable outcomes, he or she is less inclined to extend effort to complete the task.

Bandura (1977) postulated that an individual is also weighing and evaluating the setting in which the assertion of skill must take place and their ability to cope with the outcome should the process not be completed favorably. Bandura (1977) found that the process is abandoned if the individual's coping skills are not perceived as being sufficient to handle a less than favorable outcome within the setting. Based on the conclusions provided, one can surmise that a CPS social worker will examine the skill sets obtained through training, which can include education and on the job training, while conducting an investigate and will choose to either abandon any legal efforts or pursue them. However, the decision is also based on the CPS social worker's previous personal experiences rather than observed experiences.

Although an individual may observe someone within the same profession successfully execute a task or skill, a person's efficacy is also influenced by their personal ability to complete the task (Bandura, 1977). Thus, the more a person completes a task with favorable outcomes, the more likely they are to have higher confidence that they can successfully complete the task or skill in the future (Bandura, 1977). For instance, a CPS social worker may observe other CPS social workers complete legal aspects skills during the investigation but will not be able to accurately perceive their ability to complete the same tasks until they have executed the skills. This leads to further implications that skills practiced in a controlled environment might increase a CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects if provided the opportunity to practice the skills with feedback and opportunities to repeat.

Key Concepts

Self-Efficacy in CPS

The available research regarding CPS social worker self-efficacy varied among several topics. Relevant research focused on CPS social workers during the title IV-E process, which provides social work students with the opportunity to train and work in the position prior to becoming a CPS social worker (Barbee et al., 2018). Of the many factors noted, Barbee et al. (2018) found that there are several factors that impact a student's desire to stay or leave CPS social work and self-efficacy was cited as a reason that title IV-E students left the role of CPS social work after obtaining the role post-graduation. Pierce et al. (2017) provided information that supported this notion, as they concluded that posttest confidence of completing court reports and testifying decreased once the CPS student began practicing their learned skills.

When a student is enrolled in the title IV-E program, the student receives training to become a CPS social worker and is afforded the opportunity to practice their CPS social work skills prior to joining a CPS agency (Pierce et al., 2017). Within the title IV-E program, the student is expected to dedicate service to a CPS agency in exchange for having their social work education paid with title IV-E funds (Pierce et al., 2017). These learned skills obtained during the title IV-E program includes legal aspects skills such as testifying in court (Pierce et al., 2017). However, what Pierce et al. (2017) concluded that regardless of the training received prior to completing the required work component of the title IV-E program, the student's self-efficacy with legal aspects skills decreased once these skills had to be executed with real CPS cases.

Self-efficacy is influenced in part by previous training, including educational training (Bandura, 1977). Barbee et al. (2018) provided research that showed that students who completed the title IV-E program were more likely to have higher rates of self-efficacy and were less inclined to leave the position during their first year when compared to CPS social workers who were not in the title IV-E program. However, Barbee et al. (2018) does not differentiate between the CPS skills learned during the title IV-E program and does not elaborate if these skills include those pertaining to legal aspects. Pierce et al. (2017) provided conflicting information as they postulated that CPS student self-efficacy and confidence decreased. In both the Barbee et al. (2018) and the Pierce et al. (2017) research, they concluded that self-efficacy in CPS social work is relevant; however, neither study included participants from CPS social workers who were currently working in the field outside of the title IV-E program and did not include any North Carolina CPS social workers.

Other factors that influence self-efficacy include the working relationships with others (Bandura, 1977). CPS social workers rely on many successful working relationships in order to successfully conduct their duties (Berlanda et al., 2018). Berlanda et al. (2018) provided an understanding of working relationships of CPS social workers across multiple departments and how this relationship impacts self-efficacy. Trust, communication, and organizational culture were determined to be vital components of the profession that impacts self-efficacy in CPS (Berlanda et al., 2018). Similarly, Berlanda et al. (2017) also linked self-efficacy and agency trust in the CPS social worker as an influencing factor of the CPS social worker executing tasks within the

position. Additionally, self-efficacy increases the length of time a CPS social worker stays with the CPS agency (Berland et al., 2018). CPS social workers who had been in the position for less than a year were found to need higher levels of inclusion and support during their training phases with CPS to increase their self-efficacy (Berlanda et al.2018). The relationship between self-efficacy and CPS job retention is made evident and consequently imperative to the successful completion of legal aspects.

There are many factors that influence a CPS social worker's intent to stay or leave in CPS social work. Because previous research examined factors that led to a CPS social worker leaving the position, de Guzman et al. (2020) examined the CPS social worker's intent to stay or leave a position before the act of leaving the position occurred. de Guzman et al. (2020) postulated that the intent to stay or quit is determined by several factors to include self-efficacy. CPS social workers with fewer years of experience reported higher results of intent to quit when compared to CPS social workers who have been in the position for years (de Guzman et al., 2020). This supports the information learned from Berland et al. (2018) and Berlanda et al. (2017) which found that self-efficacy increased the longer the CPS social worker remained in the position.

Legal Aspects

The protection of children from child abuse and neglect began as a process of uncertainty as to how to balance a family's right to have an intact family and the intervention of child abuse and neglect (Kobrick, 2017). What is certain, however, is that laws to protect children from abuse and neglect was enacted after laws to protect animals from cruelty and abuse was established (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). The

first child abuse and neglect laws were first established in 1974 when President Nixon signed the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). Prior to this, in 1962, Dr. C. Henry Kempe published an article titled “The Battered Child Syndrome” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). This article detailed the various symptoms and adverse reactions that children display because of prolonged and current child abuse and neglect (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). Dr. Kempe encouraged medical providers to look beyond the presenting medical concerns and to explore possibilities of abuse and neglect as contributing factors (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). Once confounding factors indicated child abuse and neglect, Dr. Kempe encouraged medical professionals to document and report findings (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). Following this, a series of legal mandates were developed to strengthen the laws to protect children from abuse and neglect, clarification of the roles of workers and advocates, and clarification on federal and state oversight (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

In North Carolina, CPS social workers are mandated to participate in several training courses to aid in their development as a CPS social worker (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). These training subjects include North Carolina Pre-Service and Legal Aspects of Child Welfare in North Carolina (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (2020). These training courses detail the foundational guidelines that CPS social workers follow when engaging with families during an abuse and neglect investigation and detail the process of legal interventions (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). While the CPS social

worker is required to take the North Carolina Pre-Service training prior to completing any child abuse and neglect investigations, the Legal Aspects of Child Welfare in North Carolina is not required prior to any child abuse and neglect investigation but is required within the first year of employment (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

CPS social workers are tasked with making a case decision at the conclusion of the investigation into child abuse or neglect (Gupta-Kaplan, 2020). Based on the general statutes in North Carolina, CPS social workers can determine that services are not recommended because no abuse or neglect was found, they can determine that services are recommended and offer optional services to the family, they can determine services are needed and the family continues CPS involvement, or, the CPS social worker can seek legal intervention which includes the removal of the children from the home (Gupta-Kaplan, 2020). Available literature details how the CPS social worker's case decision is not always predicated on the evidence made available during the investigation (Lauritzen, et al., 2018). In fact, Lauritzen et al. (2018) explained that the caseload demands as well as the CPS social worker's personal feeling often assist in the CPS social worker determining the best available outcome for the family. Investigations that lead to substantiated findings have various legal outcomes.

Although many substantiated cases involve court interventions, there are instances where children and families receive supportive services without court intervention (Gupta-Kagan, 2020). Gupta-Kagan (2020) found that the checks and balances system is removed when children are removed from their homes without court intervention. Gupta-

Kagan (2020) argues that children placed temporarily with family should have court oversight and found that CPS social workers chose a temporary safety provider as opposed to court enforced removals which creates an oversight concern. Similarly, Korbick (2017) found that CPS social workers are concerned with the fact that their roles can often interfere with a parent's fourth amendment right to not have interference with their ability to maintain an intact family. However, Ferguson (2017), Fluke et al. (2016), and Wilderman et al. (2020) found that the process of court intervention should be avoided, if possible, to decrease further trauma for the children involved.

Child Protective Services Role

The practice of CPS is a community effort which relies on a reported act of alleged child abuse or neglect (Tilbury, 2019). Once reported, CPS social workers are required to coordinate with the family involved in the allegations and conduct a thorough investigation into the reported allegations (Kobrick, 2017; Tilbury, 2019). The CPS social worker will also use appropriate community resources to aid in the future prevention of child abuse and neglect regardless of the outcome of the investigation (Berrick et al., 2020). Currently, there is an overwhelming amount of scholarly reviewed literature that details the vast components of CPS and CPS social workers.

Of the available literature, what is lacking is available literature that provided an understanding of how CPS social workers determined case outcomes particularly with legal aspects skills. In fact, Bartelink et al. (2018) explained that CPS social workers make case decisions on a consistent basis but not much is known about the processes that CPS social workers used to make these decisions. Bartelink et al. (2018) explained that

much of the available CPS literature detailed the outcomes of those decisions and not the decision-making process. This, of course, is a gap in literature of how CPS social workers use their legal aspects skills to make case decisions and their understanding of this process. However, many of the scholarly review articles linked many of the issues concerning CPS social work with job retention, intent to quit, and high turnover. Based on the amount of literature located pertaining to CPS job retention concerns, I completed an exploration of this literature to illustrate what is known about self-efficacy and the impact that the available literature links to self-efficacy and CPS social work.

The position of CPS social worker has a high turnover rate which has been attributed to many factors (de Guzman et al., 2020). Many researchers have attributed the high turnover rates to secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma, other researchers examined the role of organizational leadership, supervisory support, salary, and agency culture as reasons for turnover (de Guzman, 2020; Berlanda et al., 2017). While there might be a combination of factors that ultimately contributed to a CPS social worker's reason for leaving the position, ultimately, the remaining CPS social workers and the child and family are impacted by the turnover.

There are several negative impacts experienced by the remaining CPS social workers and the children and families left from the caseload of the CPS social worker who left the position. Curry (2019) implies that for many children, the exit of a CPS social worker causes similar adverse emotions that are equivalent to those felt when abandoned by a trusted caretaker or parent. For many children, the CPS social worker is the only stable and positive adult in the child's life (Curry 2019). Consequently, for the

cases that remain open upon the CPS social worker's departure, researchers concluded that this caused a high caseload demand for the remaining social workers (Curry, 2019). This demand caused impacted agencies to use additional funding to cover additional costs of overtime from the remaining CPS social workers who used overtime to meet the new caseload demands (Curry, 2019).

