RESILIENCY: LEARNING FROM INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN SOCIAL WORK

by

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Abstract

This exploratory study was undertaken to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of resiliency among Indigenous women practicing social work in child welfare. Aspects of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) and Margaret Kovach's (2009) Indigenous research approaches were used to guide this research, and the method of analysis used was thematic analysis. The experiences shared by the Indigenous women who participated in this study revealed that personal attributes and work environment can hinder or promote resiliency. These women found that having a strong sense of identity and being grounded in culture and spirituality, along with striving to create work-life balance and practicing self-care were important to maintaining a healthy well-being. Other factors identified as promoting resiliency included: flexibility in the workplace, and being able to practice social work in a way that is reflective of Indigenous worldviews. Having access to resources and supports, such as clinical supervision, and creating space where genuine relationships can be built with colleagues and clients were also identified as significant. Recommendations to better support social workers were derived from the interviews, and further directions for research were also discussed.

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Acknowledgements

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Chapter One: Introduction

This research study focused on the experiences of Indigenous women who are social workers that have practiced, or who currently practice, within the field of child welfare in British Columbia. Many of the problems Indigenous people face today can be linked to the history of "government-Aboriginal relations" (The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 2015, n.p.). The intrusion by child welfare authorities in the past has been paternalistic and colonial in nature. Indigenous children were taken from their families and communities, first by the residential school system and later by the child welfare system. Both systems have had devastating effects on generations of Indigenous people and communities (McCaslin & Boyer, 2009). Today, Indigenous children continue to be over-represented within the child welfare system (Kozlowski, Sinha, Hoey, & Lucas, 2011). Many Indigenous Nations are establishing their own child welfare agencies so they can deliver their own child welfare services, and as a step towards self-determination.

A qualitative, exploratory research design was chosen to help the participants share their unique experiences, and to explore how the concepts of wellness and resiliency are connected. Exploratory research is often favoured as a methodology when little is known about the topic under study (Marlow & Boone, 2005). I wanted to explore the following question: What are the experiences of Indigenous social workers working in child welfare? This research study was guided by the following secondary questions: What factors contribute to Indigenous social workers' resiliency while working within the child welfare system? What coping strategies do Indigenous social workers employ to promote wellness and balance in their lives while working in the field of child welfare?

My goal was to provide a space that promotes the sharing of knowledge and the experiences of Indigenous women who have worked within the field of child welfare, and to reveal new knowledge and perspectives regarding this topic.

A purposeful sampling strategy was applied to invite Indigenous women who have a degree in social work and who have worked as social workers for a minimum of two years in the field of child welfare to participate in this study. During the research process, I conducted individual, semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis was used to highlight some of the topics that arose from the experiences shared by the women who chose to participate in this study.

Personal Location: Identity, Culture, and Social Work Practice

The way we view the world and how we relate to the environments around us impacts our scholarly work and our areas of interest. Smith (1999) states it is important for researchers to situate themselves in relation to their family, community, and cultural background. I will begin by offering my genealogical introduction. I am a mixed-race, Indigenous woman. My paternal grandfather was Cree from the Slave Lake area of Alberta, and my paternal grandmother came from a Métis settlement in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba. My maternal grandmother is primarily of French ancestry and came from Saskatchewan, and my maternal grandfather's family is of English ancestry. Although I have a strong connection to my family and culture and feel grounded in my identity, it has been difficult to maintain a connection to my Indigenous roots and traditions while living within an urban community situated far from my traditional territory. Like many other Indigenous people, I did not grow up on my traditional territory. Several of my relatives were forced to attend church-based schools as children.

Generations of my extended family were displaced and assimilated into dominant society, and when they returned to their home communities they felt a sense of disconnect and alienation. As a result, child welfare policies and practices have impacted several generations of my family.

Although it is not a simple or easy process, I believe it is important to acknowledge the positions of privilege and power we hold within society. In addition I believe self-reflexivity is central to our growth as individuals, our relationships with others, and our ability to promote equity. I identify as a heterosexual, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, mixed-race Indigenous woman. I was fortunate to grow up in a middle class home free from abuse and neglect, which offered me a sense of security and belonging. Now as an adult, I am also privileged to be a mother, which has introduced new meanings into life I would not have experienced otherwise.

Identity can be a highly charged subject for Indigenous people due to the actions taken by the government of Canada to eradicate Indigenous identities. In mainstream society, power and privilege can frequently be linked to the colour of our skin, colour that affects day-to-day social experiences. The ways in which Indigenous identity is experienced because of skin colour is the source of many tensions in discussions of Indigenous issues between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, as well as between Indigenous groups (Crey, 2015). As a light-skinned Indigenous woman, I have not experienced the day-to-day burden of racism, or the level of discrimination that Indigenous people who are darker-skinned and visibly recognized as Indigenous have faced.

For the past thirteen years I have worked as a social worker, in the area of child welfare in a variety of Indigenous communities throughout British Columbia. Through these experiences I have witnessed how systems continue to oppress Indigenous populations and perpetuate and promote cultural assimilation of Indigenous children and youth into mainstream society. Although there is no straightforward solution, it may be possible to develop appropriate systems of child welfare that will not only support Indigenous communities, but perhaps the larger Canadian society. In order for this to occur, agencies and child welfare workers need to show a genuine respect for Indigenous peoples' self-determination and a willingness to learn new ways of practice.

My professional experiences have led me to believe Indigenous social workers face unique struggles when working in child welfare. Although the majority of the clients I have worked with are Indigenous, I have worked alongside few Indigenous social workers. These personal experiences have influenced my desire to help develop knowledge about how social workers can be better supported, and to promote and empower Indigenous social workers working within the field of child welfare. Furthermore, I hope my research findings will inform my own clinical practice and that the collective experiences of the Indigenous women who participated in the study are honoured and provide some insight to those supporting social workers.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are given to provide clarity and context to this research study:

Indigenous peoples. There are many different terms used across literature to denote Indigenous populations, such as Indigenous, Aboriginal, Native, Indian, First Nations,

Métis, and Inuit. Many scholars have chosen not to use the term "Aboriginal" because the concept is constructed within colonialism and was defined through government legislation (Alfred, 2005). For the purpose of this paper the term "Indigenous" will be used to include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples who have ancestral roots within Canada. The term "Aboriginal" will still be used in relation to government policies, agencies, and within direct quotes.

Child welfare. The term "child welfare" is used throughout this research study to refer to protective services for children, youth, and families provided by designated government and delegated Aboriginal agencies. The term "child protection" is also commonly used within literature. Child welfare as a state in British Columbia is responsible for providing safety, permanency, and well-being for children. Child welfare services are legally sanctioned by the provincial government under the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA), as well as other relevant legislation such as the Adoption Act (Gough, 2007).

Child welfare services can include receiving and investigating reports of possible child abuse or neglect; providing services to families who need assistance in the protection and care of their children; arranging for children to live with kin, foster families, or approved group home facilities when they are not safe to be at home; arranging adoptive homes for children in continuing custody; and providing independent living support to youth in care (Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal, 2014).

"Child welfare worker" or "child protection worker" refers to a person delegated under the CFCSA to provide child welfare services (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2014). Child welfare services are provided directly through the provincial

government known as the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), or through delegated Aboriginal agencies.

Worldviews of wellness and healing. Today we hear the word "wellness" in the news, advertisements, conversations, and even at work. Although there is no universally accepted definition of wellness, Charles B. Corbin of Arizona State University defines wellness as "a multidimensional state of being describing the existence of positive health in an individual as exemplified by quality of life and a sense of well-being" (Definition of Wellness, n.p.). Wellness can also be defined as an active, preventative process towards healing and balance, which is not limited to the absence of disease and illness (Definition of Wellness, n.p.).

Resiliency. There is much debate among researchers concerning the concept of resilience; however Bottrell (2009) defines resilience, in the broadest sense, as a positive adaptation despite adversity. The American Psychological Association refers to resilience as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors" (2014, n.p.).

Culture. Culture can be understood as a network of shared meanings taken for granted as reality by those who interact within the network (Zapf, 1993, p. 696).

Marginalization. Marginalization is "an interdisciplinary term," which refers to "the process in which a subject is rendered marginal through the exercise of power. Within patriarchal cultures women, despite their numerical majority, are marginalized by a range of practices and discourses including employment law and academic disciplines" (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 2000, p. 150).

Burnout. Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) describe burnout as "a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy" (p. 1). Gilliland and James (2013) suggest some reasons for burnout include large caseloads, lack of workers expertise, demanding employers, unbending institutional rules and procedures, continuous paperwork, and long work days.

Trauma. The term is defined within constructivist self-development theory in the following way:

> as the unique individual experience, associated with an event or enduring conditions, in which, (1) the individual's ability to integrate affective experience is overwhelmed or (2) the individual experiences a threat to life or bodily integrity. The pathognomonic responses are changes in the individual's (1) frame of reference, or usual way of understanding self and world, including spirituality, (2) capacity to modulate affect and maintain benevolent inner connection with self and others, (3) ability to meet his psychological needs in mature ways, (4) central psychological needs, which are reflected in disrupted cognitive schemas, and (5) memory system, including sensory experience. (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995, p. 61)

Surveys of the general population suggest that at least half of all adults in the United States have experienced at least one major traumatic stressor.

Summary

Chapter one provided an overview of the purpose, questions, and significance of this study. I suggest that the experiences of Indigenous women need to be heard. By

creating space for women to share their wisdom and knowledge, I am hopeful that we can gain a better understanding of how to support social workers working in child welfare. This thesis is a starting point in providing that space; however, there is a need for more research that includes Indigenous women's issues and perspectives.

At the present time there are few Indigenous social workers practicing in the field of child welfare. The historical relationship of distrust between Indigenous communities and the child welfare system is significant, especially for Indigenous women who choose to work in this field. Little research has been completed that explores the unique experiences of Indigenous women who practice social work in child welfare. Research in this area is critical to understanding the connection between Indigenous social work theory and practice. Indigenous social workers who are dedicated to practicing social work in child welfare are rare and highly coveted. It is crucial that we develop the knowledge necessary to support Indigenous social workers working in the field of child work. This qualitative study was designed to gain insights into Indigenous women's experiences of resiliency while working in child welfare, and to begin to address the gap in the literature concerning Indigenous social workers' experiences.

Study Overview

This thesis is divided into five chapters that focus on the relevancy of this research topic and provide an overview of the pertinent literature and research. My research journey and process, as well as the findings and recommendations for future research and practice, are also represented within these chapters.

Chapter two includes an overview of the literature, which examines the development of the child welfare system in BC and its impact on Indigenous people. The

current delegation process that many Indigenous communities are using to implement their own child welfare agencies, and statistics related to Indigenous communities, are also highlighted in this chapter. The personal, organizational, and environmental factors that present challenges for social workers practicing in child welfare are explored. In addition, barriers, struggles, and the resiliency factors pertaining to Indigenous women practicing in child welfare are also discussed.

Next, chapter three outlines the methodologies that guided this study and the methods I have used to complete the research. A qualitative exploratory research methodology was chosen in this study because it is an epistemologically appropriate choice as the goal of this research is to gain knowledge about a particular group's lived experience. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Indigenous projects and Margaret Kovach's Indigenous methodological characteristics were also considered and used to guide my research process. It was important to use a process that respects Indigenous ways of knowing as a means of honouring my own values and beliefs, and to show respect for the women who chose to participate in this study.

In chapter three, self-reflexivity, maintaining transparency, and choosing to use an exploratory research design are described as means of remaining accountable and promoting integrity in the research process. An inductive thematic analysis method was completed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step approach as described in this chapter.

In chapter four, I present the themes that emerged from the eight interviews completed during this research process. The main themes include self-identity – subthemes: Indigenous perspectives and child welfare, culture, and spirituality; Goodness

of fit – subthemes: personal and professional values aligning, workplace innovation, and social work practice; Access to resources and supports – subthemes: supervision and debriefing, training and cultural resources, and the power of mentorship; relationships, and self-care and work-life balance. The findings are presented using many of the women's own words. Other significant issues such as institutional racism, discrimination in the workplace, and systemic barriers are also discussed.

Finally, chapter five includes an interpretation of the key findings, study limitations, recommendations, and ideas for future research. The findings of this thesis clearly show that specific factors can promote or hinder resiliency for social workers practicing in the field of child welfare. The findings also indicated that Indigenous social workers may benefit from supports, such as mentorship from other Indigenous social workers who share common experiences and perspectives, and time to build relationships with those they work with. Although it was not a topic of focus within the research, most of the social workers expressed feeling well supported while working within delegated Aboriginal child welfare agencies.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Child Welfare: A Chronological Canadian Overview

Child welfare as a national issue has involved invasive and disruptive government sanctioned interventions into the domestic spaces of families. The literature suggests that one of the most intrusive responses for a child at risk is removing the child from their family. Responding to child protection concerns usually involves social workers and other professionals, such as police officers, schools, and hospitals, often without the parent or child's consent. The work surrounding an apprehension is time-consuming and can involve social workers, courts, lawyers, family mediation programs, and parental supervision program requirements. In my experience, this process creates additional stress to family systems and parents. De Leeuw (2014) states that children have often described the experience as "devastating" (p. 63). Child welfare policies and the social workers who work within these systems must balance the conflicting pressures of society's desire to protect children from abuse and neglect with the larger society view that the family unit is important and should be preserved whenever possible (de Leeuw, 2014).

In March 1901, the first child welfare act was passed in the BC Legislative Assembly, supported by the Council of Women of Vancouver. This act gave the state authority to remove children and place them with foster families to ensure the children were removed from situations where they faced abuse, neglect, or abandonment. Historic assessments were often subjective and based on the hygiene of the home, morality of parents, and the behaviour of parents and relatives towards each other and their children (Morales, Sheafor, & Scott, 2007). In early years, child welfare workers were most

commonly volunteers or members of religious societies. Between the 1930s and 1960s there were significant changes that occurred within the field of child welfare in Canada. By 1939, university affiliated programs became recognized and thus social work as a profession (Morales, Sheafor, & Scott, 2007).

In addition, the state's formal assimilation process of Indigenous people via government policies emerged through the creation of church-based schools and Indian residential schools. The number of residential schools reached 80 in 1931. The Gordon Residential School was the last federally operated residential school and it closed in 1996 in Saskatchewan (Alston-O'Connor, 2010). The Indian Act was amended in 1951 to include child welfare and to provide the province with the authority to deliver child welfare services on reserves.

In the 1960s, the sixties scoop emerged, a term coined by Patrick Johnson. In 1983, Johnson prepared a document titled *Native Child and the Child Welfare System*, which was one of the first publicly accessible documents that recounted the impact of the child welfare system on Indigenous communities (Hanson, n.p.). Kulusic (2005) suggests that "power, privilege and poverty are complexly related to the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children who were removed from their communities" (p. 26). Indigenous children were removed based on Eurocentric government standards and delivery models that stated it was in the best interest of the child; however, there lacked input and a recognition of traditional Indigenous culture and kinship caring systems (Palmer & Cooke, 1996). The permanent removal of thousands of Aboriginal children during the sixties scoop continues to effect Indigenous communities today (Alston-O'Connor, 2010).

There has been a significant increase in the number of Indigenous children entering care since the 1960s (Hudson & McKenzie, 2003). *When Talk Trumped Service: A Decade of Lost Opportunity for Aboriginal Children and Youth in B.C.* stated that in 2011 an Aboriginal child was "7.4 times more likely to be admitted into care, and 13.4 times more likely to remain in care" in BC (The Representative for Children and Youth, 2013, p. 20). In 2013, the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) stated that more than 52 per cent of children in care of the BC government were Aboriginal (2013, p. 7). Indigenous children continue to fare worse than non-Aboriginal children in care in BC They face higher rates of incarceration, suicide, self-harm behaviour, and lower rates of school completion (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2007; The Representative for Children and Youth, 2013). The RCY has suggested that the Federal child welfare funding policy has also influenced a greater number of Aboriginal children coming into care due to a lack of funding for preventative services (2013, p. 21).

Child welfare in BC is currently practiced within the legal framework of the *Child, Family, and Community Service Act* (CFCSA), which was passed in 1996 and amended in 2011. In addition to the *Child, Family, and Community Service Act*, child welfare practice is guided by the *Child and Family Service Standards* created by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (Ministry of Children & Family Development, 2015). The purpose of these standards is to promote better services for children, youth, and families, as well as to preserve cultural connections for Aboriginal children, and to strengthen families and communities (Merritt, 2012).

The *Aboriginal Operational Practice Standards and Indicators* (AOPSI) were developed in 2006 with the support of delegated Aboriginal agencies and many

Indigenous communities. Agencies and communities collaborated with the provincial government with hope of developing a new set of standards that would exceed current government standards, and better support children and families in a more culturally relevant way.

In addition, there was optimism that changes in practice standards would lead the way for the development of new legislation. Since 2012, the MCFD has publicly stated they would no longer support separate standards and policies for delegated Aboriginal agencies in regards to child welfare. As a result, the development of the AOPSI child welfare standards did not come to fruition and Aboriginal agencies continue to be heavily monitored and critiqued by the provincial government.

