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The Relationship Between Child Protection Workers and School Social
Workers

Daniel S. Gibbel

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of School of the
Social of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

This study explored how both school social workers and child welfare workers communicated with one another. By using Qualtrics as a data collection method, both school social workers and child welfare workers from a variety of school districts were surveyed. Qualitative and quantitative questions were asked in order to discover whether there is a lack of professional communication between child welfare workers and school social workers. The information learned from the study will help both school social workers and child welfare workers discover how their roles could be improved or possibly changed for the betterment of the field and the clients. All the data collected was compared and contrasted with the literature review, and by members of a committee. The themes discovered was a difference of opinions on confidentiality and cultural attunement. Also, discussion regarding frustrations between child welfare workers and school social workers were highlighted. Possible solutions to these problems were given in the findings.

Acknowledgements

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Overview

According to the Minnesota Department of Human Resources, nearly 17,000 reports of child maltreatment were received by child welfare workers in 2010. Seventy percent of those reports received a family assessment, and the other thirty percent received a full investigation. The lack of full investigations of student cases of possible maltreatment reported by school social workers can cause tensions between school and agency social workers. Parton discussed how over the past fifteen years, an increase of reports have been documented regarding child safety and neglect with agencies and schools (2012). This could be caused by many factors, but possibly the increase of the awareness of this issue of child maltreatment may be the reason. This being said, the amount of child welfare workers has not increased at the same level of the reports being documented (Parton, 2002). Due to the amount of reports filed, a lack of communication may occur with child welfare workers, which may cause the perceived lack of professionalism in regards of proper communication and action (Dodge & Daro, 2009.)

Child welfare awareness within schools is a necessity due to the large amount of times children spend within the setting. Since schools cannot perform their own investigations, they need to seek help from outside agencies. Parton discussed how constant communication between child welfare and the school system can help uncover dangers within a child's home life (2012). Parton also discussed how all school social workers are mandated reporters, and play a pivotal role in the safety of their students. However, communication barriers often create dissatisfaction in a school setting due to different agency roles (Gibson, 2013). These barriers include confidentiality, legal

obligations of child welfare workers, and interpretation of organizational roles (Gibson). Problems manifest when social workers within a school setting have conflicting priorities from their professional obligations to the client (Parton, 2002). Parton discusses how tensions within these two organizational roles can cause a lack of communication and professionalism (2002). This lack of communication and professionalism includes sporadic follow-up calls, lack of explanation for reasons why cases are not pursued, and inconsistent documentation. This could be a cause for a negative perception of child welfare from a school faculty viewpoint and vice versa.

Conceptual Framework

School social workers deal with a wide range of issues throughout the day, from one on one counseling to home visits. With all of the different daily interactions, many different relationships are created between the social worker and the school's population. A school social worker often will investigate cases outside of the school as well in order to give clients the best possible treatment. Outside activities include home visits, family meetings at a neutral location, and referrals for safety checks at homes. Child welfare workers have the same goals as school social workers, but their methods are often different. A child welfare worker will use resources from the county and outside agencies in order to investigate reports of abuse and protect vulnerable populations such as children. For both these social service agents, the ecological framework is a model that guides their practice. According to the NASW, having an ecological perspective within a school setting creates greater unity among their students and their home life (2012). This is done by seeing all of the different factors that affect the student's lives. A study by both Hopson and Weldon (2013) discusses how behavior problems in schools often come from a parent's lack of expectations or unrealistic expectations. These differing expectations from within the home often cause miscommunication among staff members and parents (Hopson & Weldon). Better connections between school and with families resulted in improvement in communication. In connection with school social workers, child welfare workers who attempt to create better connections with the families of their students are able to solve cases in a more professional manner (Dodge & Daro, 2009). The National Association of Social Workers (2012) also addresses the importance of communication among its members. The ethical principle regarding how social workers

recognize relationships to create strong bonds with clients is a value that is central to the field (NASW, 2012). This connection also relates to the professional relationship between child welfare workers and school social workers.

The common goal for social service agents is to create a successful environment for the child to succeed whether that is in a school or within the home. In connection with the Ecological Theory, the best way to intervene with clients is by viewing problems at a micro, mezzo, and macro level (Clancy, 1995). Social workers and child welfare workers need to collaborate in order for home life and school life to be at a healthy level.