CPS high caseload demands created strains that negatively impact the children and families involved with CPS. What is known, based on available research, is that the investigations into allegations of child abuse and neglect are not thoroughly completed and many concerns that children express are not addressed (Ferguson, 2017). de Guzman et al. (2020), Berlanda et al. (2017), and Berlanda et al. (2018) postulated, however, that CPS social workers who remain in the position over a year do not have the same struggles with managing higher caseloads as those CPS social workers who have been in the position for less than a year.

Based on the aforementioned information, the available literature detailed that the turnover in CPS, in many instances, is connected to self-efficacy hence showing the importance of self-efficacy in CPS. Although the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (2020) detailed that training is required for CPS social workers, the Legal Aspects of Child Welfare in North Carolina is only required within the first year of employment and not required prior to a CPS social worker conducting child abuse and neglect investigations. What was learned from available literature is that turnover in the CPS social work position occurs within the first year of employment (Berlanda et al., 2018).

Summary

Although not a new public concern, there is still more to learn about child abuse and neglect which was made evident by the gap in available research. The available research provided a wealth of information that explored the complex tasks of CPS, the factors that led to CPS social worker turnover, and the impact of child abuse and neglect on children. After examining the available research, I identified the gap in research. There is limited available research that seeks to understand the CPS social workers' self-efficacy with legal aspects skills during the child abuse and neglect investigation. The importance of this topic will help explore the various reasons as to why 40% of the children in North Carolina who are alleged to be abused or neglected do not have safety and risk evaluated during the investigation. This is a problem because evaluating safety and risk during the child abuse and neglect investigation is a primary component in determining a case decision.

To peruse the vast amount of available research on CPS legal aspects, I used a strategic plan to explore the topic by using key words and combining those key words in various phrases to obtain relevant available research. Although there is available research that examines legal aspects in CPS, many of the available research focused on Title IV-E CPS students and did not include CPS social workers in North Carolina. While there is available research on self-efficacy and CPS social work, many of the available research focused on Title IV-E CPS social workers.

Self-efficacy is the theoretical framework that best aligns with understanding the CPS social workers' legal aspects skills for several reasons. First, self-efficacy is a self-

defined process that occurs when one examines their ability to successfully complete a desired task. Self-efficacy is the cumulative process of examining what one has learned through training and observations, and combining those things learned with one's own confidence to determine if one would be able to complete a task that meets or exceeds the expectations set for the task. It is through this process that one determines if they should or should not exert the energy needed to complete a task. Self-efficacy can be used to examine through the lens of the individual and can be applied to the individuals' process of examining their tasks within their worldview. Based on this, to understand self-efficacy through the lens of the CPS social worker, one will need to examine the CPS social workers' understanding of the objectives and outcomes of the tasks that CPS social workers complete with their legal aspects skills, examine the CPS social workers' understanding of how to complete these skills, examine how CPS social workers learned these skills, and then examine how the CPS social worker explains their confidence in reaching the objectives while using these skills. It is through the process of self-efficacy that a CPS social worker would determine if they would execute their legal aspects skills during a CPS investigation. Research that examines the self-efficacy of CPS social workers in North Carolina during the child abuse and neglect investigation will provide many implications for positive social change.

The information obtained by researching CPS social worker self-efficacy with legal aspects can inform CPS social workers, CPS supervisors, Department of Social Services, families, trainers, legal staff, and other legislators. With this information, CPS social workers can examine their own self-efficacy with legal aspects and obtain

additional training if needed. CPS supervisors will be able to assist CPS social workers with the gaps in skills that might be needed. Trainers and legal staff will be able to review current legal aspects training and update components as needed. Additionally, families will be better able to understand the process of CPS and the legal aspects that occur during the process. Most importantly, the services provided to children who have been alleged to be victims of child abuse and neglect can be improved.

The review of the literature provided substantial amount of information and detailed the components of self-efficacy, legal aspects, and CPS. However, the CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects in North Carolina is still left to be understood. To that end, in the next section I described how I used the GoToMeeting platform to complete virtual interviews to provide North Carolina CPS social workers with the opportunity to provide their understanding of their experiences with legal aspects.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative inquiry was to understand the CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects when completing investigations of child abuse or neglect in rural counties in North Carolina. The problem is that in North Carolina, CPS social workers review safety and risk during the CPS investigation with only 60% of the CPS investigations (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.b). In this study, I asked the following research questions: (a) What are the perceptions and implementation processes of legal aspects as it relates to rural North Carolina CPS social work interventions in child abuse and neglect cases? and (b) How is self-efficacy perceived among rural North Carolina CPS social workers in the profession of investigating child abuse and neglect? I followed a basic qualitative design to answer these research question. A basic qualitative design, also known as a generic qualitative design, is often used when the research topic is fairly new or there is little available scholarly research about the topic (Kahlke, 2018).

This chapter details the rationale for the use of the basic qualitative design and the major components of this design. Additionally, this chapter details the role of the researcher and the ethical considerations based on this role. Following this is the methodology section which details the rationale for the participant selection, the data collection instruments that were used, and the procedures that were used for recruitment, participation, data collection, and the plan for data analysis. Finally, this chapter will conclude with issues of trustworthiness and examine credibility, transferability,

dependability, confirmability, and ethics. The summary of this chapter will feature an overview along with an introduction into Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

What are the perceptions and implementation processes of legal aspects as it relates to rural North Carolina CPS social work interventions in child abuse and neglect cases?

How is self-efficacy perceived among rural North Carolina CPS social workers in the profession of investigating child abuse and neglect?

A qualitative inquiry was most appropriate for this study. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), a qualitative study is subjective in nature; therefore, I used a qualitative inquiry as this study was subjective. Ravitch and Carl (2016) proposed that a qualitative study does not give a directional relationship between variables. I did not assume a directional relationship as the purpose of this study was to gain understanding through the lens of the participant. Within this qualitative inquiry, I gathered information about the participants' beliefs, feelings, and assumptions which exceeded the scope of a quantitative design. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), these elements are not collected in a quantitative study. I explored several qualitative traditions when reviewing alignment. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that it is important to review and rule out all designs and to select the design that aligns with the study. I determined that of the designs, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, case study, and narrative did not align with the purpose of this study. However, I determined that the basic qualitative

design best aligned with the purpose of this study because of the ability to be flexible and reach the desired elements of this study. Kahlke (2018) proposed that the basic qualitative design be used when the need to be flexible is needed.

Kennedy (2016) stated that the basic qualitative inquiry is used when the researcher wants to highlight the participant's worldview based on the participant's subjective experiences. Based on this definition, by using the basic qualitative design, I assumed that an analytic lens would need to be used to understand the phenomenon through the subjective lens of each participant. Although a strength of the basic qualitative design is the fluidity of incorporating elements from other methodological traditions, the caveat is that this design can negatively impact the overall study if it is not well aligned and grounded in a theoretical or conceptual framework (Kennedy, 2016). Researchers use the basic qualitative approach when the researcher needs an opportunity to complete a study that does not align with a quantitative design but also does not align with other qualitative designs (Kennedy, 2016). It is, however, worth noting that although phenomenology closely mirrors the underpinnings of the basic qualitative design (Kennedy, 2016), I was not concerned with the collective understanding or lived experiences of legal aspects during the CPS investigation but rather the individual perceptions of the phenomenon.

Role of the Researcher

Within the qualitative design, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument for the study. As such, I was an observer within the study and used observation skills to collect the data. This included recording by writing notes of the

observed verbal and nonverbal responses during the individual interviews. Noting is a critical element of the qualitative interviewing process. I later used these notes during the coding process. I also followed a semistructured interview process to ensure that the questions asked remains focused on the purpose of the interview. A semistructured interviewing approach was used so that the participant would expound upon their responses and so that I could follow the participant while also ensuring that the main objectives of the study remained at the forefront. I ensured that respect was given to the participants' time and that discussions remained relevant to the purpose.

Within the state of North Carolina, I held a position of supervisor at a Department of Social Services in a rural county. However, the supervisory position is not in the area of CPS. This position required interactions with other supervisors at other counties and sometimes staff at other counties. Before becoming a supervisor, I worked as a CPS social worker at the same county where I am a supervisor. Because of this, participants were not recruited from the county while I was employed at the county. This ensured that there were no power dynamics over the participants. Additionally, I used my university email address. I used this email address so that there was a clear separation of the two roles. Within this process, I explained my professional role and how this role differed and would not interfere with my role as the researcher. Following Walden Institutional Review Board's (IRB) ethical guidelines, I informed each of the participants on the role of the researcher and their role within this study.

With the previous experience that I had as a CPS social worker, I ensured that any biases were mitigated and reduced the chances that biases negatively impacted the data.

To do this, I used member checking to assist in the review of the interview questions as well as the analysis of the data. Member checking adds to the trustworthiness of the data and provides assurance to the reader that steps were taken to ensure that quality data was extracted during the process and was not tainted by the biases of the researcher (Daniel, 2018). I followed Saldana's (2016) approach and used reflective notes throughout the process, and I kept journals and notes of thoughts and feelings I had before, during, and after interviews for recall purposes.

Methodology

Participant Selection

Selecting the right participants for the study was an important task to complete as using the wrong participants can create flaws in the data (Ellington & Sotirin, 2020). For this study, participants were employed at a Department of Social Services in a rural county in North Carolina. Additionally, participants were CPS social workers who have had experiences with conducting abuse and neglect investigations. Adding to this, participants had experience with completing legal aspects. For this study to reach saturation, I aimed to obtain at least nine participants. Saturation is defined as the point in which no new information is learned from participants as information already gained is continuously repeated (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldana, 2016).

I used a purposive sampling approach to obtain at least nine participants for this study. A purposive sampling approach is the intentional selection of participants based on a set of criteria (Ames et al., 2019). A purposive sampling approach is generally used

when the study calls for participants who meet a certain qualification or have exact experience and characteristics (Ames et al, 2019). Using a purposive sampling approach aligned with the purpose of this study. The recruitment process was intentional as participants had to (a) be a CPS social worker, (b) be employed in a rural county, (c) have experience conducting abuse and neglect investigation, and (d) have experience with legal aspects skills. Based on the key factors in addressing the most important role of CPS social work which is to identify safety and risk of abused children, this study was not about the impact of multiculturalism. By having a defined participant criterion, the depth of information obtained was increased.

I used a snowball method as part of the purposive sampling approach until saturation was reached. Snowballing is a component of purposive sampling and is the process in which current participants assist in the recruitment of other participants through recommendation (Ames et al., 2019). CPS social workers were able to identify other CPS social workers who met the participation criterion and were able to introduce the future participant to the study. This approach yielded one participant.