Overview of Child Welfare and Indigenous People

The evolution of Canadian child welfare policies and practices in relation to Indigenous communities was described by Armitage in 2003 as being divided into three phases: the assimilation period from 1867-1960, the child welfare period (1960-1980), and the devolution of services period from 1980 to present (Mandell, Carlson, Fine, & Blackstock, 2003, p. 11).

The assimilation period reflects the broader assimilation policies in Canada, while the second phase describes the integration of services to status Indians within existing mainstream services. The third, and current phase, illustrates BC's current child welfare system, which supports some degree of community self-governance under the terms of tripartite agreements between the federal and provincial governments, and the aboriginal communities/bands (Mandell, Carlson, Fine, & Blackstock, 2003).

During the assimilation period residential schools were created throughout Canada, sanctioned by Indian Affairs as an alternative parenting institution in an attempt to assimilate Indigenous children into dominant society. Women were forced to watch helplessly as their children were taken away from them and placed in residential schools. Many of these children were subjected to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse while residing in residential school, and cultural practices such as language were forbidden from being spoken (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Although residential schools have been closed for the past two decades, the negative effects of these schools are still affecting Indigenous communities today.

In the 1940s the Canadian Association of Social Workers and the Canadian Welfare Council created a brief advocating for amendments to the Indian Act. They recommended that provincial child welfare services be offered to on-reserve populations in the hopes of providing equitable services where the federal government was failing to offer any services. At that time, the provinces provided on-reserve services strictly in cases of extreme emergency, referred to as "a life and death" policy (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013, p. 3).

In 1951, Section 88 was introduced to the Indian Act, which made "all laws of general application from time to time in force in any province applicable to and in respect of Indians in the province," (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013, p. 3) and for the first time provincial child welfare legislation applied on-reserve. With the new allocation of federal funds through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada the provincial government began delivery of child welfare services on reserve.

In the mid-1970s there was a movement by First Nations communities to form their own child welfare agencies, which reflected the communities' growing desire for self-determination. This occurred in response to the large over-representation of Indigenous children in the care of the state. Since the early 1980s child welfare legislation authority has remained with the province, but many Indigenous communities are currently in the process of negotiating, developing, and implementing their own programs designed to better meet the needs of their members. However, there are vast variances throughout the province in how Aboriginal child welfare services are delivered (Mandell, Carlson, Fine, & Blackstock, 2003).

There are increasing numbers of Indigenous communities operating delegated Aboriginal agencies in BC; however, these agencies must meet the strict readiness and legislative requirements, through the provincial delegation model created by the provincial authority known as the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), to receive authority and funding to provide services to their members. Reserve-based First Nations communities, urban-based Aboriginal communities, and Métis communities are granted authority under their delegation enabling agreements with the province of British Columbia to deliver services to their members as an Aboriginal child and family service agency.

Within the delegation agreement, the agencies agree to enter into a three-tiered operational process defined within the Ministry of Children and Family Development "delegation of authority to Aboriginal agencies" matrix (2005, n.p.). Each delegation level has specific operational and practice standards associated with it. The three delegation levels are defined within the Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards

and Indicators (AOPSI) as voluntary services (C3), guardianship services (C4), and child protection services (C6) (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2005).

The child welfare delegation model can include full authority being given to delegated Aboriginal agencies, or through partial delegation that allows agencies to provide child welfare-specific services up to their approved level of delegated authority. Delegated Aboriginal agencies providing human and social services to their members living on reserve must adhere to the provincial legislation; however, they receive their funding through the federal government.

Directive 20-1, the current federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (AANDC) funding policy in BC, lacks specific criteria for adjustment of funding to meet specific community needs. There have been no funding formula changes since the creation of Directive 20-1, which occurred 25 years ago. For this reason, delegated Aboriginal agencies have been lobbying for enhanced prevention funding so they can better support the needs of their community members through preventative services.

As described by Mandell et al. (2003), funding has been a "thorny problem" for the delegated Aboriginal agencies, because "organizational funding benchmarks and formulas inhibit agencies' abilities to develop services deemed necessary" (p. 40). Delegated Aboriginal agencies have struggled with inadequate resources, and have had difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified social workers due to their inability to provide competitive wages and benefits in comparison to the provincial government (Representative for Children and Youth, 2013). In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada called for action from the provincial and federal governments to

provide "adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so" (p. 1).

Many delegated Aboriginal agencies regard the delegation model as an interim model of governance pending the recognition of Aboriginal laws and self-governance. The delegation process is seen as a way to build capacity, while actively exploring long-term options to provide child welfare services in a way that empowers communities to sustain their own values, beliefs, and traditions (Mandel et al., 2003).

Indigenous Women

Taking into consideration the historic context outlined above, my research will focus on the roles of Indigenous women and gender issues. Historically and currently, social workers are predominately women (Walmsley, 2006). To date, little research has been completed to examine the needs and strengths of women working in the field of child welfare.

A number of scholars argue Indigenous women's power and position in their communities have been altered substantially since contact with European settlers (Alfred, 2005). The Indian Act played a key role in changing the roles of Indigenous women through the banning of traditional and hereditary governance systems. Patriarchy is deeply embedded in the ideology and practices of European culture. The Indian Act created conditions of economic disparity between Indigenous men and women, which did not exist prior to contact with Europeans (Green, 2007). Women had equal rights to land and resources and often held prominent positions as matriarchs in their communities. Thomas (2009) describes this significant change in the following way:

In yet another attempt to destroy women's roles in the community, in 1869 the

Indian Act was amended to forbid women from participating in the management

of our communities. Only men were able to run for positions of power – chief and

council. As well, all property that women held was now controlled by her

husband and wills and estates were transferred from the father to the children by-

passing women all together. (p. 6)

Until as recent as 1985, the Indian Act effectively removed Indian status from Indigenous

women and their children if they married a non-Indigenous man.

Conversely, when Indigenous men married non-Indigenous women, these women

were automatically part of the Indigenous community. As a result, Indigenous women

and their children faced greater disparities as they were not afforded the same access to

housing on reserve, education sponsorship, and other social and health programs

available to members with Indian status. This also placed women in situations that

increased rates of poverty, social exclusion, and violence.

In 1985 the Indian Act was amended and granted Indigenous women and their

children the right to regain their Indian status through Bill C-31. This amendment did not

eliminate the inequities that Indigenous women still faced within their own communities

(Big Eagle & Guimond, 2009). The amendment was met by resistance from some male-

dominated Indigenous organizations (McIvor, 2004). Women who openly advocated for

gender equality were often labelled as feminist and troublemakers within their

communities. Political groups criticized Indigenous women for focusing on gender issues

and suggested that their agenda took focus away from fighting the larger collective battle

of establishing community self-governance. Today, there are still few Indigenous women in leadership positions across Canada (LaRocque, 2007).

Colonialism and patriarchy have stereotyped, objectified, and dehumanized Indigenous women. One of the most damaging stereotypes is that Indigenous women are unfit mothers. The following reference illustrates the negative attitudes that dominated the early 1900s:

> Probably much of this infantile mortality may be traced to premature marriage, which result in weakly offspring, and to ignorance of inexperienced mothers as to what constitutes suitable nourishment for their children, and as to their care when sick. (Canada, 1911, as cited in Moffat & Herring, 1999, p. 1828)

Indigenous communities view women as the centre of their nations because of the important role they play as caretakers. To date, one could argue there is no other group of women more scrutinized for their parenting abilities when we consider the disproportionate number of Indigenous children in care (Fiske, 2006). Kline (1993) challenged this notion by stating structural oppression, imperialism, colonization, and racism are the true factors contributing to Indigenous families' struggles, in addition to the high level of monitoring and interventions by child welfare authorities.

Wellness and Healing

Prillelyensky, Nelson, and Perison (2001) state wellness is not only the absence of disease but rather it is defined by the "presence of positive marker characteristics that come about as a result of felicitous combinations of organismic, familial, community and societal elements" (p. 7). Furthermore, we strive towards wellness when we desire wholeness and competency within our lives.

Pappas (2004) defines healing as "the aggregate of techniques used to make human beings whole again by counteracting distress in the body, mind, and spirit" (p. 2). All societies have evolved methods aimed at restoring physical health and promoting emotional contentment. In many Indigenous cultures around the world, healers have approached wellness from a holistic perspective, trying to create and maintain balance and harmony in multi-dimensions. Generally, traditional approaches incorporate culturally-based healing strategies. Examples of strategies used around the world may include, but are not limited to, ceremonies, traditional medicines, spiritual practices, rituals, prayers, dance, song and chants, art, fasts, feasts, and meditation.

Waldram (2014) has explored contemporary Indigenous healing programs in Canada and suggests that there is often an interconnection between healing and historical trauma for Indigenous people due to our history of colonialism. He further suggests that a common element of many Indigenous healing programs is a focus on the on-going journey of healing without a specific, fixed destination. Waldram (2014) also suggests that, while there is a focus on the individual to engage in the healing process, their situation can be placed firmly within the colonial context. In this way, history is not denied but helps individuals understand their circumstances in relation to the historical processes of oppression and intergenerational aspects of trauma. Brave Heart and DeBryun (1998) have asserted that Indigenous people today "have a pervasive sense of pain from what happened to their ancestors and incomplete mourning of those losses" (p. 68).

Resilience

Resilience is often viewed as a process defined by access to, and effective use of, protective influences in response to risk and adversity, as well as the ways that personal and community contexts help to produce wellness (Wexler, 2014). A study that examined resilience in response to life stress suggests that two specific variables, cognitive hardiness and the effects of coping style, may promote psychological functioning and well-being when we are faced with adverse life events and psychological distress (Beasley, Thompson, & Davidson, 2003, p. 77). Wexler (2014) also points out there is a direct link between resilience and culture. Culture is an important variable that influences how people approach, interpret, and respond to adversity and difficult situations.

Indigenous Resilience

Despite the legacy of genocide and colonialism, today many Indigenous communities and their members lead resilient lives in the face of extreme adversity (Smith, 1999). Optimism stems from the belief that now, more than ever before, Indigenous people are better able to respond to their community struggles. Activism and strategic alliances within Canada and internationally have helped reinforce movement towards a positive future and space for reclaiming identity (Smith, 2004). Ramirez and Hammack (2014) state Indigenous strategies of resilience are derived from both traditional and cultural resources and paradigms, and reflect the on-going responses to challenges posed by evolving relationships with mainstream society. Chandler and Lalonde (1998) commended First Nations communities in BC for their active engagement in community practices that have promoted cultural revitalization and significant positive change, such as lowering youth suicide rates in specific communities.

For many Indigenous communities in Canada, women play a central role as facilitating agents of resilience despite a lack of public acknowledgement (Ramirez & Hammack, 2014). Several male Indigenous leaders have emphasized the importance maternal figures have played in their lives personally, as well as the significant role women have played in bringing community members back together to strengthen their communities. The following excerpt describes this strength:

> So being so close to her [grandmother], my brother and myself were able to learn a lot about, or get a lot of knowledge from her...I do believe the most important thing I did learn from my grandmother was how to treat other people around me and always be respectful. A lot about our Native ways came from her. At night, she would always make us say our prayers, and she would speak in our Native tongue. (Ramirez & Hammack, 2014, p. 125)

Another leader described the quiet strength and resilience his grandmother modeled when he recalled:

> I had a real special relationship with my grandmother...She went completely blind due to diabetes, and then she had her legs amputated. Not one day in her life did she have any self-pity, did she talk negative. She was the most optimistic and happiest person. (Ramirez & Hammack, 2014, p. 121)

The leader went on to describe his grandmother as the most important and positive force in his early life. Indigenous women remain the guardians of the values, cultures, and traditions of their communities. They play an essential role in facilitating healing within families and communities.

Social Work as a Profession in British Columbia

As a profession, social work is focussed on problem solving and change. Social workers are often seen as change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families, and communities they serve (Johnson & Yanca, 2007). The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) describes the practice of this profession in the following way:

> Human rights and social justice are the philosophical underpinnings of social work practice. The uniqueness of social work practice is in the blend of some particular values, knowledge and skills, including the use of relationship as the basis of all interventions and respect for the client's choice and involvement (2015, n.p.).

Ethical conduct and practice is at the core of most professions, including social work. The British Columbia Association of Social Workers (BCASW) Code of Ethics was adopted in 2003 and consists of 11 principles guiding the practice of social work in BC, which include the following:

1. A social worker shall maintain the best interest of the client as the primary professional obligation.

2. A social worker shall respect the intrinsic worth of the persons she or he serves in her or his professional relationships with them.

3. A social worker shall carry out her or his professional duties and obligations with integrity and objectivity.

4. A social worker shall have and maintain competence in the provision of a social work service to a client.

5. A social worker shall not exploit the relationship with a client for personal benefit, gain or gratification.

6. A social worker shall protect the confidentiality of all professionally acquired information. She or he shall disclose such information only when required or allowed by law to do so, or when clients have consented to disclosure.

7. A social worker who engages in another profession, occupation, affiliation or calling shall not allow these outside interests to affect the social work relationship with the client, professional judgment, independence and/or competence.

8. A social worker shall not provide social work services or otherwise behave in a manner that discredits the profession of social work or diminishes the public's trust in the profession.

9. A social worker shall promote service, program and agency practices and policies that are consistent with this Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice of the BC College of Social Workers.

10. A social worker shall promote excellence in her or his profession.

11. A social worker shall advocate change in the best interest of the client, and for the overall benefit of society.

The BC College of Social Workers (BCCSW) has also adopted Standards of Practice that are used to set the minimum acceptable level of practice, guidance, and criteria for the assessment of complaints about practice for registered social workers. Although it is not mandatory in BC for social workers delegated to practice in child welfare to be registered social workers, universities in the province review this information within the Bachelor of Social Work curriculum and encourage students to

become registered social workers in order to support and enhance their social work practice. Some workplaces, such as hospitals and mental health organizations, are requesting that employees become registered social workers as part of their employment requirements.

The BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) requires employees entering into child protection to have, at minimum, obtained a bachelor's degree in social work, child and youth care, or a master level degree in educational counselling/psychology with a practicum completed in child and family services (International Credential Evaluation Service, 2015). MCFD and delegated Aboriginal agency social workers are not required to be registered social workers.

The majority of social workers working in child welfare are employed by MCFD throughout the province within one of their 429 ministry offices. Child welfare social workers are also employed by 23 delegated Aboriginal child and family service agencies in BC who are given the authority to provide delegated services through the MCFD (2015). According to the Canadian census data from 2006, approximately 85 percent of social workers work within the health and social service sector (Government of Canada, 2015).

Child Welfare Education in British Columbia

Following the publication of the Gove Report in 1995, schools of social work in BC began discussing ways in which Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programs could better prepare students for work in child welfare (Pierce, Hemingway, & Schmidt, 2014). Recommendation 57 of the Gove Inquiry stated that schools of social work in BC should increase child welfare content in their curriculum. In response, schools developed child

welfare specialization programs to specifically prepare social workers for child welfare work. Schools also consulted with MCFD during program planning in regards to their competency requirements for new employees employed at MCFD (Armitage & Mitha, 2000). The child welfare specialization programs that were established include BSW core courses, child welfare core courses, relevant electives, and a fourth year child protection practicum (Armitage, Callahan, & Lewis, 2001).

The new collaborative relationship between schools of social work and MCFD has brought about discussions regarding what should be included in the child welfare social work curriculum. Schools of social work have shown a commitment to providing opportunities for discussions and analysis of the child welfare system in BC, as well as the impact that the child welfare system has had on Indigenous people. In addition, schools of social work have emphasized the need to teach skills that will enhance students' abilities to think critically and advocate for social justice and change (Allen-Meares, 2008). MCFD's interests have focused on gaining new BSW employees who have been taught the competencies and skills that will ensure that they are job ready for frontline child welfare work (Armitage et al., 2001).

Armitage (2001) states that the Gove Inquiry did not make specific recommendations pertaining to delegated Aboriginal agencies, and at the time there were few fully delegated Aboriginal agencies in BC. Today, many schools of social work collaborate with local delegated Aboriginal agencies to ensure students have the opportunity to complete their practicum field placements within these agencies, and to develop initiatives and programs as a strategy of recruiting and retaining Indigenous social workers within the field of child welfare (Pierce et al., 2014).

Challenges and Social Work

Social workers working in the field of child welfare face ongoing challenges directly related to the work. Understanding the experiences of social workers working in child welfare is essential to improving social work practice and decreasing staff turnover in the field. Smith's study (2004) states that child protection worker turnover rates range from 23 to as high as 85 percent per year, among local agencies in the United States. Another study described by Smith (2004) suggests that turnover rates are highest among staff within their first three years of practice. Interestingly, Smith (2004) states it takes approximately two years for a new social worker to learn the job and to be able to work somewhat independently, however it appears many workers leave during this adjustment period.

Ellet, Ellis, Westbrook, and Dews (2006) state that the child welfare work environment is one of the most complex roles or areas of practice in social work. They describe three main areas that can be used as a conceptual framework for examining factors contributing to recruitment and retention issues for social workers: 1) personal characteristics; 2) external environments such as policy making context and the judicial system; and 3) organization's characteristics. An overview of some related literature findings will be described to highlight some of the factors negatively impacting social workers working in child welfare.