Elements of the microsystem within a child's life is more apparent to the school social worker than a child welfare worker due to the more frequent interaction they share with the student (Woolley, 2008). Child welfare workers have contact with students on a more individual basis in order to investigate reports but also must consider the family. At a mezzosystems level, both the role of the school social worker and child welfare worker provide equal opportunities to reach out to the student. Pennekamp and Freeman (1988) discuss how members of the school system desire to create a working partnership, but often due to time constraints, it is not possible. This partnership includes child welfare workers. The macrosystems in student's lives who are having family issues often are under the responsibility of child welfare workers and not school social workers. Legal issues and state regulations are examples of macrosystems. These legal issues are a deciding factor in the child welfare becoming the dominant social construct (Saini & Black, 2012). In analysis of the three systems, the ecosystems perspective is a way for members of the social work community to understand the environment of student (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2006).

This study will explore how both school social workers and child welfare workers communicate with one another. The purpose of the study is to discover whether or not communication is considered an issue among both social service agents, and how it can be improved at a micro, mezzo, and macro level.

Literature Review

Goals of the School Social Worker

The foundation of school social work is to empower students to succeed in schools both socially and educationally. This empowerment can come in all different ways. Whether the student is performing better in the classroom or at home, it is the job of the social worker to teach students a good basis for behavior. Also, school social workers work under the set of guiding rules called the Code of Ethics. These ethical guidelines are used by all members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). According to the NASW, The *NASW Code of Ethics* is intended to serve as a guide to the everyday professional conduct of social workers. These guidelines for school social workers ensure that everything is done to place the student's priorities first in the school setting. These Codes do not just apply to school social workers, but also child welfare workers within the field. They have the ultimate goal of doing no harm to their students.

One important aspect when discussing social services in a school setting is to focus on the educational value of the service. The reason for social services in the school is to increase their educational attainment by eliminating barriers that impede academic progress. For example, when dealing with a child who has autism, some of the services that could be provided would be small group sessions to help classroom interaction, individual sessions that focus on eye contact and conversation, or parent contact if a social worker thinks a new strategy should be taken into consideration. However, this

main objective is often times placed to the side in order to address more pressing issues at hand. These issues include the safety and the overall health of the child.

It is significant to consider today that social workers are located in schools at a higher level than ever before (Kolar, Patchner, Schutz, William & Patchner, 2010). This fact also has created the job title of “school social worker” as a legitimate professional group (Altshuler & Webb, 2009). According to Altshuler and Webb, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has placed new standards and educational demands for all school social workers. Also, the gap between school counselors/psychologists and school social workers is closing due to schools seeing the benefits of having another social service agent (Altshuler & Webb, 2009). For these reasons, it is important to study services provided in order to see which are most beneficial and which are not. This issue is important for this study because it connects with services provided by child welfare workers. In studying these services, issues that may arise among social service agents may become more evident. The issue of communication among professionals is one that has not been addressed or investigated fully among school social workers and child welfare workers. More research is needed in order to show the effects of communication.

(Kelly et al., 2010) created a study that was the first documented effort to understand how school social work practice has attempted to positively change the students as well as the organization. The findings suggested that school social workers continue to place great emphasis on helping their departments be more visible to the different facets of the school system. However, the study showed that the communication between child welfare workers and social workers were rarely pursued (Kelly et al.). This

shows a disparity within the professional role of the school social worker and also a lack of effort to continually grow skills that could better the field.

Child Welfare Worker

In contrast to school social workers, the priority of child welfare workers is to prevent and respond to harm from happening to children within all facets of a child's life. Hayes and Spratt (2009) in their article regarding child welfare services described the issue of the role of a social worker, and what this should be in child welfare. According to these authors, child welfare is a social service that attempts to reduce harm and refer clients to services to the best of its ability (Hayes & Spratt). This desire also has legal issues that complicate cases, and that often places the child welfare worker in a difficult position. An example would be a child living in a dangerous environment. The child welfare worker is aware of the situation, but if that worker takes a child away from a home before a proper case is created, the child may go back into the negative environment. These issues create a worker's conflicting ideology to protect the student or construct a workable case (Hayes & Spratt, 2009). The conflict occurs when the safety of the child is put in question. In some cases, a child will be kept in an environment that is unhealthy because of lack of legal recourse to change the situation. If a workable case is not made about a child welfare incident, then the child will go right back to the abusive situation after the legal upheaval.

Understanding roles as practitioners and different ideologies was also frequently discussed in the literature. Confidentiality and legal obligations from child welfare workers, and interpretation of organizational roles are requirements for child welfare workers (Gibson, 2013). An example of this is how child welfare workers are not allowed

to divulge all aspects of a case to school social workers. Problems occur when school social workers within a school setting have conflicting priorities from their professional obligations to the client (Parton, 2002). These problems need to be addressed within the school population in order to better understanding between both groups of people. It is not the responsibility for child welfare workers to break their confidentiality agreements in order to make the school system happy.