The sample size of nine participants was the goal for this study and the nine participants allowed the study to reach saturation. A smaller sample size is typically used with a basic qualitative approach when compared to other qualitative designs, like grounded theory, which requires a much large sample size due to the focus of the study (Kahlke, 2018). I conducted a thorough review of the literature to assist in the determination of the sample size for this study. Of the available literature reviewed, Berlanda et al. (2017) and Tilbury (2019) used sample sizes of 70 and over. These were

qualitative studies with CPS social workers and are closely aligned with the purpose of this study; however, there were no available scholarly articles that specifically addressed CPS social worker self-efficacy with legal aspects. I reviewed literature by Berlanda et al. (2017) and they focused on a general concept of self-efficacy with CPS social workers and Tilbury (2019) focused on the legal aspects skills that CPS social workers used.

A large sample size was outside of the scope of this current study and was not feasible for the current study. However, I used the purposive approach to obtain depth and to reach saturation faster. Ravitch and Carl (2016) encouraged this approach to reach saturation. Saturation occurs when the information that has been learned from participants continues to show up as common responses from other participants (Hennink et al, 2019). Saturation can occur at any time and is not dependent upon higher participation numbers (Hennink et al., 2019). For this study, saturation occurred when there were no new thematic concepts emerging due to the rich data that had been obtained. As such, coding occurred throughout the sampling process. By using this approach, I minimized the likelihood of missing or forgetting important information and knowing when saturation had been reached increased.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument in qualitative research is the researcher (Korstjen & Moser, 2018). As the researcher, I developed in-depth interview questions which guided the interview process with the participants. To minimize bias in the development of the research questions, I reviewed available literature with similar scope to assist in the formation of the interview questions. By reviewing similar literature, the trustworthiness

of a study increases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also used member checking to review the research questions. This assures the reader that steps were taken to ensure rigor (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used a voice recorder, in addition to the GoToMeeting software, to record the participant interviews. Using more than one source to record the interviews reduced the chances of software malfunction and increased the preservation of the data obtained. Multiple avenues of recording the data should be considered before the interviewing process begins (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I used shorthand note taking to jot down any relevant information during the individual interviews. I recorded all relevant information such as the participant's nonverbal statements or background setting that I observed during the interviews. Using these techniques captures the entire essence of the interview and extends the available information that is used during data analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The directors and program administrators of the Department of Social Services in the rural counties in North Carolina received emails asking permission to have the recruitment information disseminated to the CPS social workers. The legal aspects training staff were also contacted and asked to disseminate the invitations at the end of the course. Additionally, I posted flyers to the National Association of Social Workers online networking platform. Walden University posted the flyer on the Walden University website. Rudestam and Newton (2015) explained that it is important to obtain the correct participants for a study to increase trustworthiness. To obtain the correct participants, I recruited from the Department of Social Services where CPS social

workers are employed to ensure that the correct participants were selected for the study which increased the trustworthiness of the data obtained. The recruitment flyer included the purpose of the study, their potential role in the study, the benefits of completing the study, my point of contact information, gift card information, and who they can contact if there were any concerns. The flyer also included a statement indicating that participation is voluntary and that participants can withdraw their participation at any time. A copy of the flyer can be found in Appendix B.

Once contacted by a potential participant, I completed a series of questions with the potential participant to ensure that they understood the recruitment flyer and to answer any questions that they might have. I asked questions to ensure that they met the qualifications to be participants in the study. I provided each potential participant with the IRB required information which included the informed consent. Following guidelines provided by the IRB maintains the integrity of a study from the beginning (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Email was used to conduct the screening process and a copy of the screening process is in Appendix C.

Once I determined that the potential participant was appropriate for the study, I used the GoToMeeting software to coordinate with the participant and established a date and time to complete the interview. I informed each participant that the link to the interview was specifically designed for their interview and should not be shared with others as the interview was designed to maintain confidentiality. Although in qualitative research it is encouraged to use face-to-face interviewing particularly within the participant's setting (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), I used GoToMeeting due to the current

COVID-19 pandemic. Using the virtual platform, reduce the continued spread of COVID-19. Using the GoToMeeting platform provided some of the benefits of a face-to-face interview as the use of a camera provided the opportunity to see a participant's face during the interview.

I used GoToMeeting to collect the data. I purchased the license to use this platform as it provided a secure link that I disseminated to the participant. Within the GoToMeeting software, I used the video formation to interview participants. Due to technical difficulties and personal choice, some participants opted to not use their video format. For the participants who opted to use their video, non-verbal feedback was observable much like a face-to-face interview. By using this software, the interview was also recorded. Each of the participants were informed of the recording and informed that the recordings would be used to assist with transcription purposes. In case of software malfunction, I used a voice recorder to also record the interviews so that the data was not lost if the GoToMeeting software malfunctioned and did not record. Three of the interviews fully or partially malfunctioned in the GoToMeeting software and I used the backup voice recorder to transcribe the data.

GoToMeeting is designed to meet HIPPA requirements for confidentiality and offers the opportunity to lock the meeting once all participants have joined to prevent others from hacking into the meeting (GoToMeeting, 2020). Additionally, the GoToMeeting (2020) software uses encryption technology that meets government level security measures. At the conclusion of the interview, each participant was notified of the

end and was notified that they will be provided the opportunity to review the data at a later date.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan is the detailed process that a researcher uses to determine how the data collected will be analyzed for interpretation (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). As such, the data analysis plan is a key component in the qualitative research process. This plan includes how data will be transcribed and coded (Saldana, 2016). While coding can occur without the use of software, I used the data analysis software NVivo. By using a data analysis software, data that might have otherwise been overlooked with hand coding can be found (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldana, 2016). I compared the coding in the NVivo software to the hand coding. I reviewed each transcript, and I took the necessary steps to make corrections and clean the transcripts. The NVivo identified codes were not automatically accepted but rather they were reviewed and compared to the codes found during the hand coding process.

The GoToMeeting software provided the opportunity for transcription to be completed if selected. For the purposes of transcription, each GoToMeeting participant video had transcription selected. Once the transcription was complete, the transcript was downloaded and then each recorded video was replayed while reading the transcript. Daniel (2018) suggests that researchers should review and clean transcripts to increase trustworthiness. I reviewed the transcripts while playing the videos and I ensured that what was stated was accurately transcribed. During this process, I reviewed each of the transcripts and corrections were made when necessary to ensure the interview was

captured verbatim. Once corrections had been made to the transcripts, I emailed the transcripts to the participant for review and corrections if needed. I then uploaded the transcripts into the NVivo software. Once uploaded, I completed a line-by-line coding process to hand code the data. Saldana (2016) explained that line-by-line coding is cumbersome but is used in many approaches. Once the line-by-line hand coding process was completed, I used the NVivo software to code the data. After this, I reviewed the codes and used a thematic content analysis to identify the emerging themes. Emerging themes are identified once coding and categories are established (Saldana, 2016).

The coding process in this study included an open, axial, and selective coding process. Open coding involves the process of reviewing the data that has been obtained and then strategically placing those codes into intentional categories (Alhassan et al., 2019). The axial coding process involves systematically reviewing the data after it has been placed intentionally into categories and finding new ways to string the collection of data together (Alhassan et al., 2019). Finally, selective coding is the process in which the categories are reviewed and then the main categories are identified (Alhassan et al., 2019).

The thematic analysis refers to the process of arranging data into themes based on congruent conclusions (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Thematic analysis is a common analysis plan used in qualitative research; however, it should only be used by the researcher when the data analysis plan is to identify themes which best answers the research question (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The NVivo software was used to develop

the thematic analysis and not as the primary tool for data analysis. I reviewed the identified themes and made all necessary adjustments.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the overall quality of a study and whether rigorous applications were applied to ensure a high level of quality (Korstjen & Moser, 2018). In similar terms, trustworthiness determines if the findings of a study are reliable. To determine this, qualitative researchers use four categories to test the research. These four categories include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). By using these four approaches and providing rich details of how each of the categories were applied, I increased the trustworthiness of the study.

Credibility

There are several techniques that are used to ensure credibility and the researcher determines the steps used (Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Daniel, 2018). However, the researcher is not required to use all options available to determine credibility; instead, the researcher will use those techniques that are most appropriate for the study (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Credibility means that the findings presented in the study can be correlated with the data which is correlated with the research question (Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This means that the alignment is clear and that the reader can justify the findings based on the details provided from the data which aligned with the research question. Preparation for credibility is a fluid process that happens throughout the entire process of the study. The many strategies that can be used to ensure

credibility include member checking, triangulation, debriefing, reflexivity, and prolonged engagement and observation (Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016)).

For this study to meet credibility standards, I used a combination of the several methods. Reflexivity is the ongoing process of acknowledging and setting aside one's biases for the purposes of the research to minimize interferences of those biases (Korstjen & Moser, 2018). I used reflexivity to maintain credibility. To do this, I kept a journal to note the biases and personal feelings throughout the research process. I reviewed these entries to make sure that the documented biases did not have any influences on the research process. I also used member checking during this process. Member checking includes a third-party analysis of the information (Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016)). For this study, I consulted with the dissertation chair and second committee member to assist in the review of the interview questions and the analysis of the data. This process ensured alignment and increased the value of credibility. Participants were debriefed and I reviewed the data I collected with them to ensure that their responses were captured in the manner in which they were intended.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the likelihood that the findings of a study can be used and transferred to other individuals with similar makeup and setting (Crawford, 2016; Korstjen & Moser, 2018). For transferability to occur, the reader must be able to draw upon the rich details provided in the findings and understand the findings based on the context in which they are given (Crawford, 2016; Korstjen & Moser, 2018). To aide in this process, I provided rich descriptions of the setting, context, and meaning to the

findings. I used purposive sampling which ensured that the findings were derived from participants who were appropriate for the study. By using purposive sampling, the participants involved were able to provide relevant data. By using CPS social workers in rural counties with experiences using legal aspects during abuse and neglect investigations, the findings can be transferred to other states with rural CPS social workers who have similar experiences.

Dependability

Dependability is the degree in which the study can be replicated based on the thorough details provided by the researcher with similar participants in similar settings (Crawford, 2016; Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability is a clear and unveiled accounting of the process from the beginning of the study through the end of the study. For the purposes of dependability, I maintained notes which were used to describe the processes and steps taken during the research process. Also, I completed an analysis of the decisions I made during the research process along with a description as to why I made those decisions. I used member checking during this process to make sure that the details provided were clear and descriptive.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the ability for other researchers to draw similar conclusions based on the data presented because the findings are free from researcher bias (Crawford, 2016; Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Because reflexivity was implemented throughout the entire process, there was little to no bias interference and the findings met confirmability standards. I kept a journal of all biases and with the use of

member checking, the collected data accurately reflected the findings. During the debrief, I provided participants the opportunity to review their responses to ensure accuracy.