Personal characteristics. Social workers' overwhelming stress, due to feelings of fear and anxiety, has been noted to contribute to social work turnover (Ellett et al., 2000). Having to make decisions that have serious consequences for children and families, as well as legal liabilities, can evoke anxiety and conflict for social workers working in

child welfare (Ellett et al., 2000). It is these anxieties and conflicts that cause workers to "protect" themselves so they can survive within the emotionally charged and stressful work environment. The way in which a social worker copes, or even survives, within these situations is personally constructed and some coping strategies are unproductive, negatively affecting good practice (Horwitz, 2006).

Stanley, Manthorpe, and White (2007) found that there is the potential for social workers practicing in child welfare at all levels to experience work-related depression. Depression by its very nature tends to lead to the undermining of one's abilities to assert his or her needs and it can result in needs going unmet. Any organizational barriers or stigma related to depression can significantly impair a social worker's road to overcoming depression and contribute to higher turnover rates, further undermining the profession (Stanley et al., 2007). Hunsung and Stoner (2008) found that child protection workers continually report more feelings of depersonalization, role ambiguity, chronic stress, and conflict, leaving child welfare agencies in a continual retention and recruitment crisis.

Various studies suggest it can be more important for workers to protect themselves than to protect their clients (Morazes, Benton, Clark, Jacquet, 2010). Research suggests that minimizing exposure to traumatic situations is a way to support self-care and reduce work-related stress. Horwitz (2006) found that child protection workers tried to reduce negative experiences at work by avoiding face-to-face client interactions. Regehr et al. (2004) also found that workers who feel they do not have the resources or support to face adverse client situations report increased symptoms of depression, avoidance, traumatic stress, and burnout.

It is clear from the literature that it can be painful to face the anxiety, the powerlessness, emptiness, grief, anger, and sadness that accompany working with families facing issues of abuse and neglect. Conrad and Kellar-Guenther (2006) estimate that approximately 50 percent of child protection workers may be at risk of compassion fatigue (the trauma suffered by helping professionals), both because of what they witness first-hand and from the cumulative effects of vicarious experiences of trauma. The low pay relative to responsibility, long hours of potentially stressful work, inadequate services of community agencies, threat of personal liability related to the case work, and the contradictions between supportive versus investigative roles, all add to a worker's overall job stress.

Bride (2007) suggests that front line social workers practicing in child welfare with clients are very likely to be exposed to secondary traumatic events, and because of these events many workers are likely to experience a number of secondary traumatic stress symptoms. Regehr et al. (2000) found that front line staff working in Ontario Children's Aid societies are exposed to traumatic events routinely in their daily practice, frequently resulting in symptoms of secondary traumatic stress. They concluded that, even if workers feel well supported in their personal and professional lives, when they encounter a traumatic event, they still experience high levels of traumatic stress.

Anderson's (2000) quantitative study of coping strategies and burnout among 151 veteran child protection workers showed that nearly two-thirds of workers sampled scored in the high range for emotional exhaustion. In his study, Anderson set out to examine the relationship between veteran child protection workers' use of coping strategies and their levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and sense of

reduced personal accomplishment. The study confirmed that neither the use of active nor avoidant coping strategies saved these workers from some form of emotional exhaustion. However, when workers indicated that they were using active coping strategies like focused problem solving and use of social supports, more often they reported reduced feelings of depersonalization and an increased sense of personal accomplishment.

External environments. Unrealistic demands and perceptions held by community or the larger society about the function and role of social workers working in child welfare can cause stress for some workers and is a common example of an external environmental factor affecting social workers (Shier & Graham, 2015). Social workers practicing in child welfare are commonly referred to as "baby snatchers" or known for removing children, and are often not trusted or are thought of in a negative way and disregarded for their fundamental role in communities. Child protective actions are frequently viewed as "too little too late" and simultaneously as "too intrusive." Shier and Graham (2015) suggest that societal perceptions of social workers and their work often conflict with the altruistic values that motivate individuals to join the profession.

The rise in regulations and increasing preoccupation with protecting the profession's reputation has resulted in another shift towards organizational defensiveness and a new era of burden and stress on individual social workers (Shier & Graham, 2015). Change in the social policy environment affects funding, resources, and social workers' ability to effectively carry out their work and interact with clients in a supportive manner. Direct practice implications also include a shift where professional judgment is replaced by "bureaucratic" practice and a greater emphasis on checklists and procedures (Cardinal, 2005).

According to Hansung and Stoner (2008), the more bureaucratic the working environment, the more narrowly defined workers become in their knowledge and how they approach their tasks. These highly bureaucratic work settings can result in high levels of job stress, reduced levels of holistic thinking, and impact daily social work practice (Hansung & Stoner, 2008). Critical environmental shifts can tax the coping skills of any child welfare worker. However, Regehr et al. (2004) found that the organizational environment was the strongest predictor in producing post-traumatic distress among child welfare workers.

Organizational characteristics. As previously mentioned, organizational characteristics and particularly the organizational structure and management of a child welfare agency can impact a social worker's well-being. Collings and Murray's (1996) study of British child protection workers concluded that the most powerful predictor of overall stress was related to the pressure involved in planning and meeting administrative caseload expectations. This was described by a social worker in the following way:

> The part I liked the least is the feeling that the administration gave you of don't spend too much time and move on move on, the constant rush, and always feeling that you couldn't linger long enough with those families so that you could see them through connecting with services…I think the issue that existed then was the size of caseloads…I had 54, and I think the state's standard is 27. You just push people. You don't get to do your job…People just don't get the services they need because you don't have time to give – you have generational problems that you're supposed to fix in 10 minutes and you don't even have 10 minutes (Morazes et al., 2015, p. 238).

Smith (2004) suggests that support focused on promoting work-life balance affects social workers, and that organizational facilitation of work-life balance increases a social workers' ability to do their work and decreases absenteeism and turnover.

Burnout. The literature specifically related to burnout describes burnout as a state of physical and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations (Anderson, 2000). Job dissatisfaction is reported to be a major factor leading to burnout. Common symptoms experienced by those who are facing burnout include diminished self-concept, irritability, loss of compassion, recurring headaches, colds, and other stress-related illnesses (Anderson, 2000). Anderson (2000) found that almost two-thirds of social workers practicing in child welfare suffer from emotional exhaustion, which is known to be a core factor of burnout. Morazes et al. (2015) found that workload and quality of supervision are issues related to stress and burnout for social workers practicing in child welfare.

MacDonald, Phipps, and Lethbridge (2005) state that "employees who experience role overload are more likely to report stress, burnout, or poor physical or mental health" and "higher role overload for women than men regardless of job type" (p. 66). Furthermore, women working in social work are forced to maintain their employment and their homes, despite the often relentless symptoms of illness and the constant demands of both the agencies they work for and family obligations (Kali, 2001).

Overview of the Research

Rycraft (1994) and Morazes et al. (2015) found the following factors to be important to the well-being of social workers practicing in child welfare: having a sense of mission or sense of personal and professional investment in child welfare; goodness in

fit between the person and agency; quality and positive supervision; and investment in positive staff working conditions such as competitive compensation, benefits, and flexible hours of work, as well as opportunities to advance, and access to training and learning opportunities (Rycraft, 1994).

In Barak, Nissly, and Levin's meta-analysis of 25 articles about the retention of protection workers that examined the relationship between demographic variables, personal perceptions, and organizational conditions, on the one hand, and turnover or intention to leave, on the other, found that burnout, job dissatisfaction, availability of employment alternatives, low organizational and professional commitment, stress, and lack of social supports are the strongest predictors of turnover or intention to leave (2001). Since the predictors were often organizational or job related, these authors were optimistic that agencies, management, and policy-makers can contribute to the prevention of high rates of turnover among social workers working in the field of child welfare.

Similarly, Jenaro, Flores, and Benito's (2007) study of Spanish human service practitioners who engaged in child protection work found that coping strategies alone do not preclude burnout, but did help with staff turnover. High job and salary satisfaction, along with active coping strategies played the most important role in promoting personal accomplishment thus reducing burnout and emotional exhaustion. In addition, child protection workers who feel included in decision-making and experience supervisory and organizational support are more likely to engage as active employees and are less inclined to leave the agency (Travis & Barak, 2010).

However, Smith (2004) noted in her research that few staff were aware of job alternatives, which raises the question of whether child welfare workers stay in their jobs

at times because they feel trapped. Smith also suggests further examination is needed in regards to the link between supervisor support and job retention because turnover is high amongst supervisors as well as frontline staff.

Retention and Social Work

Self-Efficacy. Most literature focuses on the negative aspects of social work in child welfare and still little is known regarding what might encourage social workers to practice in child welfare and to remain in the work (Graham et al., 2011). Self-efficacy may be a powerful determinant to one's ability to remain in the work where there are taxing environmental demands. Self-efficacy beliefs are described by Ellett (2008) as one's ability to organize and execute a course of action. Such beliefs also influence the course of action people choose to pursue, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, and their perception of accomplishments (pp. 79, 80). This can be particularly important within the context of child welfare as there are many barriers, frustrations, and confusion associated with this work.

Bandura (1994) further suggests that individuals are less influenced by objective facts than by their own personal beliefs, and their beliefs affect their interests, motivation, and behaviour (Ellett, 2008). Martin and Dowson (2009) emphasize the importance and process of relatedness in their study regarding students and the academic context. They suggest that human beings have a drive to form and maintain positive and significant interpersonal relationships. This fulfillment produces positive emotional responses, which in turn influence our achievement behaviours and motivation such as our responses to challenges, self-regulation, and our adaptability. Study findings suggest that personal and

individual elements may contribute to staff retention in child welfare; however, organizational elements are also seen as significant to social workers' intentions to remain practicing in child welfare.

Organizational culture. Ellett (2008) suggests that organizational culture in child welfare may be improved through several means. Agencies should consider hiring employees who possess a social work degree. Studies have shown that organizations that require a social work degree as a minimum requirement experience greater retention rates. Providing strong mentoring for new staff has also been found to be helpful. Formal hands-on, pre-service training and orientation to child welfare as well as assigning reasonable caseloads have been recognized as supporting competent practice.

Implementing models of clinical supervision may help in maintaining staff. More specifically, having adaptive leaders with strong interpersonal skills can provide consistency in supervision for staff (Carey, 2011). In addition, developing norms of sharing, support, and new learning among staff help retain social workers. Specific examples could include effective performance-based evaluations, clearly defined expectations and responsibilities, competent supervision, and staff participation in decision-making. In additional, maintaining a collegial work environment where there is recognition and prestige within the profession is also identified as a way of supporting social workers. Lastly, providing experiences that enhance professional commitments, such as offering career development, have been found to impact employee retention within public child welfare agencies (Carey, 2011).

Women in Social Work

Historically, women were responsible for the work within the home and men were responsible for the paid labour work outside of their homes (Gordon, Benner, & Noddings, 1996). When the shift from agrarian to industrial society started in the early nineteenth century in Canada, it became necessary for both men and women to work outside of their homes in order to provide for their families. This affected the traditional roles of women as their labour increased since they continued to maintain their households and worked outside of the home as well. The value of their labour outcome did not increase accordingly (Gordon, Benner, & Noddings, 1996).

Gender socialization influences the types of employment and professions men and women pursue. Baines, Evans and Neysmith (1991) suggest that women tend to be drawn towards the social work profession because they are socialized into caring roles. Coldwell (1998) states that caring is associated with social work as a profession, as well as with society's conception of the mothering and nurturing role, which is often a common attribute of women. Patriarchal structures that govern our organizations impact women working in the profession of social work. The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women states that various structural factors make women more vulnerable to poverty, and the majority of the poor in Canada are women (n.p.).

In addition, women working full-time are estimated to earn 74 percent of what men earn, in addition to facing less access to education, training, employment, and other productive resources. Kelly (2009) reminds us that, although the majority of workers in social work professions are women, they are concentrated in the lower-paying, direct

service positions where they are committed to an ethic of caring about, and for, marginal populations.

Many women in social work have described a variety of experiences of marginalization and oppression within their profession, which claims to respect human dignity and self-worth. Kelly (2009) further argues that "oppression, patriarchal, and classist structures that are in place to insure the dominance of the male-centered gaze in the profession of social work are the very structures that work against women in our struggles" (p. 37). She also suggests that women have often been exposed to direct and indirect trauma and domestic violence more often than their male counterparts, which impacts their emotional, mental, and physical health and well-being in practice.

Indigenous Women in Social Work

Indigenous women who are social workers possess unique qualities and competencies that are often ignored or trivialized by our current child welfare system (Pooyak & Gomez, 2009). I believe Indigenous women face common struggles and stressors in their lives and in their work. Previous generations of Indigenous women in social work, as well as current generations, will likely face cumulative stresses that come from reliving these struggles as they mentor and foster the next generations of Indigenous women entering the social work profession. For many Indigenous communities, there is an important connection between women and intergenerational transmission of knowledge. In their roles as mothers, aunties, grandmothers, and leaders in communities, women shoulder a great deal of the work of conveying knowledge, experience, and leadership to the next generations (Stout & Peters, 2011).

Currently, there is a shortage of qualified Indigenous professionals within health and social services fields in BC (Sookraj, Hutchinson, Evans, & Murphy, 2010). Indigenous women are particularly underrepresented within the profession of social work and the numbers decrease as one progresses from a social worker to a supervisor, and then to a manager. The 2008 Auditor General's report suggests that MCFD and delegated Aboriginal agencies have struggled to recruit and retain Indigenous social workers. This issue of recruitment and retention was addressed by the Auditor General, and a recommendation was made to "develop Aboriginal human resources to meet the needs of both the Ministry and delegated Aboriginal agencies" (Ministry of Children & Family Development, 2008, p. 7). MCFD's Management of Aboriginal Child Protection Services report outlined its formal commitment to work collaboratively with delegated agencies to recruit and retain Aboriginal social workers through initiatives. The report stated that there were 239 Aboriginal staff employed within the ministry, and of those hired, three were Directors.

The last formal MCFD initiative was completed in 2009 and is known as the Aboriginal Child Protection Recruitment Project in the North. In 2014, MCFD released a report stating they plan to hire over one hundred new staff by 2016; however, there was no information regarding who would be recruited for such positions and no collaboration with delegated Aboriginal agencies regarding this decision or where these positions should be located (Culbert & Sherlock, 2014). The difficulty of recruiting Indigenous social workers may be linked to the challenges Indigenous women social workers face, which include intergenerational trauma, intentional and unintentional discrimination, individual and institutional racism, as well as personal and professional barriers.

Indigenous women in social work face personal challenges regarding "self in relation" to the environment in which they work. As described by Vakalahi and Starks (2010), being aware of an emotionally and politically driven work environment can be stressful and have a negative impact on women's spiritual health and well-being. Stout and Peters (2011) state that "given that professional Indigenous women tend to be understudied, the alarmingly high statistics on mental health issues of Aboriginal women may under-represent them" (p. 4).

In contrast, Vakalahi states that "one cannot change a culture of racism without investing heavy spiritual power" (2010, p. 114). Raven Sinclair (2004) acknowledges that the two key concepts that underpin Aboriginal worldview are the concept of "All my Relations" and the concept of the sacred. Spirituality is often intrinsically woven into daily living and valued by many Indigenous people. The concept of holistic balance is described as a common Aboriginal worldview and may encourage individuals to live in a harmonious and moral manner (Sinclair, 2004). Vakalahi's study identified spiritual values, beliefs, and practices as key factors in supporting marginalized women within the profession of social work (Vakalahi & Starks, 2010).

Indigenous women are also faced with the challenge of being "politically savvy." They must contend with their desire to be visible (recognized for her accomplishments and competence as an individual) as well as invisible (not being viewed solely through the lens of the dominant view of an Indigenous woman stereotype and avoiding being labeled incompetent or criticized). Indigenous women strike a balance between "rocking and not rocking the boat" (Vakalahi & Starks, 2010, p. 115) within the child welfare system.

Some Indigenous women embrace their racial and ethnic realities and often enter into social work viewing their life experience as an expertise that will be respected, valued, and helpful. However, the work environment and the administrative practices may perceive these experiences as characteristic deficiencies. Women may struggle with emotions, such as feeling isolated or alienated, resulting from oppression and discrimination present in their workplace. Women further experience dual roles and must work hard to balance the duality of a collective versus an individualistic perspective. An example of this was described by a woman working for the New York State government:

I clearly believe my employer was acting unethically in its bullying of First Nations people, yet strong statements to this effect would not win me many friends among powerful people…My fears continue to lead me to be cautious in expressing my views on sovereignty and other indigenous issues, even though I have [a secure position], supposedly, freedom…To say that it is awkward being an indigenous person and an employee of the State…is an understatement (Vakalahi, 2010, p. 116).

Outcomes of racism and discrimination in the workplace can lead to feelings of vulnerability, fear, distrust, isolation, and a lack of feeling safe within the environment. This was described by a woman of color working within a university setting:

Consequently, my tendency is to take on too much to prove my worth and value to the university. Often I feel second-guessed and like I am on call all the time, which can be a wearying, discouraging experience, I guess working hard and long is the price that is paid for institutional support (Vakalahi, 2010, p. 118).