Ethical Procedures

Over the years, research and ethical procedures evolved. Currently, ethical guidelines must be followed strictly during the process of research to protect participants, the researcher, and the institution approving the research (Shaw et al., 2019). As a student completing research, it was imperative that I review the ethical expectations and adhere to the outlines and expectations to ensure the safety of all involved. Prior to beginning any steps of the research process, I received IRB approval to complete the study. I completed all necessary forms and the committee chair reviewed all forms. I then submitted the forms to the IRB. I addressed all follow-up questions from the IRB and I made any requested changes. I submitted any changes to the data collection procedures to the IRB. I received IRB approval prior to implementing any changes in the data collection process.

During the data collection process, I emailed each of the participants a copy of the IRB approved informed consent form and I acknowledged their voluntary participation in the research. Informed consent is a critical component of the process because it ensures that the participant is fully informed to reduce harm to the participant (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). I informed each of the participants of the role of a student researcher and I informed each participation that they can withdraw their participation at any time. I also provided the contact information on who to call should they have any concerns throughout the process. I maintained confidentiality of all recordings and transcripts, and

I used pseudonyms in addition to redacting any other identifying information. I provided each participant with an explanation that although their interviews will be kept confidential, the raw data, such as the transcripts, was shared with the dissertation chair for member checking purposes only. However, I redacted their names and identifiable information. Because the interviews did not occur face-to-face but instead occurred virtually, I encouraged participants to meet in a secure location of their choosing and to wear headphones to reduce the likelihood that others will hear the interview. I completed each of the interviews in my home office and I used a white noise machine outside of the office to minimize the likelihood that others in the home heard the interviews.

I used the GoToMeeting platform to record the interviews and I secured the information by creating a login and password. I kept the backup audio recorder in a locked briefcase and stored it in a non-disclosed area in my home. The data is secured and will be kept for five years as required by the IRB and subsequently destroyed after this timeframe.

Summary

This chapter detailed the methodology process for this study which included a purposive sampling approach to recruit participants who were qualified and relevant to the research. By using this sampling method, participants provided rich details which assisted in the process of reaching saturation. Participants were employed CPS social workers in rural North Carolina with experience completing legal aspects during the investigations of child abuse and neglect. The process of recruitment met IRB ethical standards and followed all protocols required by the IRB. The collected data from the

individual interviews was secured and will continue to be kept secure. The data has been redacted and contains non-identifiable information. This study meets trustworthiness standards as a plan was established and subsequently followed through to meet credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability standards. In Chapter Four, the results of the study will be provided.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative inquiry was to understand the CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects when completing investigations of child abuse or neglect in rural counties in North Carolina. The research questions for this study were:

What are the perceptions and implementation processes of legal aspects as it relates to rural North Carolina CPS social work interventions in child abuse and neglect cases?

How is self-efficacy perceived among rural North Carolina CPS social workers in the profession of investigating child abuse and neglect?

This chapter details the participant's demographics as well as the setting. Additionally, this chapter details the information regarding the data collection process and data analysis process. Finally, the chapter concludes with the evidence of trustworthiness, results, and a summary.

Setting

The CPS social workers who consented to participate in this study were from rural counties in North Carolina. During the data collection process, many of the participants were working in counties that were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the participants discussed the negative impact of COVID-19, which included stress with face-to-face contact with clients, turnover, high caseloads, and working on a remote schedule. The trauma experienced due to working through a pandemic may have influenced or impacted the participant's understanding of the interview questions.

Additionally, legal aspects trainings that are normally offered in person to CPS social workers were being offered virtually, which for some participants meant that they had not had the training although they were completing legal aspects during their investigations.

Some agencies had a change in leadership and legal team members. This change impacted internal policy and procedures and may influence the participant's interpretation of their self-efficacy. Some participants also discussed that due to turnover and staffing shortages, they are working dual roles. These critical changes at local agencies may have influenced how participants interpreted the interview questions as well as their responses to the questions. I maintained an audit trail to ensure outside influences did not impact the interpreted results of the study due to the many factors that had the potential to impact the study.

Demographics

A total of nine participants consented to participate in a virtual semistructured interview. During the data collection process, flyers were submitted to 69 rural counties in North Carolina as an approach to increase recruiting response in diverse participant demographics. Each of the participants had experience completing legal aspects and conducting investigations of child abuse and neglect. One participant identified as being 18 to 29 years old, two participants identified as being 30 to 39 years old, two participants identified as being 40 to 49 years old, and four participants identified as being 50 years old and older. Eight of the participants self-identified as female and one participant self-identified as male. Five participants self-identified as Black and four participants self-identified as White. Five of the participants had 1 to 5 years of CPS

experience, two participants had 11 to 15 years of experience, and one participant had over 15 years of experience. Three participants identified a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education while six identified that a master's degree was their highest level of education. Presented in Table 1 is the overview of the demographic information of each participant.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Age Range	Gender	Race	Years of Experience	Highest Education Level
Social Worker A	18-29	Female	White	1-5	Bachelor's
Social Worker B	40-49	Female	Black	11-15	Bachelor's
Social Worker C	50+	Female	White	15+	Master's
Social Worker D	50+	Female	White	11-15	Bachelor's
Social Worker E	40-49	Female	Black	1-5	Master's
Social Worker F	30-39	Female	Black	1-5	Master's
Social Worker G	50+	Female	Black	1-5	Master's
Social Worker H	50+	Male	White	1-5	Bachelor's
Social Worker I	30-39	Female	Black	1-5	Master's

Data Collection

There were nine participants who participated in the study. I met virtually with each of the participants, who accessed their unique log in information for GoToMeeting. I followed a semistructured interview format and I used GoToMeeting to record each of the interviews. I also used a voice recording system as a back-up recorder. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. I asked the participants 14 questions from the interview guide with some participants being asked follow-up questions for clarity. The data collection process lasted 5 months from May 2021 through October 2021.

I maintained an audit trail to capture variations in the data collection process. I noted a few variations in the audit trail. First, I added a \$10.00 gift card which later increased to \$25.00. Originally, there was no offer of a gift card to thank participants. Next, I added a snowballing approach to the data collection process. Originally, I anticipated needing ten participants for the study to reach saturation; however, saturation was reached with nine participants. Lastly, I added the recruitment flyer to the National Association of Social Workers forum discussion board. All the changes to the data collection process were reviewed and approved by Walden University's IRB. The IRB approval number was 05-04-21-0972979.

The data collection process was met with some unusual circumstances. Even though a thorough recruitment process was used, participation remained low. A total of 16 potential participants initially reached out for consideration but after receiving the consent form, many of the participants opted to decline the interview. The data collection

process occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which also caused delays in potential participants viewing the recruitment flyer due to staggered office days and remote work.

Data Analysis

The process of moving from coded units to themes began with the transcription process. The first step involved several days of transcribing and cleaning the transcript of each interview. To ensure accuracy, once transcribed, I played the recordings several times while reading the transcripts. I used this process to ensure that the transcripts accurately captured the information. From there, I uploaded the clean transcripts into the data analysis software NVivo. After uploading the clean transcripts, I used an open, axial, and selective coding process.

The coding process began with open coding as outlined and detailed by Saldana (2016). I followed an iterative process during the open coding process. The iterative process includes a continuous review of the data while coding (Saldana, 2016). While reviewing transcripts, I wrote the preliminary codes in a journal to capture the first thought process when reviewing the interviews. The process of conducting preliminary coding provides a starting point for initial thoughts when reviewing the data (Saldana, 2016). Later, I completed line-by-line coding. Line-by-line coding is an intricate process which requires the researcher to code each line of the transcribed document rather than paragraphs of the document (Saldana, 2016). I then compared the preliminary codes to the line-by-line coding to determine a final code. I manually completed this process in NVivo. Once the information was manually coded, I used NVivo in the auto coding process to compare and review codes that might not have been considered.

Once the full code list from all transcripts was complete, the process of axial coding and selective coding began. The demographic information identifying race, years of experience, gender, and degree level was obtained as part of the recruitment procedures. However, these demographics were not relevant in the analysis of this study in focusing on the role of CPS social work which is to identify safety and risk of abused and neglected children.

I used code clusters to combine similar codes. During this grouping process, I began the selective coding process. I created categories to establish the relationships between the codes. Based on the relationships, some codes were identified as having no value and were later eliminated from the code list. Throughout the entire coding process, I used analytic memo writing to capture emerging codes and themes.

The process of analyzing the data followed an iterative process. Saldana (2016) defines the iterative process as the process of reviewing data simultaneously with data collection. I listened to the interviews and reviewed the data several times while reviewing the final code list and categories. I used an audit trail to document the emerging themes. I compared the audit trail and analytic memos to the categories. Additionally, I reviewed the research questions and then grouped the categories into subsets under the research questions. I used this to provide a view of how the responses answered the research questions. The next step in the process included reviewing the information to determine themes.

This study reached saturation with nine participants. Throughout the interview process, common themes began to emerge by participant six and saturation was

confirmed by participant nine. For example, Social Workers F, G, H, and I talked about the importance of the role of the supervisor and the legal team which was also a discussion with Social Workers A, B, C, and E.

The themes emerged by viewing the categories, the audit trail, interview notes, and the analytic memos and finding common implications. I grouped these codes in a new section within NVivo so that I would not lose the original grouping of the codes. That way, I could review the data and review the reimagined groups several times to ensure an accurate and thorough process. Once this process was complete, the following themes were identified:

1. Legal training needs
2. Legal aspects is a complex process which contradicts policy
3. Race, class, and resources
4. Leadership and legal teams impact self-efficacy
5. Self-efficacy challenges decreases with longevity
6. Self-efficacy begins before becoming a CPS social worker
7. Paperwork and caseload demands

To decrease discrepancies with the data, each participant received a copy of their transcript. I asked the participants to review their transcript and to provide feedback regarding accuracy. Each of the participants provided verification that their information was captured accurately. This process is known as member checking. Additionally, I immediately updated any discrepancies that were found in the transcripts when I listened to the interviews while simultaneously reading the transcripts. For some participants,

clarification was needed in sections that were inaudible and the participants provided clarification.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is used to analyze the legitimacy of the research. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are each a component of trustworthiness. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument. As such, providing evidence of trustworthiness is critical. For this study, I used several components to meet trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the intentional process of ensuring that the data collected is congruent with the research questions (Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Daniel, 2018). Establishing credibility is completed by employing various techniques. For this research, I used member checking to ensure credibility. I provided each participant a typed copy of their transcript. I encouraged each participant to read the transcript and to provide feedback. I used this process to ensure that the transcripts accurately depicted the information that the participant intended to share. Eight participants in this study did not indicate that there were changes needed to their transcript. One participant's transcript did require changes as the information regarding their degree and length of time in the profession were inaudible. I included this update in the transcript.

Reflexivity is another process that was used to maintain credibility (Daniel, 2018; Korstjen & Moser, 2018). Reflexivity is the process of documenting researcher biases. A critical component I used during this process was reflexivity. I used this process to adopt

a not knowing stance when collecting and analyzing the data. I used a journal to capture reflective thoughts and I reviewed the journal to ensure that there was a separation between personal biases and the data.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability to generalize the study findings to the population (Crawford, 2016; Korstjen & Moser, 2018). While this study is a sample of the population, by following concepts to ensure transferability, the study findings can be extended beyond the sample population. However, this study might not be transferable to communities with CPS social workers who identify in demographic groups outside of the participants in this study. For this study, I maintained an audit trail to document thick descriptions. Additionally, I followed a purposive sampling approach to recruit participants in rural counties with direct CPS experience. I also used snowball sampling. One participant referred a participant who met the criteria for participation.

Dependability

In qualitative research, dependability is achieved when there is clear alignment in the research process from beginning to end (Crawford, 2016; Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For dependability to be reached, the researcher must provide a clear accounting of the consistent steps taken during the research process (Crawford, 2016; Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). If there were any deviations from the intended methods, the researcher should make these changes clear to guarantee dependability. During this study, I used several steps to maintain dependability standards. I used a complete audit trail to capture each step of the process. Additionally, I used

member checking. I consulted with the dissertation chair and the second committee member to analyze process and steps taken during the research process.

Confirmability

Confirmability is reached when other researchers can understand how and why the researcher arrived at the presented results (Crawford, 2016; Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Because the researcher is the primary instrument in the qualitative process, it is imperative that the researcher adopts a not knowing stance and uses an objective lens when analyzing and presenting the results. I was reflective to maintain an objective stance. As part of member checking, I asked participants to review their transcripts and provide feedback if needed.

Results

The purpose of this study was to understand CPS social workers' self-efficacy with legal aspects during the investigation of child abuse and neglect. By conducting a thorough analysis of the data collected from nine CPS social workers, seven themes emerged with one subtheme. These themes are presented to answer the research questions. What was learned during the analysis is that a social worker's self-efficacy is determined by many factors when completing legal aspects skills during an investigation. Based on the analysis, there are legal aspects training needs, legal aspects is a complex process which contradicts policy, the legal aspects process differs depending on race, class, and resources, leadership and legal teams impact self-efficacy, self-efficacy challenges decreases with longevity, self-efficacy begins before becoming a CPS social worker, and there are high paperwork and caseload demands.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions and implementation processes of legal aspects as it relates to rural North Carolina CPS social work interventions in child abuse and neglect cases?

Theme 1: Legal Aspects Training Needs

During the analysis, an initial emerging theme was the need for ongoing legal aspects training. Eight of the participants identified having completed the legal aspects training while one participant identified as not having completed the training. The participants also identified legal aspects training from their legal team as being a critical component with their ability to understand and complete legal aspects skills. Social Worker B describes this process in the interview: “They got the judges and the attorneys to get together, and we went into the courtroom and had a training with them... That was a turning point for me to be more confident in the courtroom testifying.”

The participants also discussed the need for refresher courses or training that provides a more thorough overview of different topics within legal aspects. Social Worker H stated, “I think the one thing that I would try to expand on is the legal aspects in the different types of hearings that you encounter as the CPS worker.” When asked what could be added to the legal aspects training, Social Worker G stated, “The actual petition and like the adjudication paperwork. Those two for me.” Social Worker H stated, “...I would change is just kind of breaking it down better. So that for those of us that don't have that law degree behind their names can better understand the legal piece of it...” Social Worker D stated, “...maybe have refresher courses for people who have been there for maybe every 5 years...”

Additionally, the participants further stated that they rely on seasoned CPS social workers to assist them with any legal training needs that they did not receive in the legal aspects course. Social Worker B illustrated this by stating, "...I was doing petitions and other stuff prior to training, because of the lack of availability. So, I relied on co-workers to walk me through the process." Social Worker I reinforced this and stated, "... I need a refresher course. I depend heavily on coworkers and supervisors... and I would like to be more confident in my own skills and knowledge as it relates to the legal aspects. I kind of want to have it memorized to the point where I don't have to contact anyone."

Theme 2: Legal Aspects is a Complex Process which Contradicts Policy

The participants described the legal aspects process as one that is dependent upon case allegations. The social workers describe a process that includes working with their supervisor and the legal team very closely when using their legal skills. The participants also described the legal aspects process as one that contradicts policy.

Social Worker C described the contradiction between policy and the law as something that lacks clarity by stating "...but there's a little shaded gray and that's what I'm talking about. Between law and policy. And that's where we operate sometimes and it's not clear." Social Worker G further expands on this concept and stated, "...what we have for policy versus what they have for practices sometimes bumps heads."

Social Worker I was discussing internal policy and stated, "...it is in fact overwhelming, right, in the back of your mind, you're like, did I do everything that I needed to do at that particular moment?"

Theme 3: Race, Class, and Resources

The final theme to answer research question one centered around race, class, and resources. The participants stated how the participant's race, class, and availability to resources can influence or impact the use of legal aspects skills. The following quotes illustrate this concept.

Social Worker C was asked a follow-up question for clarity when Social Worker C stated that their confidence with legal aspects would be lower if they worked in an urban county. Part of Social Worker C's response was, "so, this racial inequality thing, I'm not sure if I can handle that if it were spouted at me, because that's not who I am. And so, I'm not sure if that's my weakness." Social Worker B described how legal aspects for a family changed due to their status in the community by stating, "I was talking about the privilege that was being given to a specific family, and I talked about how culture, and how finances, and the social class influenced a lot of the safety planning for this child."

Social Worker H provided an understanding as to how resources can influence the legal aspects process.

"I've come down here, and the resources down here are more challenging than in the city. In the city, you can get resources for sexual abuse, duly diagnosed mental health down here in this county...It's more of a challenge for resources for family, and I think that's the difference... I feel, more confident, because that I can now provide additional resources. I'm more familiar with the resources here, in this county then when I first started."

Research Question 2: How is self-efficacy perceived among rural North Carolina CPS social workers in the profession of investigating child abuse and neglect?

Theme 4: Leadership and Legal Teams Impact Self-Efficacy

The participants described their self-efficacy in different stages. One of these stages included the impact leadership and the legal team have on their self-efficacy. The participants described the working relationship with their leadership and legal team as one that is imperative to the overall functioning of their CPS skills. The following quotes illustrate the impact of these relationships.

Social Worker A stated, “my supervisor was very supportive. So, I mean, anytime that I was kind of unsure of what to do next, or if I wasn't really sure if I was doing the right thing, or asking the right questions, or, you know, if the information I was getting really rose to the level of concern, ..., I would call her.”

Social Worker B stated, “my supervisor, at that time, she would come in the field with you. If I had a difficult case and it was a doozy and I text her and say this is a lot, she's going to stop what she was doing, she was going to notify our attorney, and it made it so much easier, they were there.”

Social Worker C stated, “and you're only as competent and confident as you are by the tone set by your management.”

The following participants describe the impact of not having the support needed from their supervisor.

Social Worker E stated, “my supervisor was like, ... oh I don't have to go to that. And I was like okay so I'm just going by myself...I felt alone. I didn't feel like I

had much support at that time. But I just, you know, just did the best that I could do.”

Social Worker G stated, “there wasn’t a lot of guidance. We were just kind of thrown in there, so I wasn’t confident. That was because of the supervisor. She just kind of threw me in there and I’m like okay.”

Theme 5: Self-Efficacy Challenges Decreases with Longevity

Each of the participants had over one year of experience at the time of the interview. Each of the participants explained that because of their longevity, they were able to have an increased feeling of self-efficacy. The following quotes provided insight to the relationship between longevity and self-efficacy. Social Worker B stated “It’s improved over time. I’ve learned to do cases as if they’re going to court. And I never had that approach when I was a younger social worker.” Social Worker D stated, “so, you need to have that personal confidence in yourself. But I think that comes with experience...” Social Worker F stated, “I’m pretty confident during this because I’m, now, I’ve been doing it for a while. I know what to look for, I know what information is the best information to gather...” and Social Worker I stated, “...because I’ve now been in the part of the system, the CPS system, for three years. So, I feel more confident in making my decisions.”

Theme 6: Previous Social Work Experience Increases Self-Efficacy

Previous work experience doing social work in the mental health field or previous work with children was attributed to increased self-efficacy with CPS skills. The participants described how they were able to use their previous work experiences to help

them navigate challenging situations. Additionally, one participant described how the lack of social work experience decreased self-efficacy. The following quotes support the relevance of this theme. Social Worker D stated “I feel like I’m confident. I think it’s just experiences through the years. Also, from my previous two jobs working in mental health and working in juvenile justice.” Social Worker H stated, “and so, I felt comfortable doing investigations on risks and needs and dependency, because I had some background working with children and youth with my other job.” Social Worker I stated, “I was one of the ones who kind of got thrown out there and, you know, you sink or swim with it. I appreciate it. But I also have field experience just because of my work experience in mental health and substance abuse...” and Social Worker F stated, “Oh, yeah, within my first year of working, oh my God, my confidence was not high at all. And that's because I had no experience in social work at all.”

Theme 7: Paperwork and Caseload Demands

The participants described that when completing legal aspects within their job duties, that there is a high level of paperwork that is completed. The participants also described how the paperwork is often redundant or out of touch with the CPS experience. The participants also described how this creates a demand on the caseload. Additionally, the participants described how seasoned CPS social workers are brought in on cases with newer social workers and the challenges that are faced when this occurs.

Social Worker C stated, “and the obstacle is this. There are people who are not in the field anymore, who do not realize the changing environments and how much work is, is required, as opposed to what they, they require with the policy. So,

every time a child is hurt, they add an initial to a page or they change a sheet, or they add or take something out. The real difficulty is that, because policy and red tape rolls from the top down, and they are not the feet on the ground. Although I understand that there has to be a structured way of doing it, there's got to be a better way than people just sitting at a roundtable, talking about it, and rolling it out to, to the people on the ground.”

Social Worker D stated, “yeah, it can be paperwork, definitely, especially when you wait for someone else to get it to you. So yeah, paperwork is a mess, but I don’t know if there is a solution for it.”