Narda Razack (2001) examined the challenges that social work students from racial minority groups in Toronto are confronted with in social work field placements. Racially diverse students often reported both subtle and deliberate forms of racism and prejudice in their practicum sites. Marshack, Hendricks, and Gladstein (1994) proposed that agency supervisors frequently avoid discussions about diversity, especially when the student is a member of a marginalized group. From my experience, diversity and the realities of racism and discrimination are still not commonly discussed among social workers and supervisors within the child welfare context.

Summary

Indigenous women in social work offer unique contributions and resiliency in the midst of the previously described barriers and challenges. Research suggests that Indigenous women can nurture resiliency within themselves through family support, mentorship, and spiritual forces. Marshack, Hendricks, and Gladstein (1994) also suggest that, within an organizational context, policies need to be created that enhance the political power of Indigenous women. Agencies should continue to promote policies and practice that are culturally relevant and effective by working collaboratively with Indigenous women and Indigenous communities who hold valuable knowledge, experience, and expertise.

I believe the differences between Indigenous women should also be considered to ensure individual differences are not disregarded. The dynamics of resiliency need to be better understood so those supporting Indigenous women can build upon their strengths. Indigenous women social workers can help to support one another and future generations

by leading and leaving a legacy of cultural connection, mentoring, networking, and spiritual commitment.

In this chapter, I have presented a literature review to provide context to this research study. The development of the child welfare system in BC was built on a foundation of colonialism and patriarchy, and this system has negatively impacted Indigenous people and communities. Despite history, many Indigenous communities are resilient and committed to healing and wellness. An overview of the profession of social worker was also discussed within this chapter. More specifically, the personal, external, and organizational challenges social workers face, as well as burnout and retention issues were discussed. In addition, literature related specifically to gender socialization and culture and how these issues impact social workers was also explored. In the next chapter, the process of inquiry used in this study will be explored in detail.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

"If research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right."

(Wilson, 2008, p.135)

In this chapter, I will explain my choice of qualitative exploratory research as a methodological framework. I also drew from several of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's 25 Indigenous Projects (1999) for guidance when creating my research design. Aspects of the insider and outsider relationship between Indigenous methodologies and qualitative research described by Kovach (2009) were utilized during my research journey to support relational context and work. The research design and methods, ethical considerations, phases of the data analysis, and steps taken to promote integrity throughout the process will be described in detail.

Theoretical Orientation

As described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), research is linked to colonialism and it is generally seen as "one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (p. 1). Research has typically perpetuated Eurocentric views of Indigenous peoples through misrepresentation of history. It has been used to deny the rights of Indigenous peoples to their lands and resources, and has not supported Indigenous communities' inherent right to self-determination. Many communities have felt research completed within their communities has not been relevant or helpful. Science, cultural arrogance, and political power within research continue to be a real threat to Indigenous people as they inhibit Indigenous alternative knowledge and the process of reclaiming (Wilson, 2008).

I have personally struggled with being an Indigenous woman who is involved with academic research. I have a desire to gain a higher level of education through a recognized university, which is also supported by my family and community. However, it cannot be to the detriment of having to adjust my Indigenous values, or if it oppresses other Indigenous people. As an Indigenous researcher, I am aware that there are risks and sometimes consequences associated with conducting research. I witnessed the urban Indigenous community where I grew up subjected to continual research studies that lacked consideration for community needs and goals. Even as a youth, I naively participated in research focus groups because of the monetary incentive with no thought to how this research would be used or how it would impact the future. I have feared being criticized by other Indigenous community members, scholars, and Elders because of my decision to use an exploratory research methodology that is rooted in Western science.

Margaret Kovach (2009) suggested there are risks associated with bringing cultural knowledge into Western research spaces. Although colonial history has dismissed Indigenous ways of knowing, Kovach states that "many Indigenous people recognize that for their cultural knowledge to thrive it must live in many sites, including Western education and research" (2009, p. 12). I believe exploratory research allows space for research regarding Indigenous issues to be carried out in a manner that is respectful and ethically sound, and can be inclusive of Indigenous perspectives. In addition, "this process naturally challenges Western research paradigms, yet it also affords opportunities to contribute to the body of knowledge about Indigenous peoples" (Louis, 2007, p. 130). Utilizing an exploratory research design was beneficial for me as a

novice researcher because it provided me with a clear framework, and gave me the ability

to incorporate values and concepts to promote a respectful research process.

Smith (1999) implied that debates have continued to occur regarding the concept

of authenticity, which has been critical to the conflicts among Indigenous people in

relation to knowledge and culture. She stated that such debates are designed to fragment

and marginalize those who speak up about Indigenous issues. Other groups within

Indigenous society, like women and non-status people, are often silenced or made

invisible. Sharing alternative Indigenous views of the world is important to me as an

Indigenous woman. To have something worth sharing allows for reciprocity, which gives

dignity to the giver and the receiver (Smith, 1999). I mindfully chose a research topic

which I could relate to and had experiences to share so that I could promote reciprocal

interactions with the Indigenous women who participated in this study.

I felt it was important to use an Indigenous lens throughout the research process to

ensure respect for cultural beliefs, traditions, practices, and values remained at the

forefront as these factors are integral to promoting a humble and ethical process. My

hope was that this research study would benefit and empower the Indigenous women who

participated in this study to share and reclaim their experiences each in their own way

and for their own purposes.

Kovach (2009) states that Indigenous and qualitative methodologies share

common characteristics. Both approaches are relational, require self-reflexivity, and must

show evidence of process and content. I was cognisant that, as an Indigenous researcher

completing qualitative research, I was an insider and an outsider within Indigenous

contexts, and I identified that there was a constant need for self-reflexivity through

journaling during the research process. In my journal I found it helpful to include a visual reminder list for myself of key values and concepts I had identified as important to reflect upon during my research journey.

The complexities of an insider approach can be mediated through support mechanisms that ideally involve the Indigenous community. I mindfully chose to ensure there is an Indigenous woman, whom I respect as a mentor, to sit on my research advisory committee to ensure there is space for me to have culturally inclusive dialogue regarding issues associated with the complexities of Indigenous research, gender issues, and flexibility wherever needed. Louis (2007) suggests that "having a supportive Indigenous community in academia can provide students with the opportunity for intriguing discussions about their research and make graduate work on Indigenous issues feel less isolating" (p. 136).

As an Indigenous person it is important I remain humble and honest by acknowledging the limitations of this study. Although the research aims to honour the experiences of the Indigenous women who have volunteered to share their experiences, and I believe there were collective experiences that emerge which will be valuable to others, there will not be further extensive community collaboration and action taken within my first graduate level research experience. This study is not a representation of Indigenous peoples or Indigenous life. My hope is that the experiences shared within this study will capture some of the complexities, real-life dilemmas, and strengths of a unique group that share common experiences. Like Kovach (2009), I considered my role to be that of a facilitator rather than a 'knowledge-keeper', and I wanted to help "create entry points for Indigenous knowledge to come through" (p. 7).

Methodology

My intention was to share a personal approach to research that was culturally sensitive, balanced, harmonious, circular, holistic, and unfolds with fluidity and grace for me and those who choose to participate in this research study. Smith's (1999) book, "Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples" was written to support Indigenous researchers. Twenty-five projects are described within the text and provide some parameters that should be considered when proceeding with a research process. The projects described do not claim to be entirely Indigenous, and Smith (1999) suggests that Indigenous methodologies are often "a mix of existing methodological approaches and indigenous practices" (p. 143). I used many of Smith's suggestions, embedded in her projects, to guide my research process, including celebrating survival and remembering, connecting, representing, gendering, networking, and protecting.

Smith (1999) suggests there is value in celebrating survival within research that focuses on the positive and celebrates resistances at "an ordinary human level" (Smith, 1999, p. 145). I chose a research topic and design that I believe celebrates the survival of Indigenous women. This approach has helped affirm some of the collective experiences we share as Indigenous women, and celebrates the journey that each person has taken. Smith (1999) also notes the importance of remembering and discussing our collective history of colonialism. Although I did not ask specific questions related to the history of Indigenous people during the interview process, accounts of systemic racism and intergenerational trauma were brought up within the experiences shared by many of the Indigenous women who participated in this study. I believe creating space to talk about and share experiences regarding the history of colonialism can be transformative and

healing. Upon reflection of the interview process, I noted in my journal that I felt fortunate that many of the women felt they had a safe space in which to share their experiences. Engaging in personal prayer and cultural practices were helpful in keeping me grounded during the data collecting process.

Smith (1999) states that representation should be considered when researchers create their research study design. I believe that research completed by Indigenous people for Indigenous people helps counter the dominant society's view of Indigenous people, and allows the research to capture the complexities of being Indigenous. I was mindful of the value of representation when establishing my research process, and I believe I was successful in capturing some of the unique issues that have impacted Indigenous women working in child welfare.

Gendering, networking, and protecting are also concepts described by Smith (1999) that helped guide my research process. I chose to recruit women exclusively for this research because I believe that Indigenous women traditionally held unique roles within communities that are impacted by colonialism and paternalism. As described by Smith (1999), I also believe women continue to maintain a central role in creating harmony within the world today. We need to continue to create spaces for women to dialogue about issues that are unique to us to promote empowerment.

Relationship building and protecting were important principles that helped guide me during this research journey. Networking processes between Indigenous people is a form of resistance, which I deliberately chose to engage in. It was very important to me during this process to build connections with the participants through face-to-face interactions. Being respectful and transparent were at the forefront of every interaction

and decision I made regarding the research design process. I clearly described my personal and professional background and my purpose for doing this research at the onset with each participant. I believe this is particularly important when completing research with Indigenous people who have continued to be marginalized in the past through research processes. I also ensured participants had opportunities to engage in the analysis process by creating opportunities to share their observations and through review and feedback of their transcripts.

I noted in my journaling that some of the women interacted more freely with me and shared more personal experiences once the formal interview was complete and the audio recording had stopped. Although I believe I had established respectful and meaningful interactions with the participants, several Indigenous women were still cautious of what they shared during the formal interview process and asked that I not share some of the stories they told me during our meeting. The principle of protecting Indigenous people, knowledge, and ways of life were at the forefront of my thoughts throughout this research process. My research process was founded on the idea that Indigenous people have something to offer the non-Indigenous world. Several guiding principles for completing research with Indigenous people outlined in Smith's (1999) works described above were adapted and incorporated into my research process to promote research that is respectful, relevant, and helpful to the Indigenous women who agreed to participate in this study. I am also optimistic that the outcomes of this work will be of benefit to other social workers practicing in the field of child welfare.

The tenets of qualitative research provide a process of inquiry that is conducive to allowing the researcher an opportunity to illuminate the experiences and realities of those who participate in the research. Wilson (2008) states:

> Research within Aboriginal communities can be problematic if it is not informed by Aboriginal people themselves, based on ethical knowledge and procedures which locate the protocols of working with Aboriginal peoples within themselves. Research must be approached with integrity and fidelity to these knowledge procedures and protocols (p. 54).

Furthermore, Willis states research should contribute to self-determination as defined by the community itself. Neil (2000) describes Aboriginal research in the following way:

> Aboriginal research is research which reflects the values and beliefs of our peoples. Hopefully when Aboriginal researchers do research, they will keep their thinking broad in terms of methods and approaches, and will, at the same time be able to construct and conduct their research in a way which is in accordance with their worldviews (p. 145).

Neil also states Indigenous research is not defined as such just because you self-identify as Indigenous, rather it can be defined this way when the methods used, the way the research has been conducted, and the way the theory is constructed all reflect an Indigenous worldview as given to us by our mothers and grandmothers. I believe I have a responsibility to my community to adhere to my cultural teachings when conducting research. The cultural teachings that guide my life, which include honour and respect for all living things and my ancestors, shaped the approach I took within my entire research journey.

It was imperative that I maintain a sensitive and humble attitude during and after the research process to raise awareness and respect Indigenous women's perspectives. Furthermore, I believe the perspectives shared by the participants demonstrate strength and resilience. As an Indigenous researcher, I chose to utilize a qualitative-based methodological framework, along with formal strategies of conducting research with Indigenous people to promote harmony, positive change, and growth in the hopes of deconstructing privileged, Western systems of knowledge (Creswell, 2003).

In order to be transparent in this study, I identified my preconceptions, assumptions, and beliefs about the related issues. This identification process occurred in several ways, which included on-going discussion with my advisor and through self-reflective journaling which helped me to remain open and sensitive to internal and external scrutiny. Cresswell (2013) suggests this is relevant to the issues of reflexivity and the influence of the researcher in relation to the research and participants. Qualitative methodologies share a common goal in that "they seek to arrive at an understanding of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it" (Vaismoradi, Turuen, & Bondas, 2013, p. 398). A qualitative approach supported my intent to explore the complex experiences and perspectives of the Indigenous women who participated in this study while preserving the meaning individuals attribute to their unique experiences.

More specifically, an exploratory approach was chosen as it allowed me to examine my research topic using words, instead of numbers, and enabled me to focus on the underlying meanings and patterns of the relationships (Marlow, 2005). An exploratory strategy is often used when very little is known about a topic of study. Palys (2003) states that using exploration can be useful for researchers when they have little

knowledge about the group, process, or situation they want to examine. Stebbin (2001) also suggests that researchers need to maintain flexibility and open-mindedness while exploring a phenomenon. Focusing on experiences shared through interviews allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the individual and collective experiences shared which I do not believe could have occurred through a survey or through quantitative means.

Sample Selection

A purposeful sampling strategy was employed in this study to invite Indigenous female social workers who have a degree in social work and a minimum of two years of social work practice within the field of child welfare to participate in the study. This type of sampling is described in Koerber and McMichael (2008) as a non-probability approach where participants are chosen because of the essential characteristics they possess so they can answer questions about the topic being explored. I chose this approach as it supported the selection of participants who possess a rich body of knowledge with reference to my research topic. I wanted to create a space where the participant's knowledge and wisdom could be honoured. I believe this research process and analysis has strengthened my own social work practice, and I think it will deemed as helpful information by other social workers working within the field of child welfare.

Reflecting the diversity of the current Indigenous populations and communities in this region, the participants are from various Indigenous communities; however, they are all living in urban communities outside of their traditional communities. With the scope of this project and the difficulty of finding participants who meet the participation criteria, my proposed sample size was six to nine participants. I was able to interview eight Indigenous women who met the pre-determined selection criteria.

Participant Recruitment

There were several ways in which I recruited participants for my research. I began the recruitment process by emailing my recruitment poster directly to the list serve members of the British Columbia Association of Social Workers, Northern Women's Network, and Social Work Alumni (See Appendix A). Five Indigenous women responded to my call for participants through email. I also emailed three Indigenous women directly, whom I had had met previously, to enquire whether they would be interested in participating in the research.

In each case, I replied via email and asked for permission to provide more information about the research study. I attached a copy of the "information letter/ consent form" in my reply and I encouraged potential participants to review these documents (See Appendix B). I also asked potential participants if they would prefer to communicate via telephone, email, or meet in person to discuss the research study details and any questions they might have. Email was the preferred means of communicating chosen by each participant, so interviews were arranged via email correspondence and set up to occur within a month of the initial contact made.

All participants indicated that they would prefer it if I travelled to their community to conduct the interview, so I made arrangements to travel to conduct these interviews. Interviews were arranged in locations that the participants identified as being the most comfortable for them. Each participant was gifted at the end of the interview process as a gesture to show my appreciation for their willingness to share their experience with me and those who read this thesis.

I continued to write in a personal journal during this process to reflect my thoughts, feelings, and observations. I anticipated the recruitment process to take longer than it did as child welfare workers are often very busy and already inundated with paperwork; however, all of the participants expressed an interest in my research topic and were enthusiastic and eager to participate. Throughout this process, I maintained my own self-care and I maintained balance as well through prayer, smudging, and spending time in nature while I was gathering data.

Ethical Considerations

Because exploratory inquiry is a qualitative and interpretive approach, there are many ethical considerations to be addressed. Firstly, the overall small number of Indigenous female social workers working in child welfare and the number of child welfare agencies within British Columbia makes anonymity more difficult to maintain. I tried to maintain anonymity by asking each participant to choose a pseudonym. Other identifying information, such as names and places, were removed from the information reported in the study to ensure confidentiality.

All research participation was voluntary and participants were provided with a description of the proposed research, the rationale for the research, the associated risks, and the requirements for their participation as described in Appendix B. Participants were provided with informed consent information that outlines the research focus, as well as the participant's rights, risks, and potential benefits. Participant consents were signed prior to participating. Each participant was reminded throughout the process that she could withdraw at any time without consequence. All signed consent forms were kept in a locked cabinet in a secured office at the University of Northern British Columbia.

Research approval was sought and obtained from the University of Northern British Columbia Research Ethics Board (REB) prior to the commencement of this research. Additional ethics approval was requested from REB and obtained where applicable from the designate of the delegated Aboriginal agencies for participants who identified as being currently employed by a delegated Aboriginal agency.