Social Worker E stated, “the only thing I received in that nature is a whole lot of paperwork. And nobody’s ever really talked about it. They just say here is this and here is this and here is the new this and you’re just supposed kind of take it and I guess absorb it all.”

Social worker F stated, “it puts more on our plate because we already have lots of forms and paperwork that we already have to do. Documentation on top of that. The last thing you want is more paperwork on top of that and it does prevent you from being able to move on to the next task because you have so much paperwork that you have to get done to move on to that next task. So, it is a hindrance, it does, and I do feel like they would cut back on some of the forms that we have to do. I think that we could be more effective in our jobs. You could spend more time doing social work rather than paperwork.”

Social Worker G stated, “I don’t understand why the state and the federal government can’t get on the same sheet of music to where we’re not touching all this paperwork so many times and repeating ourselves.”

Caseload Demands on Seasoned CPS Social Workers

The quotes presented below provide context about the demands that seasoned social workers experience when working with newer social workers. The participants provided details that explain that the newer social workers are paired with a seasoned social worker to work on challenging cases. Social Worker D stated “I wasn't confident because they were just coming at me, coming at me. Honestly it wasn't my case.” Social Worker B stated, “It was not my case. I got pulled into the case because of my experience. And, I initiated the case, and I helped get everything going, and I thought it was going to be transferred...”

Social Worker F stated, “... new social workers shouldn't be thrown into these complex cases. But at the same time, if you put it all on your seasoned workers, it absolutely does burn them out because then that means they're constantly receiving the complex cases. And in a way, that's actually kind of unfair because just because I had the experience, I'm getting thrown these cases, and at what point will your new social workers learn how to handle those cases? I think there, there should be some guidance for a new social worker through that complex case.”

Non-confirming Data

An audit trail was maintained during the research process to capture non-confirming data. For instance, when asked about the impact of leadership with self-efficacy, Social Worker D who identified as White female with a bachelor's degree stated, "I do not feel that way because my confidence comes from within. Different supervisors I have had through years. Because there are supervisors that I am not confident in them." This statement was captured in the audit trail and later used as further understanding on the role of longevity and self-efficacy as this participant had 11 to 15 years of experience at the time of the interview.

Summary

By maintaining trustworthiness of the study, I was able to identify the themes that emerged. I used these themes to answer the research questions. The identified themes were (1) legal training needs, (2) legal aspects is a complex process which contradicts policy, (3) race, class, and resources, (4) leadership and legal teams impact self-efficacy, (5) self-efficacy challenges decreases with longevity, (6) self-efficacy begins before becoming a CPS social worker, and (7) paperwork and caseload demands.

The nine participants had experience with using legal aspects skills during the investigation of child abuse and neglect. Each of the participants were knowledgeable of the CPS process and were able to provide detailed descriptions in their responses to the interview questions. The participants described the use of legal aspects skills and provided an evaluation of their self-efficacy when using legal aspects skills. Based on the detailed responses of the participants, saturation was reached as no new information was

learned during the interviews. In the next chapter, I provided an explanation of the results that were presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative inquiry was to understand the CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects when completing investigations of child abuse or neglect in rural counties in North Carolina. The research questions were:

What are the perceptions and implementation processes of legal aspects as it relates to rural North Carolina CPS social work interventions in child abuse and neglect cases?

How is self-efficacy perceived among rural North Carolina CPS social workers in the profession of investigating child abuse and neglect?

Through interviews with CPS social workers with experiences completing legal aspects skills during the investigation of child abuse and neglect, the following seven themes emerged:

1. Legal training needs
2. Legal aspects is a complex process which contradicts policy
3. Race, class, and resources
4. Leadership and legal teams impact self-efficacy
5. Self-efficacy challenges decreases with longevity
6. Self-efficacy begins before becoming a CPS social worker
7. Paperwork and caseload demands

These seven themes emerged and I used these themes to answer the research questions. Through the semistructured interview process, the participants were able to

give rich details about their understanding and experiences with legal aspects skills and how they define their self-efficacy. Each of the nine participants were able to provide detailed accounts regarding the legal aspects process and the factors that influence their self-efficacy.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings in this study confirm and extend knowledge of CPS social work. In Chapter 2, I presented various available articles to illustrate what was known and left to be known about CPS social workers' self-efficacy with legal aspects during the investigation of child abuse and neglect. Albert Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy was the theoretical lens I used to analyze and answer the research questions. By reviewing and analyzing the data, I was able to accurately interpret the emerging themes.

Theme 1: Legal Training Needs

The data presented in Chapter 3 detailed an understanding into the CPS legal training needs. The participants stated that more training was needed to assist in their self-efficacy when completing legal aspects in their role. Based on the data, with increased training that focuses on (a) the types of petitions and when to use them, (b) the level of evidence gathering needing to sustain a case decision, and (c) refreshers for long-term CPS social workers and supervisors, the CPS social workers can experience increased self-efficacy. The available literature on this topic, as described in the literature review, provides insight into the training needs of the CPS social worker. The findings of this study expand upon the knowledge already available in the field. Pierce et al (2017) and Barbee (2018) provided discussion about CPS social workers and how their self-

efficacy is impacted by their training received. While this literature does not specifically address the legal aspects training, this study fills this gap.

Theme 2: Legal Aspects is a Complex Process which Contradicts Policy

The participants described legal aspects as a complex process which can have challenges when policy contradicts this process. Korbick (2017) postulated that CPS social workers work through conflicting roles within their position. The legal aspects process is complex and one that challenges the CPS social worker particularly when there is a lack of understanding and training with legal aspects. Moreover, when there is a conflict with policy and legal aspects, the complexities cause confusion and challenge self-efficacy. When contradictions exist, the CPS social worker must then decide which process to follow. However, some participants described this process as a gray area that they often find themselves working in. This challenging process is a key element that impacts self-efficacy and by addressing the training concerns addressed in them one, can ultimately be improved.

Theme 3: Race, Class, and Resources

The role of race, class, and resources with the CPS legal aspects process was not addressed in the literature review. There was no available literature that addressed this concept before or after this study. Thus, this study contributes to the available literature. Social Worker B detailed how a family's class and privilege changed the legal aspects process that is typically used. Adding to this, Social Worker C explained how the racial climate challenges her self-efficacy and Social Worker H provided details about resource scarcities. Each of these components detailed an unexpected understanding of how race,

class, and resources determines the CPS social worker's use of legal aspects skills and impacts the CPS social worker's self-efficacy.

According to Briggs et al. (2020), minority children are overrepresented in the child welfare system. The authors stated that due to racism, biases, and lack of training from agencies and schools of social work, minority children continue to enter foster care at higher rates when compared to other children. Although these findings were not associated to the analysis and outcome of this study, these emerging themes bring awareness to the importance of further research on topics and literature.

Theme 4: Leadership and Legal Teams Impact Self-Efficacy

The participants provided thorough insight regarding the important role of leadership and the legal team during the CPS process. The available literature outlined in the literature review provides validation to this topic. For instance, Berlanda et al. (2018), Berlanda et al. (2017), and de Guzman et al. (2020), provided data that illustrates that CPS social workers state that trust with the agency leadership and organization influence their intentions to remain in the position or leave the position. The role of the supervisor in CPS social work, as described by the participants, is critical to the CPS social worker's self-efficacy. When there is supportive and knowledge leadership, the CPS social worker is able to navigate some of the challenges and difficulties of legal aspects. With leadership support, CPS social workers are able to obtain the direct training that they need to have feelings of high self-efficacy. Additionally, the legal team's support can increase the CPS social worker's feeling of high self-efficacy.

With a supportive legal team, the CPS social workers are able to separate their legal requirement from their social work requirements. The role of the CPS social worker requires the CPS social worker to effectively manage their legal and social work roles. Korbick (2017) stated that CPS social workers often have conflicting roles that may interfere with a parent's rights to their children. The CPS social workers who expressed having a supportive legal team indicated that while they may be required to handle both roles simultaneously, their level of self-efficacy is not reduced because the legal team provides support in the areas where they are uncertain.

Theme 5: Self-Efficacy Challenges Decreases with Longevity

Available literature discussed in Chapter 2 provides an understanding of the high turnover in the CPS profession. Many CPS social workers vacate the position for various reasons within the first year of their employment. Berlanda et al. (2017) found that self-efficacy in other CPS duties increased with longevity. CPS social workers who completed the Title IV-E program in a BSW or MSW education program had lower turnover when compared to those who did not complete the program (de Guzman, 2020). The experiences of the CPS social workers for this study ranged from over 1 year to over 15 years. The CPS social workers described how overtime, their self-efficacy with the CPS role and legal aspects increased.

Theme 6: Self-Efficacy Begins Before Becoming a CPS Social Worker

While many of the participants described having some levels of doubt with their self-efficacy when working their first CPS case, those with some exposure to the field reported having higher self-efficacy. This information adds to the existing body of

available literature. Pierce et al. (2017) provided an understanding of the training and experiences of CPS social work students prior to their role of a CPS social worker. The previous experiences in juvenile justice, mental health and substance use, and probation and parole provided the CPS social workers with the skills and understanding they needed to complete some of the duties. The participants who described having no prior experience discussed how low their self-efficacy was due to the lack of exposure and experience.

Theme 7: Paperwork and Caseload Demands

There is a multitude of available literature that provides a correlation between burnout and paperwork and caseload demands. This study indicates that a CPS social worker's self-efficacy is impacted by the paperwork and caseload demands. This information adds to the study completed by Lauritzen et al. (2018) as they postulated that caseload demands aides in the CPS social worker's determination of continued efforts. This is particularly described as a concern because of redundancy in the paperwork. Some of the participants described how the multitude of forms delays their ability to move on to the next task. Some participants even acknowledge their lack of ability to complete the legal forms without some assistance. Some participants indicated that completing legal forms can take several hours to complete. Additionally, the seasoned participants describe the caseload demands that are placed on them due to having to provide guidance to the new social workers. While literature suggests that peer training is effective, seasoned CPS social workers describes feelings of lower self-efficacy when they are made to testify or continue working in a case that has been assigned to another

CPS social worker. There is a level of knowledge that the CPS social worker does not have when they are placed in a case that is assigned to another CPS social worker.

Limitations of the Study

During the data collection phase, which lasted for 5 months, I experienced several challenges. For several assumed reasons, participation was low. Initially, 16 potential participants reached out to participate in the study. However, seven of the potential participants declined to move forward in the process. Once the consent form was submitted, three of the potential participants opted to decline interviewing. Two potential participants scheduled appointments and then later cancelled due to caseload demands. One potential participant consented and then later declined the interview due to becoming ill. After several failed attempts, I was unable to re-schedule an interview with this potential participant. One participant asked that their data not be included in the final process and their data was subsequently removed.