This research study aimed to explore some shared experiences of Indigenous women; however, this research does not represent all Indigenous perspectives. I carry my own values and beliefs, which are rooted in particular life experiences. Thus, this study represents my subjective understanding, which is contextualized in a limited number of Indigenous women's experiences and beliefs. Furthermore, the qualitative methodology utilized may not be able to touch on all of the connections between historical, cultural, social, political, ecological, and economic factors and the research.

To support ethically sound conduct within the research process, I maintained an awareness regarding my dual roles as an Indigenous female researcher and as an employee of a delegated Aboriginal agency. As a researcher, I had a responsibility to ensure my employment commitments did not compromise my research or personal ethics (Social Research Association, 2004). To promote transparency and safety of the participants, the potential impact of my dual role within the context of my research was outlined in the consent information letter. I maintained ongoing transparency with all participants by reminding them throughout the process that they had the opportunity to withdraw at any time as their participation was voluntary. I provided my cell phone number and email address information to each participant and communicated that they

could contact me at any time should they have questions or concerns related to the research process.

I maintained a personal journal throughout the research study process to support self-reflexivity and to promote an accountable research process. Journaling was used as a tool for identifying existing or potential barriers. My own experience was explored in parallel to conducting and processing the interviews through my reflective journaling, which was an account and narrative of my thoughts, feelings and ideas.

Data Collection

Kvale (1996) states an interview is an interaction between a participant and an interviewer in which there is an exchange of views and interpretations are negotiated. Wilson (2008) supports this notion by stating interviews are focussed discussions that allow the researcher to gather information directly from the point of view as expressed by the participant, supports a mutual sharing of information and a reflection on the meaning of one's experiences.

Interviews are used to explore the knowledge and to capture the voices and experience of those with information relevant to the research inquiry (Onweugbuzie, 2003; Sreejesh, Mohapatra, & Anusree, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) suggest in-depth interviews can promote an Indigenous methodology through the telling of stories and counter-narratives that disrupt privileged Western views by exposing the complexities and contradictions that exist.

Participants' experiences were captured through face-to-face individual interviews that were audio-recorded. Semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were used to guide the process and created consistency within the interview processes.

Interviews took place in locations mutually agreed upon and where participants were comfortable confidentiality would be maintained. The information and consent letter, along with the interview questions, were sent to each participant via email 24 hours prior to the commencement of the interview. This provided participants with sufficient time to review the questions, consider their responses, and to communicate any questions or concerns. The consent information was also reviewed in person before starting the interview process as an added measure of researcher accountability. A personal greeting card and small gift was given to each woman at the end of her interview to show respect and gratitude for their willingness to share their knowledge.

During the interview process, I listened intently to all the experiences and ideas shared by the women who agreed to participate in this study. I believed this group had much to share with social workers and other stakeholders and that these voices are not often heard so I was excited to enter into this research with them. I felt so grateful that each of these women had agreed to share her story with me. Developing comfortable relationships with each participant was important to me in this study and I made efforts to communicate and develop reciprocal interactions as much as possible. However, it was also challenging as the research to development relationships during a considerable short time period and the interview process seemed to bring about a formality to these interactions.

At the end of each interview, I asked the participants how they felt and also reminded them of the counseling contact information provided in my information and consent letter. I was prepared to debrief with participants if they appeared to be upset or indicated that we had triggered memories that were upsetting. However, all of the

participants seemed to be grateful to finally have the opportunity to talk about their experiences openly. Many participants told me they felt that it was important to talk about and acknowledge their strengths. During each interview I felt inspired and motivated by the experiences they shared with me.

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by a third party transcriber. The third party transcriber reviewed and agreed to maintain confidentiality and signed the Transcriber Agreement of Confidentiality (See Appendix D). Although my initial plan was to transcribe each interview myself, barriers and time constraints prevented me from being able to complete this task. I spent many hours reviewing the transcriptions while simultaneously listening to each interview recording. Participants were provided with a copy of their personal transcript to review for any changes and then approve as part of supporting transparency and credibility within the research process (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012).

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis is a method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within data. This method is widely used in qualitative research. Thematic meanings are identified by Holloway and Todres (2003) as one of the few shared generic skills across qualitative analysis. It has been described as a tool to use across different methods because it is flexible and is not firmly connected to one theoretical framework. It is considered a non-linear process that promotes a rich, complex, and detailed description of the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

An inductive approach to analyzing the data was taken. This approach allows the semantic themes to emerge from data and to be analyzed without trying to fit them into a

pre-existing coding framework. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that, an "inductive

approach means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves" (p. 83).

Inductive analysis is further described as a "bottom up" way to identifying themes and

patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of thematic analysis permits the

researcher to combine analysis of their meaning within their particular context

(Onwuegbuze, 2003). I believe this approach is consistent with the ethical conduct of

research in relation to carrying out research with Indigenous people.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that although flexibility is seen as a benefit of

using thematic analysis, it is still important to follow clear guidelines to ensure the

analysis is methodologically sound. Their 6-phase step-by-step guide to performing

thematic analysis was used to guide my data analysis. In the initial phases, I immersed

myself in the data by becoming familiar with it. I did this by listening to the entire audio-

recorded interviews several times, by reading and rereading the transcriptions, and by

noting my initial ideas in the margins, along with any connections to my journal

reflections (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Next, I generated initial coding for as many potential themes and patterns as I

could find, and extracted data relevant to each code while ensuring to include

surrounding data for context. I was mindful to consider whether individual extracts of

data could fit into different themes and was open to coding them many times.

I completed this manual coding process by using highlighters and coloured 'post-

it' notes to identify segments of data as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Common

themes were then highlighted and coded using different coloured highlighters to represent

each theme within each transcript. Different colours of construction paper were then used

to create headings for each theme. Each highlighted quote associated with a theme was then cut out of the photocopied transcribed text and attached to the corresponding coloured board underneath the theme title as described in the figure below.

Figure 1. Visual display of themes.

This process enabled me to clearly identify themes while creating a visual

reference during the analysis process. The themes were narrowed down to five overarching themes with a set of sub-themes as described in the table below. Once the themes were visually displayed I read transcripts one final time as a review mechanism to ensure no themes or subthemes were missed. I defined and named themes, sub themes, and miscellaneous themes by creating a table with the name of each code and included a brief description.

In addition, I checked to make sure the themes worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set by creating a 'thematic map' (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A written analysis was created to explain the 'story' each theme tells and how it fits within

the context of the overall 'story'. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that themes should clearly be defined in terms of what they are as well as what they are not.

The final stage of the analysis included presenting the report by selecting compelling examples and extracts to include in my written findings chapter. These selections and extractions were also analyzed in relation to the research question and literature related to the topic.

I kept a journal throughout this process to reflect my own ideas and thoughts related to the process and the themes. This assisted me in identifying and processing my own feelings after each interview, as well as any emotions that the participants showed. At the end of each interview, I spent time journaling my thoughts and feelings about the interview and the participant's reactions. I noted when participants had made similar comments about their experiences and some of the themes started to emerge in these early journal entries. I also made journal entries while I transcribed the interviews noting when similar phrases, words, or thoughts were repeated by more than one of the participants. The written transcriptions were emailed to each participant for editing and approval. This process was completed to ensure I had correctly written what they wanted to express, and to ensure they felt respected in the process.

Integrity in Research

Quality in research is dependent on honesty, transparency, and a self-critical awareness and attitude to promote trust and an evaluation process for 'consumers of the research' (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

Rigor, as a concept, is linked to the quality of the research process, which promotes trustworthiness and accountability. A number of components are used to define

rigorous qualitative research: "transparency, credibility, reliability, and reflexivity" (Saumure & Given, 2008, p. 795). I have attempted to promote transparency and clarity within my research study by providing those who read my thesis with a detailed description of the steps taken within the research process. This also gave the participants the opportunity to assess whether the methods chosen were appropriate in relation to my research question.

Credibility is identified as an "overriding goal of qualitative research, reflecting the relativistic nature of truth claims in the interpretivist tradition" (Whittemore et al., 2001, p. 530). Assuring credibility refers to the purposeful effort to establish an accurate interpretation of the meaning of the data. I attempted to complete member checks with all participants individually by providing them with a copy of their written transcription. I also attempted to gather feedback from each participant concerning the interview transcription and initial thematic data analysis. I will also provide each participant with a copy of the completed thesis.

Reliability is also an important process to consider when evaluating qualitative research. It is especially important when it comes to coding information to ensure different viewers would code the data similarly (Merritt, 2012). In regards to coding and thematic analysis, my academic advisor independently reviewed an interview transcript and compared her results with my coding to see whether the results were similar to help enhance reliability.

Lastly, reflexivity has emerged as a key evaluation component and critical concept in the methodology of qualitative research. How reflexivity is conceptualized and how it is incorporated into research practices has implications for the qualitative research

produced (Day, 2012). Reflexivity entails the researcher being self-aware of her effect on the process and outcomes based on the premise that "knowledge cannot be separated from the knower" and that, "In the social sciences, there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself" (Anderson, 2008, p. 747). Reflexivity requires consideration and examination of decisions made at each stage of the research process. I kept a journal of my thoughts and ideas throughout the research process to promote self-reflectivity.

Summary

In summary, a qualitative exploratory methodological framework and ways of approaching research with Indigenous communities were used to guide this research process. The evaluation criteria described in this chapter helped to promote transparency, enhance accountability, and trustworthiness within my research process (Finlay, 2002). The themes that emerged from research, other relevant ideas shared by the participants, and similarities between the literature and research findings will be described in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

The research findings offer rich information and insight into the experiences of the Indigenous women who participated in this study. The participants articulated that they felt this research was needed and they were pleased to have the opportunity to share their insights about this important issue. Quotes are included throughout this chapter to ensure the research participants' voices are central to this discussion. In this chapter, I will discuss my research findings, which include demographical information and details regarding the five themes and subthemes identified within the research. Examining the themes and subthemes that emerged throughout the research will be used to better understand the factors that help social workers remain resilient while working in the field of child welfare.

Demographical Information

Participants who met the following criteria were invited to participate in this research study: 1) possess a degree in social work; 2) have worked in the field of child welfare in BC for a minimum of two years; and 3) are female and self-identify as being First Nations, Metis, or Inuit.

Eight participants agreed to participate in this research study and completed individual interviews with me. Participants resided within different urban communities throughout British Columbia. All participants were women, and their Indigenous roots included Metis ancestry and First Nations communities in British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba. Four women identified as being members of First Nations communities in British Columbia, while three women identified as belonging to First Nations communities from outside the province. Three women also identified as having Metis

ancestry. The specific communities will not be listed due to the small sample size, and to protect the participants' anonymity. Each participant was asked to choose a pseudonym, which will be used throughout this chapter to protect confidentiality.

The participants' ages ranged between mid-thirties to mid-fifties. Years of delegated child welfare experience ranged from a minimum of six years of experience up to twenty years of experience. Areas of child welfare experience included child protection investigation and family service work, guardianship, and permanency planning and adoptions. Four of the participants also had experience working as team leaders or had held supervisory positions within child welfare agencies.

In regards to educational background, seven participants had obtained a Bachelor's degree in Social Work (BSW). One participant identified as having a BSW with an Indigenous specialization, while another participant had obtained a BSW with a child welfare specialization. Two participants also possessed Master of Social Work degrees.

Table 1: Identified Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme
1. Self-Identity	Indigenous Ways of Knowing
	Culture & Spirituality
2. Goodness of Fit	Personal & Professional Values Aligning
	Workplace Innovation
	Social Work Practice
3. Access to Resources and Supports	Supervision and Debriefing
	Training and Cultural Resources
	The Power of Mentorship
4. Relationships	
5. Self-care and Work-life Balance	

Self-Identity

Two important areas, or sub-themes, regarding self-identity emerged within the data: 1) the personal insight and acknowledgment each woman held regarding their Indigenous perspective, or lens, and how it related to their social work practice, and 2) how aspects of culture and spirituality enabled these women to be resilient despite working in the very stressful field of child welfare.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

The participants in this research all recounted ways in which colonialism had impacted them directly or indirectly. All of these remarkable Indigenous women mentioned they had become involved initially, or remained involved, in child welfare

because they hoped they could make a difference in the lives of Indigenous children and families. They also touched on how their Indigenous views or lens have impacted their view of the world and the child welfare system. Jessica shared her personal story of being an Indigenous woman who was adopted and reunited with her birth mother and siblings as an adult:

> I was incredibly fortunate to have those relationships as an adult, but for me it was also very telling about the different life trajectories we have and the different outcomes and the different struggles we face based on that sort of colonial practice of adopting children out. Privilege is really clear in my own personal story and so for me it is obviously very important to acknowledge that privilege and to give back…So giving back was always really important to me and issues in social justice...so I think those two things combined sort of lead me to social work.

Barb described how her upbringing shaped the way she views the concept of family and how this drew her to the work and also motivated her to practice differently within the child welfare system:

> I loved sitting beside my grandmothers growing up and listening to them, they were all caregivers, they all took care of everybody's children and I loved listening to their stories…listening to the Cree language…children were never viewed separate. They were always part of everything…kids weren't separated from the adults, and Western culture does that. They separate them. We separate our Elders, put them in homes...where I grew up, we took care of my grandma…Yes it was very difficult, but we did not even think about separating

her from the family unit…we talk about having people that are unhealthy and not safe, we always knew who they were and we always protect one another around that. Nobody was ever segregated and made to feel that they didn't belong somewhere. So I believe in my practice that children do belong with their family and in their community, and that can happen. They need to be a part of that no matter what. Lifelong.

Several women mentioned the devastating effect colonialism had on their family and how it motivated them to work in the field of child welfare and bring their Indigenous perspectives into their work, as described by Melissa:

As an Aboriginal person I lost a sister to the sixties' sweep and she passed away before we could meet. I saw how the loss of my sister affected my mother and grandmother. I have a special place in my heart for children and have always wanted to work with them. I was late starting my career, but I was determined to do it. I also would hear from families who were dealing with welfare that they did not like dealing with them. I thought having someone in the field who could relate and show respect would be beneficial to the families.

The women all shared specifically how being Indigenous shapes the way they view the world within all aspects of life, as well as in their child welfare work. Kali shared her experience in the following way:

When you work from an Indigenous perspective you kind of come to the work with a different lens. Like you have that Indigenous lens in everything you do. And so, I think that's embedded in everything that you do, like in your professional practice and your life.

Because of the devastating effects the child welfare system had on Indigenous people in Canada, it can be particularly difficult for Indigenous social workers to work within this oppressive system, as described in Jessica's experience:

> I think my practice is grounded in an Aboriginal perspective...I think knowing who I am and where I come from has been really important...I think having a strong sense, but a calm sense of identity, and an understanding of that I feel pretty grounded and self-identifying and being really clear on those things. And being really clear with my calm, with my own story...I think it is really important to be clear and calm about your personal identity and grounded in that and understand the place you come from. But the other piece that I would say, and I have seen this at work, the self-identity of being an Aboriginal woman doing this work is impacting your case work in that it's too difficult to watch the systemic oppression...and the fighting becomes reactive and having a balance between good practice and clear practice and your own personal identity it's really difficult. But I think once that balance strikes there is nothing we can't do.

Lynn described how being First Nations impacts her perspective of the work:

> I think it helps with just having a stronger identity...being First Nations and wanting to make a change for First Nations lives. That has been a huge factor as well for working in the field of child welfare.

Culture and Spirituality

The women who participated in this research study described how they have used their Indigenous ways of knowing, cultural knowledge, and spirituality to provide them with the strength and balance required to be resilient as social workers working within a

Western system that often conflicts with Indigenous ways of knowing. For example,

Britany meditates daily, which has helped her remain resilient, and she said, "There's a

daily connection of just honouring the universe." Some of the women described inherent

strength they would draw upon, while others described how their belief systems enabled

them to be resilient.

> Kali shared her experience when she said:

> Calling on…reflecting on the strength of my ancestors and just the fact that some

> of my ancestors, some of my female ancestors did amazing things with their lives

> and really lived lives of incredible hardship…when things have gotten really bad

> for me, I have reflected on that and just kind of felt…I can do what needs to get

> done. So, kind of that inner belief I guess in my own self. In my own ability to get

> through.

Barb described how she uses her cultural beliefs as the foundation for balance within her

life:

> To have a good balance in my life, I definitely work the medicine wheel even

> though I don't say it – physically, emotionally, spiritually. I believe that there's

> always good in everything and things happen for a reason.

Two woman also mentioned that they seek out Elders for advice and mentorship, and

ground themselves in cultural practices, such as smudging.

Goodness of Fit

> The environment in which we work can contribute to our satisfaction within our

work, and can promote resilience. All the women described aspects of their environment

that strengthened or hindered their commitment and ability to remain resilient while
working in child welfare.

Personal and Professional Values Aligning

Many women shared their experiences of working within agencies where the
agency values and their personal values aligned. Jessica described her experience in the
following way when talking about the delegated Aboriginal agency where she works:

> [Agency] is a fairly healthy agency and is committed to a very similar value
> esteem that I would myself have including things like relationship based social
> work, strength based practice founded in other values like respect and integrity
> and humility. Working for an agency that matches my values…certainly adds to
> resiliency. Feeling like I have a sense of belonging at [agency] and that's really
> offering some resiliency I would say...I think being fairly happy and content in
> my workplace certainly helps.