A larger sample size may have yielded different results; however, the information I obtained from the nine participants provided evidence to support that saturation was reached. While saturation was reached, there are concerns for transferability. A larger sample size may have narrowed these concerns.

The majority of the participants in this study identified as female. There were no participants who expressed that they identified as nonbinary or transgendered. Only one participant identified as male. Additionally, there were no participants who identified as Native American or Hispanic. Having a more diverse participant pool may have generated different results.

All nine participants had over 1 year of experience with CPS social work investigations. There were no participants who identified as having less than a year of experience. The experiences of CPS social workers with less than a year of experience may have provided different insight into self-efficacy.

The process of data collection began May 2021 and ended October 2021. It is worth noting that North Carolina, like the rest of the country, was operating in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional challenges were faced during September 2021 as the Delta variant of COVID-19 was identified, which impacted many agencies. Although the interviews were being held virtually, the CPS social workers were negatively impacted by COVID-19, which may have impacted their willingness to participate in this study. Additionally, the DSS was impacted by social workers leaving the career during the pandemic, which in turn created a high demand on the CPS social workers who remained in the position.

Another limitation to this study was the setting of the interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were held virtually. While this was the safest way to communicate with participants without masks distorting the interview, the use of the virtual system had some challenges. For three interviews, the participants had an issue with their microphone connecting to the system. This caused a delay in the interview process.

Based on the focus of this study, recruitment occurred within rural counties in North Carolina. In North Carolina, 30 counties are urban, but I did not collect data in these counties. There remains a possibility that CPS social workers from urban counties

may have different experiences with legal aspects when completing child abuse and neglect investigation. Due to more resources, it is possible that CPS workers in urban counties have more access to legal teams and supervision.

While the CPS social workers in North Carolina receive the same legal training regardless of county location, there is a subculture with rural CPS social workers which could potentially influence how CPS social workers use legal aspects skills. According to Jensen and Mendenhall (2018), professionals in rural communities are more likely to see their clients in other professional and non-professional settings. The CPS social workers in rural counties are more likely to encounter the family that they are investigating in the community when they are not conducting their investigation. Therefore, the CPS social worker may base their legal aspect interventions partially on the likelihood of seeing them in these locations.

While each state has a CPS unit that uses legal aspects skills during investigation of child abuse and neglect, the general statutes that govern their work varies from state to state. This study only recruited CPS social workers from North Carolina. Because of the varying state general statutes, laws, and policies and procedures, there is a possibility that transferability may be limited.

I used a basic qualitative methodology approach for this study. During this process, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument. While measures were put in place to safeguard against issues with trustworthiness, researcher interpretations may vary. Additionally, during this process, I used a semistructured interviewing format which relied on CPS social workers to articulate their understanding of the questions.

There remains a possibility that some CPS social workers may not have been confident in their articulation and thus, left information out of the conversation.

Recommendations

Based upon the reported limitations of this study, there are several recommendations for future research. COVID-19 was an ongoing issue that the CPS social workers faced. Further research could be completed to explore the role COVID-19 may have had on CPS social workers' self-efficacy and their use of legal aspects skills. With many agencies, to include court systems, being shut down because of COVID-19, it is likely that this may have had some impact to CPS social workers. Another recommendation is to expand the demographics and regions.

More research could be conducted that includes a wider demographic profile of rural CPS social workers. With this approach, researchers could complete a comparative analysis on the participant's race and their use of legal aspect skills. Researchers could also explore racism and cultural humility and the type of legal aspects skills that are used among minority children when compared to other cultures. Furthermore, a study including participants from other states or urban counties in North Carolina could build upon the findings in this study. I also recommend a focus on the CPS social worker's culture and the impact this may have on the use of legal aspects skills.

One of the themes identified in this study was the impact of the participant's race, class, resources, and the CPS social worker's use of legal aspects skills. It is recommended that future studies explore the relationships between these three areas using a more comprehensive analysis approach. This can include a qualitative,

quantitative, or mixed methods study. An exploration into how CPS social workers use their self-efficacy skills depending on the client's race, class, and resources could fill this gap in available research.

A final recommendation for future research is to explore the use of legal aspects skills in CPS from the legal team's viewpoint. Based on this study, the legal team is a critical component of the CPS process. Further research could provide insight into this role and the relationship it has with CPS social workers.

Implications

This study detailed several implications. CPS social work is complex, and these complexities impact a CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects skills during the investigation of child abuse and neglect. This study further detailed the changes that can occur at various levels to include individual, organizational, and societal. Furthermore, these findings detail implications for positive social change, theoretical implications, and further recommendations for practice.

Positive Social Change

Positive social change can occur at many different levels. The CPS social work participants stated that many of the challenges they experience when using their legal aspects skills is the disconnect between policy and law. In this study, I illustrated that by including CPS social workers who execute the myriad of duties required of them in the decision-making process, this can reduce the disconnection between policy and law. With involvement, CPS social workers are able to voice the concerns that they experience and the contradictions that cause hardships on their work. Additionally, at this level, reducing

the redundancy of forms and other paperwork can help CPS social workers effectively move from task to task with confidence. CPS social workers are faced with many tasks and duties that they are responsible for during each investigation. I illustrated in this study that by enhancing the legal trainings offered to CPS social workers, the CPS social worker will have increased self-efficacy. By offering a more robust legal aspects training module, CPS social workers will feel secure in their abilities to execute the various tasks of legal aspects. Ultimately, the changes within the CPS system trickles down to the CPS social worker and finally is experienced by the children and families involved in the CPS system.

Theoretical Implications

Albert Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy had several implications. Bandura (1977) believed that each individual does an internal evaluation to determine if they can complete a given task. This internal evaluation includes reviewing the training that one has received combined with the person's understanding of what the outcome should be given the facts of the task (Bandura, 1977). Once these factors are weighed, the person decides if they can complete the task correctly and with favorable outcomes. In this study I showed that the CPS social workers follow this process when determining their level of self-efficacy. The participants discussed the training they have received internally and externally and their understanding of the next steps in the process. With support from the legal team and supervisors from the beginning of the case, CPS social workers are aware of what the outcome should be and are more likely to have a higher sense of self-efficacy.

Recommendations for Practice

For CPS social work practice, it is recommended that the counties develop a working group with CPS social workers to address the differences in policy and the law. Additionally, this working group can be established to work on the redundancy of paperwork and processes. Counties can consider using a process that involves workers from various levels of the CPS process for their working group. The process can incorporate workers from all areas from line worker to leadership to work on various agency specific concerns. Through this process, the group members can re-establish the best practices for the agency to optimize worker performance. Incorporating this process will likely help to alleviate some of the concern with paperwork and caseload demands.

Another recommendation is to provide legal aspects training specifically to supervisors. The participants described the important role of the supervisor in the legal aspects process with some participants acknowledging that the supervisor would send them to another worker or not provide them any training at all. Likely, with a supervisor directed training, the supervisors will enhance their ability to support the CPS social worker.

Participants described taking the legal aspects course within their first year of employment with one participant describing not having the training at all going into the second year. A recommendation is to provide an agency based legal aspects course if the CPS social worker is unable to complete the course within their first year. Participants who received training from the agency legal team report having high confidence with their ability to complete legal aspects. Also, providing an agency based legal aspects

training can refresh the legal aspects skills required to complete the job for workers who attended the legal aspects course several years ago.

A final recommendation is to recruit CPS social workers with prior experience in the field or closely related experience. The participants who described having had similar experience reported having a little more confidence when completing their first investigation when compared to participants who did not have any related experiences. This practice will aid in increased self-efficacy.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative inquiry was to explore CPS social workers' self-efficacy with legal aspects when completing investigations of child abuse or neglect in rural counties in North Carolina. Through this inquiry, what was learned is that CPS social workers view the legal aspects process as one that needs more training opportunities, is complex and contradicts with policy, is a process that changes depending upon race, class, and resources. This study also highlighted the components that impact CPS social workers' self-efficacy. These components include support from the leadership and legal teams, the length of time the CPS social worker has been in the position, the CPS social worker's prior work experiences, and the paperwork and case load demands. This study illustrated that by incorporating some changes, CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects skills during the investigation of child abuse and neglect can increase. While this study detailed that there is a need for deeper exploration on this topic, what has been revealed showed that there are positive social changes that can be made now. Implementing and adhering to these findings can increase the number of CPS

social workers assessing for safety and risk which could then decrease the number of children who experience ongoing child abuse and neglect.

References

- Alhassan, I., Sammon, D., & Daly, M. (2019). Critical success factors for data governance: A theory building approach. *Information Systems Management*, 36(2), 98–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10580530.2019.1589670>
- Ames, H., Glenton, C., & Lewin, S. (2019). Purposive sampling in a qualitative evidence synthesis on parental perceptions of vaccination communication. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 19(26), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0665-4>
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>
- Barbee, A., Rice, C., Antle, B.F., Henry, K., & Cunningham, M.R. (2018). Factors affecting turnover rates of public child welfare front line workers: Comparing cohorts of title IV-E program graduates with regularly hired and trained staff. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 12(3), 354–379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2018.1457589>
- Bartelink, C., Knorth, E. J., Lopez, M. L., Koopmans, C., ten Berge, I. J., Witteman, C. L. M., & van Yperen, T. A. (2018). Reasons for placement decisions in a case of suspected child abuse: The role of reasoning, work experience and attitude in decision making. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 83, 129–141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.06.013>
- Berlanda, S., Pedrazza, M., Mori, L., de Cordova, F., & Fraizzoli, M. (2018). Inter-services communication in child welfare: The interplay of age, work-group

identification, trust, and self-efficacy. *Italian Sociological Review*, 8(1), 103–119.

<http://doi.org/10.13136/isr.v8i.222>

Berlanda, S., Pedrazza, M., Trifiletti, E., & Fraizzoli, M. (2017). Dissatisfaction in child welfare and its role in predicting self-efficacy and satisfaction at work: A mixed-method research. *BioMed Research International*, 1–12.

<https://doi.org/10.1155/2017/5249619>

Berrick, J., Dickens, J., Poso, T., & Skivenes, M. (2020). Are child protection workers and judges in alignment with citizens when considering interventions into a family? A cross-country study of four jurisdictions. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 108(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104562>

Briggs, H. E., Hardeman, C. P., Banks, L., Briggs, A. C., Allen, J. L., Hopps, J. G., & McCrary, D. (2020). Do race, racial disproportionality, and disparities remain foci of child welfare? Words matter. *Child Welfare*, 98(5), 93–117.