Lynn shared a similar experience:

> Working for a delegated Aboriginal agency, having culture as the forefront has
> helped me. Being able to keep that incorporated into my practice by participating
> in their potlatch and some traditional events in the community…a sense of pride
> that the work that I produce is appreciated and it helps with the agency's mandate,
> mission…

Another woman also described her experience as positive because of the agency she
worked for, when she said:

Environment is huge. The office that I'm at right now, I look forward to coming

to work because I know that this is a really good place to be and where I need to

be because the vision and everything is in line with what I want to do.

Many delegated Aboriginal agencies incorporate cultural and spiritual practices into their

daily business, and the women who worked at delegated Aboriginal agencies provided

specific examples during their interviews. For example, in many agencies work meetings

often start and end with a prayer, and food is blessed before meals. Many participants and

I have also had our office spaces blessed through cultural practices, which helps to

promote good energy in the workplace.

In contrast, Kali shared her personal experience and response when there was a

shift in philosophy within the organization where she worked:

My position for a lot of years was an excellent fit for me. And, I feel like I did

good work I was proud of the work that I did, and then a few things changed and

suddenly it wasn't a fit for me anymore, and that's when you need to make a

change and to recognize that a shift has occurred.

Workplace Innovation

All of the women described flexibility within their workplaces as a factor that

influenced their willingness to stay working in their positions. Jessica described how this

work can be difficult, and that having flexibility to take time away from work when

needed has helped her remain resilient:

Having a supportive work place and an understanding in the work place is

certainly a good coping strategy. I know that if I say "Hey, I'm kind of done for

the day," I'm respected and that's helpful.

Lynn had a similar experience in regards to flexibility:

> Just having that flexibility of if I do need to have a day off just to recoup, there is
>
> usually no issues from me being able to get that from my work. As well, as
>
> offering flex days that's helped a huge amount to just be able to recoup I guess
>
> and come back to work fresh.

Jane talked about how the need for flexibility can be important and unique when working

with Indigenous people. She described an experience where, when her colleague's

grandmother was very ill and she needed to take time off work, she was supported to take

time away from work even though it wasn't an immediate family member:

> She took about four days off. And then, they are waiting for her to pass and then
>
> she'll have to take more time off and in some collective agreements they only
>
> allow for so much time. But, like for Aboriginal people…it doesn't matter, it
>
> could be an aunt, it could be a grandmother, but it could affect them just as much
>
> as it would if it were their immediate family. So I think that death is seen very
>
> differently in the Aboriginal culture.

Kali explained her view in regards to why flexibility should be considered when working

with Indigenous social workers in the following quote:

> …trying to be creative rather than stigmatize people and say, "This is what
>
> [agency] has to offer you and if you can't make it…then obviously, you're not fit
>
> for this work." So rather that looking at it that way, looking at it as "why are you
>
> struggling and what is it that I can do?"…to be more flexible in what I'm doing to
>
> meet those needs and come at it from where you're at as opposed to where I'm at.

Social Work Practice

The importance of having the autonomy and support to practice social work in a way that aligns with one's own beliefs was another factor that enabled all of these women to continue to practice in the field of child welfare. Kali communicated her experience in the following way:

I had a lot of autonomy at work...I was able to...follow my own heart in my

work. I never felt pressured to make a choice that went against my own values or

what I needed to be able to live with.

Jessica told me about how her agency supported her anti-oppressive practice when they supported her to start a new program:

I think about having the freedom to do relationship based practice. Working with

these kids has been an incredible gift...it is a drop in the bucket now, but from a

larger perspective really adding to the social change movement where Aboriginal

people are coming out of systems of oppression and systemic oppression and

moving forward in a really different and much better way. Being part of that is

really exciting.

Taeya described a similar experience of how the agency she works for supports her to practice strength-based social work:

...trying to have better outcomes for them through the supports we provide at

[agency] and having some of the opportunities that can help them in their lives.

That keeps me going. And working in an agency like [agency] that provides great

flexibility. They are really good at honouring some of the milestones kids will go

through…the support of children building relationships with their families…and then the supports the social workers are provided with as well.

In Barb's response to the interview questions, she compared her different experiences in relation to her practice and the agencies where she worked:

I'm allowed to do what is best for the children. I don't have to go through as much red tape to get what I need. I don't get told no if I really believe in something. I'm supported with that and I do it. Whereas, the ministry, even though my supervisors supported me, it always went up the line and always got rejected. So, I'm allowed. I can advocate for a child and pretty much get what I need….We're working for them. They're not working for us. I think there's a lot of people that work in delegated agencies that have that same belief. They want kids to feel like they belong….

Another woman said that people told her she shouldn't work in child welfare because she was struggling while working for MCFD. She shared this powerful response regarding the situation:

It wasn't the actual work…because I've always been able to do the work and it's just whether I wanted to do it that way or not. And I've always chosen to do it my way and stay that way. That's why it's been easier for me to carry on because I'm true to myself. I can leave my work knowing that I'm a genuine person, and that I've done everything I could do for that day…and the [clients].

Access to Resources and Supports

Having access to resources and supports was a theme that emerged within all of the interviews. The subthemes that emerged within all of the interview transcripts

include: 1) having access to clinical supervision and debriefing; 2) being able to access training and cultural resources; and 3) the importance of mentorship.

Supervision and Debriefing

Having access to consistent but adaptable clinical supervision appeared to be very important to all the women. They all said that supervision can either help or hinder your child welfare work. Having access to supportive teammates and debriefing were also said to be a helpful means of support.

Taeya said that supervision was important to her continued resiliency, and in supporting her as an individual when she was struggling. She stated "good supervision, especially when you are down on yourself and you want to give up, that's been strong at [agency] with the supervisor I work with."

Jessica described the need for consistent and malleable support, especially for Indigenous women working within their own Indigenous communities:

> We would debrief every week…I think there needs to be consistent support, and it needs to be available whenever it's needed. Not just on Tuesdays. Like if you want people to work in their communities, too that's another thing because it's hard to work in your community especially when you are from the same family. So it's like have a better support management team to help you through that…a better team atmosphere. So you're not feeling like you were just let out to the wolves.

Brittany described the need for clinical supervision and debriefing in the following way:

> I came across some really talented and wonderful team leaders and definitely debrief with them was helpful and being able to debrief with colleagues. I don't

think there's enough clinical supervision in child welfare that separates your own

lens from what you're dealing with.

Another woman shared a similar experience when she touched on the importance of

clinical supervision:

> ...when I'm talking about clinical supervision. I'm specifically talking about
>
> being able to sit down and discuss a situation with your team leader or your
>
> manager and them being able to help you bring up thoughts, ideas, strategies that
>
> you might not have thought of on your own. Because you're only one person. You
>
> can only think of so much and maybe being able to challenge you a little bit on
>
> your biases. I ended up getting a lot of that from my team...I didn't get it from my
>
> team leader...

Melissa also shared her experience of working in an environment where supervision was

lacking:

> I had a team leader who watched over me like I was incompetent and every
>
> Aboriginal social worker who worked with her ended up quitting. I was the only
>
> one who stayed. Had I not moved teams I would have quit too.

The importance of utilizing your teammates for support and to debrief was also brought

up by all the women. For example, Kali said that "knowing who is on your team I know I

can trust and who I think is a good critical thinker. Being able to turn to that person I

think was a really important coping strategy." Taeya shared a similar experience and

stated, "I think debriefing, having good colleagues has helped too. Just to be able to have

the same comradery to be able to talk about stuff. That's been good. And good

supervision."

Jessica mentioned the importance of having a team that is invested in supporting each other and described this as, "having a really supportive team at work. Having a really supportive supervisor at work, I think very supportive peers…we have a pretty invested team…"

The women also talked about the importance of having a strong peer support network at work, and working with supervisors and teammates who acknowledge and share in your successes. It was also mentioned that working with supervisors who "have your back" when you are faced with making difficult decisions regarding high risk scenarios or cases was necessary in order to have good professional support at work.

Training and Cultural Resources

Having access to appropriate training and cultural resources was declared to be important and valued by all the women who were interviewed in this study. For example, Kali talked about the significance training had in her child welfare career in the following way:

> …a huge, huge piece for me as that…we got really good training and that really
>
> helped me in its own way to feel resilient because I felt empowered and educated
>
> around the decisions that I was making.

Likewise, Brittany talked about the value of having access to training opportunities:

> The [agency] was really good at offering education and learning. So there was lots
>
> of opportunities to take things you didn't learn about…there were lots of training
>
> where you could become more knowledgeable.

Several women also described the need for access to cultural resources such as protocols, teachings, practices, and cultural knowledge holders. Two women talked about cultural

teachings and practices being incorporated into the agencies where they worked: for example, having access to smudging or brushing at work. Others talked about participating in cultural camps, which was instrumental in helping them better understanding the families and communities where they were working.

Jane said that having access to formal cultural resources within the agency where she works is helpful:

I can forward that to our cultural coordinator…say I have to go take some kids back for a homecoming or take them back to their community. I consult with her and she usually guides me along and, you know teaches my about protocols.

Another woman also said she had access to formal cultural resources in the delegated Aboriginal agency where she worked:

[Agency] has two formal Elders on staff and we also have a cultural coordinator. If I'm looking for those kinds of teachings I would look towards them who are raising culture and that is their expertise and that is their knowledge base. I also love the idea of incorporating Elders into our work in general.

Lynn similarly described the significance of connecting with Elders. She went on further to share that she believes it to be helpful in guiding social work practice:

I have always had a huge amount of respect for Elders, and always when they speak I would always stop and listen and I give them all my attention because that's something that as Indigenous people, as each one of our Elders passes on or something happens where they are no longer around, you lose a piece of history. A piece of culture…keeps you strong in your identity.

One woman suggested that having access to programs such as healing circles would be helpful for social workers working with clients dealing with trauma, as well as for clients themselves. In contrast, two women mentioned that they already had access to formalized programs that incorporated a circle process and more holistic approach to the work within the delegated Aboriginal agencies where they practiced.

The Power of Mentorship

It was very evident within the qualitative analysis that mentorship was valued by all the women as an important component in facilitating resiliency and well-being while working in child welfare. Many women spoke about the importance of having access to mentors who are also Indigenous women.

Taeya believes that mentorship is specifically important for Indigenous social workers who may have more or unique pressures placed on them:

> I think just mentorship. I think that's a huge piece. I think you definitely have a
> lot more pressure on you not to fail due to the fact that you want to be successful
> in your job and for your community. You want to be successful in moving
> forward…like how the history has gone…with Indigenous people. There's just a
> lot of pressure…

Jessica shared her experience being mentored as a new social worker and talked about how mentorship could be helpful for Indigenous social workers:

> I met a lot of mentors earlier on in my career, and I still have several, but notably
> they are all not indigenous…really strong and amazing practitioners that I'm
> really grateful to have in my life, but I have never had an Indigenous role model
> in my life as a practitioner. I would think the next generation of Indigenous social

workers would have more access to that…having some sort of

mentorship…Because I think often we see people struggling in the same way that

we blame women for not taking care of their children is the same way we blame

individual social workers for not coping. But the reality is if we are not opening a

dialogue around what these things look like, if we are not offering

mentorship…we are not offering a healthy dialogue around it would be normal to

struggle with these things around identity and practice and this work is really

impactful.

Another woman described how child welfare work can be particularly triggering for

Indigenous social workers given the generational trauma many of us have faced, and that

offering opportunities for access to healthy mentors can potentially decrease the feeling

of isolation.

Relationships

Relationships was a theme that was echoed and interwoven into the dialogues of

all women who were interviewed during this research study. All of the women appeared

to place high value and priority in building relationships with others in their personal and

professional lives. Many spoke specifically about the relationships with their partners,

children, parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, Elders, and friends. Great significance was

also placed on taking the time to build meaningful and authentic relationships with their

colleagues and clients. Building and maintaining relationships and practicing social work

in a way that 'sits well with your heart and mind' appeared to be highly valued.

Gratitude, hope, respect, and humility were fundamental values that each of the women

indirectly portrayed within the discussions I was fortunate to have with each of these incredible Indigenous women.

Jessica talked about two things she feels are important in her life:

> ...having fulfilling relationships and having meaningful work. I really believe that the work we do is meaningful. I believe that listening to these children and witnessing their lives and honouring their lives is really meaningful work and really important work. So I would say that is probably the utmost for me.

Kali described the unique ways an Indigenous person may view relationship building and how this can be seen as a barrier rather than a strength in the high-paced, overburdened child welfare system:

> There is a focus on taking the time to build relationships that I don't think is the same. Just being slow about the work, I think there's so much criticism and I think I've been guilty of this myself over the years. There's so much criticism when people don't do the work quickly, but it's like that is not the Indigenous lens. Indigenous people in general value relationship building, doing the work well, doing it slowly...over let's just get the job done, sign the paper work and get it done.

Taeya talked about the personal rewards she gets from the relationships she builds with the families she works with:

> ...being able to see the families and kids grow...building relationships, seeing them become people they've become, seeing them be successful in what they can be. I think the longer you work with certain people, building relationships is a huge step...and even still connecting with some of them after their no longer

involved has been a personal reward just because it shows you that you've built

really strong relationships with them.

Barb also described an experience that relates to the significance of relationships she has

built through her work:

I keep cards from people that I've worked with in the past, I even met somebody

that I worked with many, many years ago and reconnected. They're not in a good

place, but no one is working with their kids and they're trying to relay that. To

me, trying to help people that I know that have been disadvantaged for so long

just little things…that makes me happy. Doesn't take much.

Self-Care and Work-Life Balance

All of the women consistently mentioned that they were conscientious about

maintaining balance and staying healthy in their personal and work lives through self-

care. All admitted that this was sometimes difficult and that there have been times when

they have struggled to maintain balance. Two women decided to change careers after

years of social work practice in the field of child welfare because they were no longer

able to successfully maintain work-life balance. All women talked about how having peer

and family support networks has helped them be resilient in their work and in their

personal lives. Two women talked about taking baths regularly and journaling as part of

their relaxation routine and to unwind from the busy-ness and stress of work.

Some women also commented that exercise, accessing counseling as needed,

using humour as an outlet, and having healthy boundaries when trying to balance work

and personal time helped to reduce burnout. Two women said their workplaces offered

massage therapy and yoga on site, and another woman talked about wellness challenges

at work motivating her to become healthier by increasing her physical activity and changing her eating habits.

Jane described how she promotes health and wellness through self-care as a team leader with her team:

> I think a lot of people especially in the helping field look after themselves last. I always encourage people that I work with to exercise and eat healthy and to look after themselves…just taking time for themselves and not overworking themselves.

In contrast, Britany talked about the experience she had when the agency she worked for placed too many expectations on her work and how it led to burnout for her:

> The agency was very small…I just really struggle because the boundaries between person and agency got very blurred and I couldn't cope with that. I couldn't cope with, 'this agency is my life and if you don't go above and beyond we all hate you'.

Kali talked about the importance of peer support as a way to support self-care:

> Have people to talk to. Be able to do whatever you need to do to be able to stay psychologically healthier self… Having friends. I have a lot of social work friends and the majority of my friends are social workers. I think having friends who do similar work to you, it can be really important because I think that you don't really get what it's like to be a social worker unless you are one…just having a social life where I have people that I can spend time with and do things with.

Several women mentioned the importance of spending time with family, and that their children motivated them to stay healthy and balanced as well. All the women talked

specifically about keeping healthy boundaries by trying to keep work and their personal lives separate to promote balance. For example, Lynn said she maintains her work-life balance in the following quote: "Just being mindful that when I leave work to try and have family time. Just trying to keep that separation as well."

Barb shared a similar perspective:

> Don't take on more than I can chew. Keep work at work if at all possible I do. If I have something that's eating me up and I need to get it done, I get it done and then I take the time off.

Taeya talked about acknowledging her limits and asking for help as part of her self-care plan:

> Being able to have good boundaries and knowing when to put it down and shut it off…recognizing my limits within my job. Knowing when to ask for help is definitely key. Knowing when I'm going to be burn out…I don't think you can take everything on your shoulders all the time on your own.

One woman described resiliency and the issue of self-care articulately when she said:

> It's like it's messy. Like it's so maintaining balance and resiliency is a messy, messy process. And I feel like I get off course and then somehow I'm reminded that I'm off course. Something kicks me in the butt and I realize I'm off course. I get back; I try to get back on course again…being able to keep coming back to the table over and over and over again and strive to be resilient and balanced.

Several women concluded that balance and resilience is a lifelong process. One woman described the process as rediscovering herself over and over again as she moves through different stages and changes of life. Another woman acknowledged that using good

humour and not taking yourself too seriously can help as we strive to maintain balance in our lives.

Kali felt strongly that resiliency and self-care should be discussed in the workplace to avoid burnout when she stated:

> One thing we don't do well in the workplace is even acknowledge the importance of resiliency, self-care and the potential for burn out. I've never heard anyone talk about any of these topics in the workplace other than to criticize someone in an off-handed way for being burnt out…I guess there's a lack of "realness" about how social workers can be impacted in their work.