Castleberry, A., & Nolen, A. (2018). Thematic analysis of qualitative research data: Is it as easy as it sounds? *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, 10, 807–815.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.03.019>

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (n.d). *Historical timeline of child welfare information gateway*. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/aboutus/cwig-timeline/>

Crawford, L. M. (2016). Qualitative research designs. In G. J. Burkholder, K. A. Cox, & L. M. Crawford (Eds.), *The scholar-practitioner's guide to research design* (Kindle ed., pp. 134–164). Laureate Publishing.

- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Curry, A. (2019). “If you can’t be with this client for some years, don’t do it”: Exploring the emotional and relational effects of turnover on youth in the child welfare system. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *99*, 374–385.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2019.01.026>
- Daniel, B. K. (2018). Empirical verification of the “TACT” framework for teaching rigour in qualitative research methodology. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *18*(3), 262–275. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-D-17-00012>
- de Guzman, A., Carver-Roberts, T., Leake, R., Rienks, S. (2020). Retention of child welfare workers: Staying strategies and supports. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, *14*(1), 60–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2019.1683121>
- Ellingson, L. L., & Sotirin, P. (2020). Data engagement: A critical materialist framework for making data in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *26*(7), 817–826.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419846639>
- Ferguson, H. (2017). How children become invisible in child protection work: Findings from research into day-to-day social work practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, *47*(1), 1007–1023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcw065>
- Fluke, J., Cowin, T.W., Hollinshead, D.M., & Maher, E.J. (2016). Family preservation or child safety? Associations between child welfare workers' experience, position, and perspectives. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *69*, 210–218.
<http://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2016.08.012>

- GoToMeeting. (2020). *Security features made for worry-free meetings*.
<https://www.gotomeeting.com/features>
- Gupta-Kagan, J. (2020). America's hidden foster care system. *Stanford Law Review*, 72, 841-913.
- Hennink, M.M., Kaiser, B. N., & Weber, M.B. (2019). What influences saturation? Estimating sample sizes in focus group research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 29(10), 1483-1496. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732318821692>
- Jensen, E. J., & Mendenhall, T. (2018). Call to action: Family therapy and rural mental health. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 40, 309-317.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-018-9460-3>
- Johansson, C.B. (2019). Introduction to qualitative research and grounded theory. *International Body Psychotherapy Journal*, 18(1), 94-99.
- Kahlke, R. (2018). Reflection/commentary on a past article: "Generic qualitative approaches: Pitfalls and benefits of methodological mixology." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17, 1-3.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918788193>
- Kennedy, D.M. (2016). Is it any clearer? Generic qualitative inquiry and the VSAIEEDC model of data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(8), 1369-1379.
- Kobrick, L. (2017). I am not law enforcement! Why the special needs exception to the fourth amendment should apply to caseworkers investigating allegations of child abuse. *Cardozo Law Review*, 38, 1505-1540.

- Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice, 24*(1), 120-124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092>
- Lauritzen, C., Vis, S.A., & Fossum, S. (2018). Factors that determine decision making in child protection investigations: A review of the literature. *Child and Family Social Work, 23*(1), 743-756. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12446>
- Lee, M. (2016). Use of evidence-based practice and barriers to utilize research in rural social work practice. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work, 13*, 142-154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761407.2015.1011296>
- Lusky-Weisrose, E. (2021). “Maybe what happened is actually OK?” Child sexual abuse by authority figures in the ultra-orthodox community in Israel: Survivors’ perceptions of their relationship with the perpetrator. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 122*, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105325>
- McCrae, J.S., & Brown, S.M. (2018). Systematic review of social-emotional screening instruments for young children in child welfare. *Research on Social Work Practice, 28*(7), 767-788. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731516686691>
- Mohajan, H.K. (2018). Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People, 7*(1), 23-48. <https://doi.org/10.26458/jedep.v7i1.571>
- Moss, S.E., Song, M., Hannah, S.T., Wang, Z., & Sumanth, J.J. (2020). The duty to improve oneself: How duty orientation mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and followers’ feedback-seeking and feedback-avoiding behavior.

Journal of Business Ethics, 165,615-631. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-4095-8>

National Association of Social Workers. (2017). *Read the code of ethics*.

<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.a). *Rylan's law and*

family's first overview and crosswalk. <https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/Rylan-s-Law--Family-First-Overview-and-Crosswalk.pdf>

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.b). *Local DSS directory*.

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/local-dss-directory>

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (2016). *North Carolina statewide child protective services evaluation*.

<https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/documents/files/dss/statistics/NC-Statewide-CPS-Evaluation-02-26-16.pdf>

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (2020). *Training*.

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/county-staff-information/training#child-welfare>

North Carolina General Assembly. (2017.). *House bill 630*.

<https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookup/2017/H630>

Patton, M.Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Pierce, B., & Park, T. (2017). Competency curriculum intervention: Student task self-efficacy and attitudes in child welfare. *Advances in Social Work, 18*(2), 490-506.
<https://doi.org/10.18060/21394>
- Porter, R., Welch, V., & Mitchell, F. (2019). Adversarialism in informal, collaborative, and 'soft' inquisitorial settings: Lawyer roles in child welfare legal environment. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law, 41*(4), 425-444.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09649069.2019.1663015>
- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N.M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rudestam, K. E., & Newton, R. R. (2015). *Surviving your dissertation* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Shaw, R.M., Howe, J., Beazer, J., & Carr, T. (2019). Ethics and positionality in qualitative research with vulnerable and marginal groups. *Qualitative Research, 20*(3), 277-293. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794119841839>
- Tilbury, C. (2019). Obtaining expert evidence in child protection court proceedings. *Australian Social Work 72*(4), 392-403.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2018.1534129>

United States Children's Bureau. (2018). *Child maltreatment 2017*.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cm2017.pdf>

Whittaker, A. (2018). How do child-protection practitioners make decisions in real-life situations? Lessons from the psychology of decision making. *British Journal of Social Work*, 48, 1967-1984. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcx145>

Wilderman, C., Edwards, F.R., & Wakefield, S. (2020). The cumulative prevalence of termination of parental rights for U.S. children: 2000-2016. *Child Maltreatment*, 25(1). 32-42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559519848499>

Appendix A: Email to Directors of Social Services

Dear Director:


My name is Michelle Bates, and I am a PhD Candidate with Walden University. As part of my graduation requirements, I am completing a study on CPS social workers in rural counties in North Carolina and their self-efficacy with legal aspects skills during child abuse and neglect investigations. Attached to this email is a flyer referencing this study.

After reviewing the attached information, please consider forwarding this email to your CPS social workers who currently complete child abuse and neglect investigations and assessments. If at any time additional information is needed, please feel free to email me at XXX or call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Bates

Appendix B: Flyer



CPS Social Workers Needed to Share their Experience with Legal Aspects for a Research Study- Share your Story to Help Make Change!

Receive a \$25 Amazon E-Gift Card

- ✓ I am seeking CPS social workers who:
 - are currently employed with the Department of Social Services in a rural county and
 - have experiences with completing abuse and neglect investigations and
 - who are willing to share their experiences in the form of an individual interview with the researcher using GoToMeeting or phone call.
- ✓ Participation is voluntary.
- ✓ This study will focus on the CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspects skills during the investigation of child abuse and neglect.

This research is not affiliated with the Department of Health and Human Services and is being conducted by a Walden University PhD Candidate.

Please contact the researcher using the information provided below to receive more information about the study and to become a participant.

Researcher: Michelle Bates Supervising Faculty: Dr. Lakisha Mearidy-Bell

Appendix C: Pre-screening Questions

Participant Code: _____

Email Address: _____

1. Are you a CPS social worker currently employed with a Department of Social Services in a rural county?
2. Do you have experience completing child abuse and neglect investigations?
3. Do you have experience with legal aspects?

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Participant Code: _____

Date/Time of Interview: _____

Opening

Hi, my name is Michelle Bates, and I am a PhD candidate at Walden University. I appreciate you taking the time to participate in this research that I am conducting which aims to understand CPS social worker's self-efficacy with legal aspect when conducting child abuse and neglect investigations. Later, I will ask you questions about your self-efficacy which means how confident you feel about completing a task. I will also ask you questions about legal aspects which refers to interviewing skills, gathering evidence, preparing court documents, testifying etc. I am doing this research because I am hoping that this research will add value to the existing research about CPS social workers and is part of my graduation requirements. As part of this process, I will record this interview and take some notes. I will omit any identifying information about you, any case information that you might share, the county that you work for, and will use a pseudonym for your name. This research will be published as required for the dissertation that I am completing, and I will potentially publish parts of the dissertation as a research article. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Demographic Questions

1. How long have you been conducting CPS investigations?
2. What degree(s) do you hold?

3. What is our gender?
4. What is your race?
5. What is your age range? (18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50+)

Interview Questions

1. Describe when and how you address safety and risk during the investigation of child abuse and neglect?
2. Describe what it means to you to complete legal aspects and how it is completed in your county.
3. What legal aspects training do you have? Please describe this training and when you received it.
4. How do feel your legal aspects training has prepared you to conduct investigations for child abuse and neglect?
5. How would you describe your self-efficacy or confidence with gathering evidence, completing court documents, and testifying during the investigation?
6. What are your experiences with gathering evidence during the investigation of child abuse or neglect?
7. Describe the types of evidence you collect during a CPS investigation.
8. At what point during your investigation do you decide that you have gathered sufficient evidence to either close the case as unsubstantiated, move forward with case management, or move forward with a petition?
 - a. How do you know you have reached this point?
 - b. Describe your self-efficacy or confidence when completing this process.

9. Tell me about a time when you did not feel confident in completing legal aspects during a CPS investigation.
 - a. What caused you to not feel confident?
 - b. What could have been done differently or implemented to help you feel confident?
10. Tell me about a time when you felt confident in completing legal aspects during a CPS investigation.
 - a. What helped with your confidence?
11. Describe the impact of your confidence with completing legal aspects and your intention to stay or quit the position.
12. If you could develop or change legal aspects training, what topics would you consider to be important?
13. What are some things that your county can implement to help increase self-efficacy with legal aspects?
 - a. What resources does your county lack that you feel you need to help increase self-efficacy in this area?
14. What other information regarding your confidence or self-efficacy with legal aspects would you like to share that we did not discuss?

Closing

Thank you again for your participation. The next step in this process includes me reviewing the information you have provide me today and finalizing the research. Before I finalize the research, I will be able to share with you the information I have transcribed

from this interview to ensure that I have captured everything that you intended to say.

Additionally, I can meet with you to discuss my interpretation of what we have discussed.

This process is known as member checking. During this process you will be able to tell me the areas that need corrections. Is this something you would be interested in?