Stress and Health

There were also barriers to social work practice and suggestions regarding future considerations shared by some of the women that did not meet the criteria as a theme or sub theme. However, I believe these experiences are still pertinent to this research topic and should be considered by those supporting Indigenous social workers.

The issue of institutional racism that Indigenous people have and continue to face in society as well as in the workplace was brought up by half of the women who had worked for MCFD. They spoke of experiencing discrimination on the job. They felt as though they worked in a fish bowl, were seen as tokens, and their credentials were undervalued. In contrast, the women who worked within delegated Aboriginal agencies did not share the same experience regarding racism within their agencies, but spoke of the frustration in dealing with other professionals and agency partners who did not share the same philosophy, values, and beliefs regarding how to support families, and more specifically Indigenous populations.

One woman talked about her experience of being subjected to racism growing up and how it is still an issue today that needs to be addressed:

Having to go through the racism that I had to go through when growing up, knowing it's alive and well in this community, not pretending that it's not, and there are a lot of non-Aboriginal people that I worked with that have experienced racism as well. But Aboriginal people experience a lot of racism that I don't think other non-Aboriginals do. So they don't have the same understanding and empathy because I think a lot of people come in making a lot of judgments about people, mostly Aboriginal people…growing up I was called a "dirty Indian" and I was like "Wow, I'm clean!" But, people don't realize it's still happening. I still hear those terms.

Discrimination in the workplace, as well as concrete ideas for improving the work environment for Indigenous social workers, was discussed between one woman and me during her interview:

I mean, in my perfect world, I would love to see people be more courageous and call their fellow social workers on some of their thoughtless and racist remarks. Again, that's a cultural shift. Where I've heard things like, "is she really Aboriginal?" Its like, "how about you mind your own business?!" I heard people say that about other people. "Oh, he's not really Aboriginal. He's blond-haired, blue-eyed", and I really do believe and I try…to have the courage to call people on things because that's not okay. So just hopefully, I guess changing some of that culture…maybe that's another way that Indigenous social workers can

ultimately be supported is by working for organizations that are maybe not government and that have values that are more similar to their own.

Another woman courageously shared her experience of racism within her current workplace and offered words of encouragement to other Indigenous social workers:

> When I started this job and even today there are people in my workplace who try to discreetly show their racism but it always comes out…As Aboriginal workers we need to remember what we were taught: respect, humour, humility, and appreciation. Applying these values to my job has helped me stay and continue working for an organization that to this day is feared and disrespected…

A significant point was raised by several women regarding what changes should be made within agencies to raise cultural awareness in a relevant way to decrease racism, and to better meet the unique needs of Indigenous social workers rather than doing the bare minimum to meet bureaucratic requirements.

Several women said that they felt having more Indigenous women in leadership roles within agencies, universities, and at policy-making levels would be helpful in providing better information regarding current issues impacting Indigenous social workers. One woman mentioned that when you look at the world through an Indigenous lens, "you just get it."

Lynn described how the ability to advance within the agency where she worked motivated her to continue to work in the challenging field of child welfare. She stated, "I think the opportunity to advance in the agency that I work for. That has been something that motivated me to continue to do well, to do my best…believe in myself."

Formalized leadership or mentorship opportunities led by Indigenous women was also noted as a concrete idea for supporting Indigenous women. One woman said that the opportunity to share stories and common experiences with other Indigenous women would be "incredible."

Two women commented that people supporting Indigenous social workers should be mindful of learning styles. Lynn suggested the following:

> Like what I have noticed is a lot of Indigenous women are visual learners so a lot of the reading and just passing the paper along and saying do this…maybe you have to model and mentor that for the person to grasp it…and checking in a lot to see where they're at, what they need…maybe you need to do something a little different, so model or mentor it.

Lastly, several women talked about the need to have discussions in the work place about how they can access counseling and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) to support self-care in an authentic way. Kali shared her ideas regarding how we can increase access to such programs in the following way:

> I don't know that people access that [EAP] as much as they could or should…Again, its bureaucracy going through the bare minimum whether they're saying "Here's your 1-800 number. If you're stressed out, call that number and someone will help you." It's like, you know what? You can check that off your ticky box but have you really helped that person? How about you get someone to come and just to the team in general… relationship-building. Let them see the face and see that person's genuineness in their heart and then maybe they will

reach out to that person. I think things like that are more helpful really for all social workers including Indigenous social workers for sure.

Similarities in the Literature and Research

When comparing the literature and the research findings, it is clear that most of the themes identified as important by the participants in this study also pertain to social workers practicing in child welfare in general and are not exclusive of ethnicity. There were several commonalities between the research findings and the literature discussed in chapter two. Vakalahi and Starks (2010) concluded that Black women in social work are often faced with conflicting goals of having to "play the game" to fit and advance, while wanting to advocate for themselves, their unique ways of knowing. A participant described a similar experience of being a new social worker and being "thrown into" her role as a child protection worker working in remote First Nations communities and her journey of learning self-advocacy:

> I didn't have a whole lot of supervision and learning tools…going step by step, I didn't have the opportunity to learn it like my friend…I should have said something too, but that's the other thing, you learn as you get older and more confident in speaking up for yourself and advocating and saying "this isn't working"… And that's something that's key for any Indigenous person that is working as a social worker. Do definitely advocate for yourself. And say "hey, I'm not doing this" or "I need help with this."

I had a similar experience when I started working as a child protection worker for MCFD. I was assigned to work in a rural office, and more specifically with several First Nations communities, with minimal support and guidance. As a new, inexperienced Indigenous

social worker I had little experience and mentorship, and when I asked the agency manager why I was placed in this office as I had listed it as lowest priority for my office placements choices, the manager said that since I was Aboriginal it would be a good fit for me. Reflecting on this experience, I wish I would have advocated for myself and explained why I felt this was discriminatory and that the expectations being placed on me were not realistic.

Another participant noted that "I was emotionally not ready to go on an Aboriginal team yet just because of what had happened to my family. I needed to ease into it or it could have shut me down." Child welfare organizations and agencies need to continue to have dialogue and develop relationships of trust with Indigenous social workers so they can better understand and show sensitivity to their feelings and needs.

Literature has also suggested that administrative practices and bureaucracy within organizations can reinforce the dominant culture and preserve its own self-interest at the expense of others, whether it be social workers who belong to a minority group, or clients (Vakalahi & Starks, 2010). Many of the participants described ways that dominant culture embedded within the organizations where they had worked created barriers specifically for Indigenous employees. A participant shared her views regarding this issue in the following way:

> I think that if you're an Indigenous person, like for…the ministry, I thought "God,
> like if I ever make it to management everybody's just going to think that I just got
> here because I'm Aboriginal", and that I didn't earn it fair and square like
> everybody else…so there is that sense of almost having to work twice as hard to
> get everything, just to prove that you actually earned it and deserve it and are

worthy of it…I saw a push to have more Aboriginal people in power in the ministry…but I think that we have to be really careful how we do things like that because sometimes it can create huge backlash as well where people are then angry and resentful and blaming and it's just kind of increasing that culture of racism within the organization.

Almost all of the participants in this thesis also noted that their motivation for choosing a career in child welfare was related to their desires to make a difference in Indigenous communities. Social workers felt that the approach to protecting children within the child welfare system and its policies did not flow from Indigenous ways of knowing, and in many cases, were in direct conflict with their social work practice approach. A participant described her experience of working within the child welfare system in the following way:

> I think the systemic barriers to accessing service is a big challenge. I feel like even though we are a part of that system, we are constantly, not constantly, but there is an element of fighting against the system or ensuring the system doesn't impact our children in any negative way and that is really hard…Sometimes those are the worst times where you feel like you are just sort of trapped in and watching this happen without being able to provide effective interventions due to systemic barriers. So this is probably the greatest challenge for me.

Summary

In summary, practicing in the field of child welfare can be both rewarding and stressful at times. The experiences shared by the Indigenous women in this thesis indicate that Indigenous social workers face challenges that are similar to all social workers

practicing in child welfare. However, the historical colonial relationship that Indigenous women have with government child welfare systems, as well as their experiences of racism and discrimination in the workplace, makes them vulnerable to additional stress.

The incredible strength, having a grounded self-identity as an Indigenous woman, and the depth of feelings that these Indigenous women expressed for Indigenous children, families, and communities appear to be factors that helped them maintain resilience within their child welfare work. Practicing social work within agencies that align with their Indigenous values and spiritual beliefs, as well as offer flexibility and access to resources and mentorship were also linked to resiliency. In addition, feeling supported to build genuine relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and people they serve was also noted to be important. All of the women also described how their commitment to personal self-care and balance has also helped them remain resilient while working in the field of child welfare.

Chapter Five: Concluding Discussion

In the previous chapter, the shared experiences of the Indigenous women who participated in this study were presented, predominantly in their own words through quotes as experts of their own experiences. I also highlighted some of the additional experiences discussed with the participants related to stress and health. The similarities between the literature and the study findings were also explored. Interpretation of the findings, the limitation of the study, recommendations, and future research will be discussed in detail in the final chapter of this study. In conclusion, a personal reflection of my research journey will be presented.

Interpretation of the Key Findings

I chose to complete this research as a result of my personal perspectives and experiences as an Indigenous woman, and because of my professional experiences as a social worker, team leader, and manager practicing within the field of child welfare. I was also motivated by my desire to better understand some of the collective experiences of Indigenous women who are social workers practicing in the field of child welfare, factors that allow them to remain resilient within the work, and to explore ways to better support social workers. After listening to the experiences of the women who participated in this study, I have realized that maintaining resiliency is a life-long task that can be difficult at times for any social worker. However, being consciously committed to self-care, balance in life, and self-awareness can help social workers practicing in the challenging field of child welfare. The Indigenous women who participated in this study appeared to have a unique internal strength stemming from their spiritual and cultural beliefs and teachings, and believed in a holistic approach to their social work practice.

While reflecting back on my research questions and the findings, it is evident that many of the experiences of the Indigenous women who participated in this thesis are also reflected within the current literature related to social workers practicing in child welfare. Factors, such as supervision, relationship building, and access to resources and training were factors linked to promoting resiliency and wellness while working as a social worker in child welfare. Furthermore, these commonalities suggest that social workers' experiences are also a product of the work itself, and are not exclusively linked to gender and ethnicity.

During this research process, I was also reminded of why I chose the profession of social work and how challenging and tiring it can be to promote anti-oppressive practice and change within systems still embedded in colonialism, and where institutional racism is still present. Fairtlough, Bernard, Fletcher, and Ahmet (2014) argue that the experiences of social workers are not only affected by their interactions within organizational contexts, but also by the wider society in which these organizations are situated. Although all social workers may face challenges working within organizational context, I believe Indigenous social workers may face additional challenges such as isolation or hyper-visibility while working in agencies where Indigenous people are scarce. Discrimination and racism are also additional factors that can impact Indigenous social worker's health and well-being.

Overall, it was clear from the research that finding ways to support Indigenous social workers as individuals and as a collective group is not an easy task and there is no single, straight-forward solution. However, the participants and I all agreed that better supports could be developed, and Indigenous social workers could be empowered

through extra support such as on-going mentorship opportunities. In addition, we all agreed that having more Indigenous people in leadership and decision-making roles would not only promote the process of self-determination for Indigenous peoples, but would strengthen and pave the way for future generations of Indigenous social workers.

Study Limitations

This study provided an opportunity for me to explore the experiences and perspectives of eight Indigenous women who have practiced social work in child welfare. Although qualitative, face to face interviews can elicit complex experiences and explanations, this method of data collection might have excluded those who would have shared their experiences if they could have remained completely anonymous. Furthermore, the experiences shared by the eight participants do not represent the experiences of all Indigenous social workers practicing in child welfare in BC. Although the findings may not be indicative, they still provide powerful testimony about the experiences of Indigenous women who are social workers practicing in child welfare, and suggest possible ways we can promote resiliency and better support Indigenous social workers.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations that can be made based upon current literature and research, from the participants themselves, and from the interpretation of some of the findings.

Agency fit. Child welfare agencies should provide social workers with a clear, overriding vision and purpose so they can gain a sense of grounding while practicing in this stressful field. Vision and purpose need to be strongly emphasized and linked to

service delivery and practice so social workers can clearly see their "fit" within the agency where they practice. I believe creating succinct and clear policy frameworks could also promote resiliency within the work and contentment within the child welfare agency. Participants also recommended that Indigenous social workers should mindfully attempt to seek employment within agencies that align with their personal views and cultural beliefs.

Many of the participants in this study had worked for both MCFD and delegated Aboriginal agencies. Most women expressed having more positive experiences working in delegated Aboriginal agencies over working for MCFD. Child welfare work is always difficult, but the Indigenous child welfare literature and the women in this study suggest there is some comfort in doing this work with others who share your worldview and approach to practice. Anonson, Desjarlais, Nixon, Whiteman, and Bird (2008) assert that Indigenous students and professionals are often expected to adopt Western's society beliefs, norms, and values which conflict with their Indigenous epistemology. Furthermore, they found that recruitment and retention of Indigenous professionals improved when they worked within environments where Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy were interwoven into the culture of the institution.

Recognition of self-care and work stress. Child welfare agencies and organizations supporting social workers practicing in child welfare need to recognize and formally acknowledge that self-care and maintaining healthy balance is difficult for social workers. Participants all expressed times when they struggled in their work and felt isolated, ironically while working beside other helping professionals daily. Creating space for formal dialogue amongst social workers where they can acknowledge and

discuss work stress and how to encourage self-care would help promote resiliency and raise awareness.

Indigenous social workers may require greater and unique supports due to their history of colonization through the child welfare system. Colonization has been such a destructive force and so ingrained in social systems that it can be hard to identify the oppressive practices and understandings it has created. Greater care needs to be taken to ensure Indigenous social workers have access to supports they deem as appropriate, such as circles to discuss historical and contemporary Indigenous issues and to promote a process of healing and transformation in relation to the child welfare system. In Gone's research regarding therapy and healing amongst Indigenous populations in Manitoba, he noted that there needs to be a proactive shift away from blaming Indigenous individuals and an acknowledgment of "lives lived daily in the shadows of risks" as a result of systemic oppression (Waldram, 2014, p. 378). Anonson et al, (2008) state that support practices with Indigenous people should include holistic methods of understanding which involves all sense, not only related to cognition.

Support new social workers. Child welfare agencies needs to be mindful of the particularly challenging environment that new social workers enter, and be cognizant of recruitment and retention problems. In this study, several participants remarked that they felt unprepared for the emotional intensity of the role, isolated, and unable to advocate for what they needed. New social workers should receive on-going mentoring by senior social workers they respect and trust. In addition, they should have the opportunity to work with their mentor in a case support role for a period of no less than six months and longer, if possible.

More specifically, Indigenous social workers may face unique triggers, stress, and challenges related to working in child welfare. Aboriginal social work training is mandatory for new social workers employed within delegated Aboriginal agencies. Indigenous Perspectives Society delivers this training which is competency based training offered within a holistic learning environment that is culturally relevant to Indigenous people (Indigenous Perspectives Society, 2015). This training should be offered to all social workers who identify as Indigenous to offer them access to the same support and training as social workers employed within delegated Aboriginal agencies. In addition, expanding these supports to the MCFD offices that include Aboriginal Circle teams would promote indigenous knowledge within the workplace, as well as a better service delivery and potentially better outcomes for the Indigenous families and children they work with.

Education and partnership. Program initiatives and supports have been established as a strategy to increase the number of Indigenous social workers practicing in the field of child welfare. Despite the criticism that social work educational institutions and government continue to perpetuate the process of colonialism, there have been significant changes within many education programs in Canada, and partnerships created with organizations to support Indigenous social workers (Pierce, Hemingway, & Schmidt, 2014).

In northern BC, the University of Northern British Columbia's school of social work, MCFD, and several delegated Aboriginal agencies partnered to implemented a post- Bachelor of Social Work child welfare certificate program that focused on recruiting and supporting Indigenous social workers to work in child welfare (Pierce et.

al, 2014). The Indigenous social workers involved in this program identified the importance of being part of a learning environment that is inclusive of Indigenous perspectives and experience, as well as quality supervision and mentorship. Allen-Meares (2008) also suggests that schools of social work have found that community-based partnerships and research programs can help to promote self-determination and empowerment within communities that have been oppressed.

Supervision is key. Clinical supervision can be a powerful support in promoting resiliency amongst social workers practicing in child welfare. Allowing social workers the opportunities for quality supervision encourages them to reflect on their decision-making, practice, client relationships, and their reactions in difficult situations. It also allows social workers the time and space that they need to gain insight into their case practice and interactions with others. Research completed in the field of human resources identifies supervisors as critical to "humanizing organizations, responding to employee's work and family dilemmas, and facilitating worker's use of family support policies and programs" (Hopkins, 1997, p.1221). Several participants said that having access to employee assistance programs helped them deal with their stress and personal problems. Participants also recommended that changes to the work environments need to occur to encourage social workers to access supports through EAP programs. Hopkins (1997) noted that supervisors are a key factor in whether or not workers use employee assistance programs.

The team leader is a pivotal position within the child welfare system and is in a position to understand and support social workers. I would argue that team leaders are themselves also social workers and should be offered direct clinical supervision and

support. It would be beneficial for more funding support to create additional comprehensive supervision programs in collaboration between schools of social work, MCFD, delegate Aboriginal agencies, and agencies supporting Indigenous social workers, such as the Indigenous Perspectives Society, to provide ongoing education, training, and support through formal supervision programs and initiatives.

Supervision and social justice. Although the purpose of supervision has traditionally focused on knowledge and skill-based support, research now suggests that it is equally as important for supervisors to acknowledge and embrace the need to include issues of social justice as an intentional aspect of supervision (Hair, 2015). Furthermore, supervisors should encourage the use and incorporation of Indigenous knowledge to help support the ideas and values that are deemed important by Indigenous social workers. Samuel's (2013) research study regarding child welfare social work suggests that neither student nor teacher is neutral when it comes to colonial influence. Strategies suggested and used by a non-Indigenous educator included bringing in Indigenous knowledge holders and choosing to present relevant literature written by Indigenous authors.

Many of the Indigenous women who participated in this study acknowledged that they had the opportunity to work with few Indigenous educators and supervisors. Almost all of the women recommended having regular access to Elders or formal cultural advisors who are traditional knowledge holders, as this would potentially be beneficial to their work as individuals, to child welfare organizations as a whole, and to Indigenous families involved in the child welfare system.

Mentorship and matching. The Indigenous women who participated in this study and I share a common perspective that more opportunities and spaces need to be

created for Indigenous social workers to access mentorship programs that have been developed and implemented by Indigenous people. All of the participants had many years of experience in child welfare; however many participants felt that advancement into leadership positions was more attainable while working within delegated Aboriginal agencies, and some feared that advancement within MCFD would affect them negatively because others may think they were chosen for these positions strictly because of their Indigenous ancestry. Fairtlough, Bernard, Fletcher and Ahmet (2014) assert that educators and staff in coordinator roles are in pivotal positions. Creating spaces for Indigenous people to take on these roles could be invaluable in helping to promote empowerment among Indigenous social workers, and to support shifts in social work practice in relation to working with Indigenous communities and families.

In the field of nursing, the University of Saskatchewan credits their higher retention of Indigenous students and graduates to the creation of formal mentorship and professional development programs. They specifically recruited and trained Indigenous students to take on these roles creating space for more Indigenous educators within the health care field (Anonson, et al, 2008). They have partnered with other community partners and disciplines to recruit Indigenous mentors to support an Indigenous perspective within learning. Creating opportunities for Indigenous students to learn and be supported by other Indigenous mentors and professionals is something we need to strive towards.

MCFD has made efforts to assign Indigenous social workers to their Aboriginal Circle teams and teams serving predominately Indigenous populations; however, from my experience there are usually only a few Indigenous people employed in those offices

and few Indigenous team leaders. There are currently no affirmative hiring policies to ensure Indigenous social workers have an opportunity to apply for employment on Aboriginal Circle teams within MCFD. The priority should be to match Indigenous social workers with Indigenous mentors wherever possible, and not necessarily offices that are identified as Aboriginal Circle teams.

   Training requirements. In my opinion, the province of B.C. should commit to ensuring all social workers hired to work in child welfare receive adequate cultural agility training. This training could support a practice shift to enable social workers to work in a more respectful, knowledgeable, and effective way with Indigenous colleagues and communities. Christa Williams, Nlaka'pamux, Executive Director of BC First Nations Public Services describes this process as "pausing and appreciating that there are differences, and looking at those with a view to the celebratory rather than seeing difficulties" (BC Public Service Agency, n.d.). Social workers, team leaders, and those in management positions would benefit from this training being a mandatory component of employment in the field of child welfare so social workers can approach working with Indigenous people, whether it is colleagues or communities, with an openness and appreciation instead of feeling nervousness and anxiety. Indigenous social workers and educators from the University of Victoria further suggest that contemporary social work cross-cultural training can only initiate change after understanding and engaging in the effects of where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have come from and knowing and engaging the effects of where Indigenous children and families we support have come from (Samuels, 2013).

In the spirit of reconciliation, participants also recommended that participation in programs that support truthful conversations about the impact child welfare has had on Indigenous people should be mandatory for all staff working in child welfare. Programs like Touchstones of Hope have helped promote spaces for respectful dialogue regarding child welfare and have supported reconciliation processes within Canada (First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 2015).

Future Research

This research explored the gap in the literature with regard to Indigenous women who are social workers practicing in child welfare, but more research is needed to fully understand this topic. The voices of Indigenous women must continue to be heard, and there is a need for more research with Indigenous women who work in the field of social work to capture their ongoing needs and to provide better support in the workplace. There is also a need for research to be conducted with Indigenous men involved in social work and child welfare.

In this study, some social workers said they would prefer to work with Indigenous supervisors or within Indigenous agencies, but this was not always an option. Several social workers did mention that they were well supported in their child welfare work by non-Indigenous supervisors. Another area for future research could explore the relationships between non-Indigenous supervisors and Indigenous social workers to gain insight into what is needed to create a supportive work relationship. In addition, social workers talked about feeling burned out and exhausted at times as a result of defending their worldviews and ways of practicing social work. It would be beneficial for this issue to be explored in depth.

Conclusion

As this thesis comes to a close, I find myself reflecting back on the interviews and discussions I had with each participant. I recall the strength and determination within the accounts of the Indigenous women who participated in this research study. I have the utmost respect for these women for having the courage to share their stories. I could relate to their narratives of resilience and resistance while working within a system that creates barriers to practicing from a strength-based, anti-oppressive social work approach. I was taught and I believe that all things are related to one another in some way, and that all things come around full circle. I now find myself in a leadership position where my role is to support Indigenous social workers who, in turn, support Indigenous communities. I am grateful to the women who participated in this thesis. Their stories were inspiring and need to be heard and shared. I hope that those who read this thesis will be provided with new hope as I was during this journey. Indigenous women will continue to resist oppression and systemic barriers because of their love for their children, families, communities, and nations.

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UNBC UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Appendix A: Email Recruitment Poster

Are you a First Nations, Métis, or Inuit Woman?

Do you have a Degree in Social Work?

Are you a Social Worker who has worked, or currently works in Child welfare?

You are invited to share your experiences and knowledge.

My name is Sonya Rowland and I am a Master of Social Work student at the University of Northern British Columbia. You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study to explore the unique and collective experiences of Indigenous women who have practiced social work in the field of child welfare for two years or more, and have obtained a degree in social work. This study will also focus on learning more about what factors may contribute to resiliency and promote wellness within this work.

Due to the small pool of participants, your anonymity cannot be guaranteed should you choose to participate in this study.

If you wish to participate in this study or would like further information please contact Sonya Rowland via cell phone at (250) 640-0684 or via email at sheppa4@unbc.ca.

UNBC *UNIVERSITY OF*
NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA
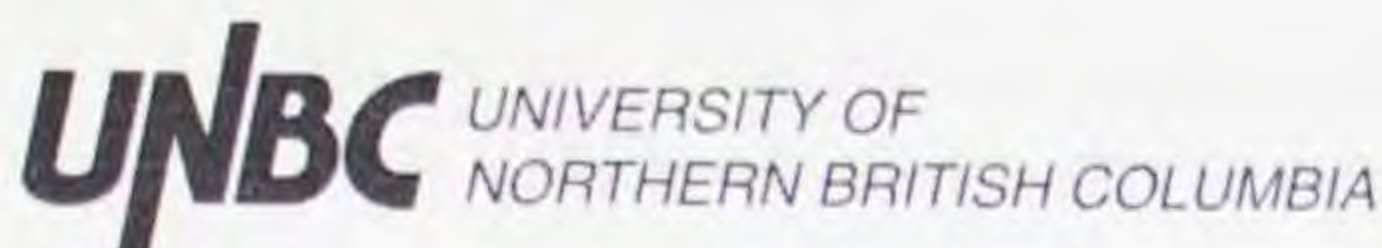
Appendix B: Information Letter/Consent Form

Resiliency: Learning from Indigenous Woman in Social Work

I.   STUDY TEAM

Graduate Student Thesis Researcher: Sonya Rowland
University of Northern British Columbia, School of Social Work,
3333 University Way, Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9
Cell Phone: (250) 640-0684
Email: sheppa4@unbc.ca

Thesis Supervisor: Joanna Pierce, Associate Professor, School of Social Work, UNBC
Office Telephone: (250) 960-6521
Email: joanna.pierce@unbc.ca

Dear Prospective Participant,

I am conducting a thesis research study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the University of Northern British Columbia Master of Social Work degree. The title of my research project is: "Resiliency: Learning from Woman in Social Work".

I would like to formally invite you to the research project as a research participant. The following information will provide further details regarding this research and your role should you choose to participate.

II.   INVITATION AND STUDY PURPOSE

- You are being invited to take part in this research study because of your unique experiences as an Indigenous woman (First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit) with two or more years of related social work experience working within the field of child welfare in British Columbia who possesses a degree in social work.

- I want to learn more about what factors contribute to Indigenous female social workers' resiliency while working within child welfare, and what coping strategies do Indigenous women who are social workers employ to promote wellness and balance in their lives while working in the field of child welfare.

- This study will promote the sharing of knowledge and experiences of Indigenous women who have worked within the field of child welfare, and will help create new knowledge and perspectives. I hope this knowledge will be used to draw

attention to the strengths of the participants, and to learn more about how to better support Indigenous women who are social workers.

- Some of the findings provided within this research thesis may indirectly critique or challenge the policies and practices of organizations affiliated with the child welfare system in British Columbia. Endorsement and permission to proceed with this research study has not been sought by any government organization as the research does not request any information related to any organization or institution.

- Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are in no way obligated to participate in this research, and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time. You are also free to not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. You have the right to withdraw from this research study at any time, without giving a reason. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any information you have provided up to that point will also be withdrawn from the study and securely destroyed.

III.   STUDY PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in the study, here is how the study will be conducted:

- You will be asked to commit one and a half hours to one research interview in a location of your preference that offers the privacy to protect your confidentiality or in a meeting room located in the library at the Prince George, University of Northern British Columbia campus.
- You will be provided with a copy of the interview questions and you will be asked questions about your experience as an Indigenous social worker who has worked, or currently works in the field of child welfare. More specifically, what factors helped you remain resilient in your work and what would have been helpful to you as a social worker.
- You will be asked to give consent in writing to being interviewed through the use of a small microphone attached to an audio recorder. I will also take notes to add to the research interview and will offer the notes to you to read.
- You will be asked to meet with me approximately one month after the interview is completed to review the typed transcript of your interview in order to confirm that the researcher correctly understood the meanings of your insights and your experiences.
- You will be asked to give consent for me to use quotes from the audio recordings as well as demographic information in the final research thesis. This information will be anonymized and will not identify you personally.

IV.   POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY

I do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you; however, there may be some potential risks to participants in this research study that I would like you to be aware of.

- As a participant, you may become emotionally upset because of some of the questions I will ask you.
- You will be offered the opportunity to decline to answer any questions, to decline to continue with the interview, and to ask that any information you have provided be removed from the research study.
- If at any point in the study you feel uncomfortable or upset and wish to end your participation, please notify me immediately and your wishes will be respected. All information that you provided will be destroyed and not used in the research. Here is a list of support agencies and contact information in your area:

Brazzoni & Associates, Counseling Services, Prince George
Phone: (250) 614-2261

Walmsley & Associates, Counseling Services, Prince George
Phone: (250) 564-1000

Pacific Counseling, Vancouver
Phone: (604) 989-9555

- Anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small pool of participants.

V.   POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

I anticipate this study will benefit you, as well as the larger social work community.

- You may be helped in this study by having an opportunity to reflect on your experiences as a social worker, as well as share your perspectives regarding the work with those who will read the final research thesis.
- The researcher believes that your insights and experiences will provide new information and knowledge which will help support and empower Indigenous female social workers working in the field of child welfare.

VI.   ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent unless required by law.
- Data will only be accessible to me and my supervisor, Joanna Pierce. All documents, including audio recordings and interview transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the office of my supervisor, Joanna Pierce, Associate Professor, School of Social Work, at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George, BC. The recorded interviews and written transcriptions will be

destroyed one year after I have successfully defended the thesis research as per UNBC requirements.

- I will do everything possible to protect your identity, but due to the small size of the study population, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

VII.   COMPENSATION

We will offer you a small honorarium in appreciation for completing this study. Parking fees will also be reimbursed.

VIII.   STUDY RESULTS

- The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books.
- You will receive a copy of the research results approximately six months after the research study thesis defence is successfully completed.

IX.   CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

If you have any questions about what the researcher is asking of you, please contact the researcher, Sonya Rowland or her thesis supervisor, Joanna Pierce. Their names and contact information are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

X.   CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250-960-6735 or by email at reb@unbc.ca.

XI.   PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE PAGE

"Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason".

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

Appendix C: Questionnaire Guide

Demographic questions:

1. What type of degree in Social Work have you obtained? Do you have any additional post-secondary education?

2. How long did you, or have you been a social worker practicing in the field of child welfare in BC?

3. What Indigenous group do you identify with?

4. Do you incorporate cultural teachings into your professional practice and your life?

5. Why did you choose to work as a social worker in the field of child welfare?

Research study questions:

Resiliency is defined as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors" (American Psychological Association).

6. What is the largest factor that contributed to you being able to be resilient as a social worker working in the field of child welfare?

7. Are there additional factors that have helped you remain resilient?

8. What do you like about your work?

9. What personal rewards do you get from your work?

10. What kinds of things keep you in the work?

11. What coping strategies helped you during your time as a social worker working in the field of child welfare?

12. How have you or do you practice self-care to avoid work burnout?

13. Are there other things that have contributed to your wellness and balance in your life?

14. What have you found to be the most helpful in maintaining balance and resiliency in your work?

15. What have been the most challenging aspects for you when you practiced as a social worker in the field of child welfare?

16. What factors would help to provide you with better support in your practice?

17. Is there anything you would change about your experience while practicing as a social worker in the field of child welfare?

18. If you had the opportunity to speak to other Indigenous women who work or have worked as social workers in the field of child welfare about staying healthy and balanced in their work what would you say?

19. Are there any factors you think should be considered by those supporting Indigenous social workers who are working in the field of child welfare?

20. Do you have anything you would like to add?

Appendix D: Transcriber Oath of Confidentiality

This research entitled, Resilience: Learning from Indigenous Social Workers, is being undertaken by master of social work student Sonya Rowland at the University of Northern British Columbia.

Data from this research will be used in the final graduate thesis.

I, _____ , agree to:
     (Name of transcriber)

1. Keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g. disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the Principal Investigator;
2. Keep all research information in any form or format secure while it is in my possession;
3. Return all research information in any form or format to the Principal Investigator when I have completed the research tasks;
4. After consulting with the Principal Investigator, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Principal Investigator (e.g. information sorted on computer hard drive).

Transcriber:

_____   _____   _____
  (Print Name)   (Signature)   (Date)

Principal Investigator:

_____   _____   _____
  (Print Name)   (Signature)   (Date)

If you have any questions or concerns about this study please contact the researcher, Sonya Rowland by phone at (250) 640-0684 or by email at sheppa4@unbc.ca

This research has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Northern British Columbia. For questions regarding participant's rights and ethical conduct of research, please contact the UNBC Office of the Research by phone at (250) 960-6735 or by email at reb@unbc.ca.

Appendix E: CSFS Letter of Support

Carrier Sekani Family Services

February 13, 2015

Sonya Rowland
8171 Prince Edward Crescent
Prince George BC V2N 3X8

Dear Sonya:

RE: *Master of Social Work Thesis Research Study titled "Resiliency: Learning from Indigenous Women in Social Work"*

This letter confirms that CSFS has reviewed your research thesis proposal regarding Indigenous women and exploring their experiences related to social work practice in the field of child welfare and it has been deemed worthwhile and has been approved by the agency.

We look forward to working with you on this study.

Sincerely

Dr. Travis Holyk
Executive Director
Research, Primary Care and Strategic Services
Carrier Sekani Family Services

Appendix F: REB Letter of Support

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA
RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

MEMORANDUM

To: Sonya Rowland
CC: Joanna Pierce

From: Michael Murphy, Chair
Research Ethics Board

Date: February 12, 2015

Re: E2015.0112.001.00
Resiliency: Learning from Indigenous Women in Social Work

Thank you for submitting revisions to the Research Ethics Board (REB) regarding the above-noted proposal. Your revisions have been approved with the request that, prior to commencing your research, you:

1) correct the grammatical errors in the poster and Information Letter / Consent Form;
2) provide the REB with consents from the delegated agencies as required (e.g. Carrier Sekani Family Services).

We are pleased to issue approval for the above named study for a period of 12 months from the date of this letter. Continuation beyond that date will require further review and renewal of REB approval. Any changes or amendments to the protocol or consent form must be approved by the REB.

If you have any questions on the above or require further clarification please feel free to contact Rheanna Robinson in the Office of Research (reb@unbc.ca or 250-960-6735).

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Murphy
Chair, Research Ethics Board