A lack of resources was not discussed in the literature directly but could also be a cause for communication barriers. An article discussing communication barriers can be correlated because these barriers may be brought on by lack of child welfare caseworkers (Parton, 2002). The lack of caseworkers means an increase in school social workers caseload. This mentally can be straining on caseworkers, and the burnout rate shows that many caseworkers are overworked. Anderson (2000) discussed how many veteran child welfare workers become psychologically overwhelmed by child contact and constant trauma. Reasons for the burnout were directly related to the number of cases each child welfare worker had (Anderson, 2000).

Communication Barriers

A study that specifically focused on the issue of school social work communication and discussed how communication among social work employees within the school was considered below acceptable levels (Teaslely, et al., 2012). Both time constraints and caseloads affected how communication among school staff and administration was performed (Teaslely, et al., 2012). Data was different according to the geographic area. Some reasons for this may be the lack of resources in rural areas of United States. Crocker (1996) discussed how the use of unorthodox methods in order to

give children services is needed by child welfare teams in rural areas. Unlike urban areas, funding is not as great in counties with smaller populations, but there is still a need. The article also addressed how families in these areas are less open to child welfare workers due to the smaller population size and possible negative stigma (Crocker, 1996). This issue may be a cause of some forms of communication barriers among child welfare workers and school social workers in regards to confidentiality of the student. Regardless, more information should be acquired on this topic due to a lack of information.

Confidentiality and a lack of resources is one cause of poor communication, but improper training, according to previous studies, is also a cause. Munro (1998) discussed how school social workers were not correctly reporting child maltreatment to child welfare agencies. A theme that was found was a lack of detailed information that made progress in investigations difficult for child welfare caseworkers. Teasley (2004) also discussed the importance of school social workers attention to detail when submitting truancy cases to child welfare workers. All information must be clearly documented in order for cases to be made by child protective services. If steps are missed in the process, it creates barriers in services or poor outcomes. This poor communication is an example of how the professional relationship between child welfare workers and school social workers is reliant on professionalism within the field. Without proper documentation, the process may not go forward.

Child welfare worker communication barriers have also been studied. In a qualitative study, which had 10 social work subjects from Texas, Florida, and Colorado, confusion was reported in the role each social service agent had in the school (Chanmugam, 2009). A specific issue that was discussed was confidentiality among

workers. School social workers want to cause the least harm to the families as possible, but at times, some reports to child welfare services seem to cross boundaries of reporting in cases of harm to simply disclosing information for the sake of building a case (Chanmugam, 2009). Along with this, confidentiality is also an aspect that child welfare workers deal with when communicating with school social workers. From the perspective of the school social worker, this may seem like poor communication. This may be caused by lack of education by school faculty and social workers in regards to the process of reporting child welfare cases (Chanmugam, 2009). The author recommended more research should be done on the topic of ethical and legal obligations of both social service agents.

In connection with role confusion among school social workers, child welfare workers have similar conflicts within the field. A dissertation about role conflict and ambiguity discussed how many members within the child welfare field, like school social workers, have questions of what their role should look like (Harrison, 1978). This ambiguity also was a cause for a lack of satisfaction within the field according to Harrison. A request was also made by this author to not only look further into correcting ambiguity in the child welfare work place, but to also address it within social work schools (Harrison, 1978).

Cultural Awareness From Different Perspectives

Different perspectives on child abuse and the fine line of cultural sensitivity are areas that need to be considered when dealing with children in the United States. Beaver (1986) discussed the correlation between reports made regarding children and perceived abuse. In many cases, people do not understand “cultural normalities” among members in

the community (Beavers). Cultural formalities for example include different gender roles, disciplinary strategies, and acceptable living conditions. It was mentioned that in some instances, reports of child neglect and abuse were being filed without any real evidence (Beavers). This showed that it is important to consider all factors of a child's life before making assumptions. Humphreys, Atkar & Baldwin (1999) discussed this issue in detail in regard to Asian families and their culture. Issues that arose with this people group was a lack of priority of mental health and living conditions (Humphreys, Atkar, & Baldwin). Asian extended families will often live together in order to take care of their extended family. This is a cultural norm that may not be understood by either child welfare workers or school social workers. To people from the United States, they may view a crowded household as an unsafe environment. Also, many Asian families do not value Western methods of mental health (Humphreys, Atkar, & Baldwin). They often will use more traditional methods that may not be understood by social service providers.

The Beaver (1986) article also discussed the importance of reporting child maltreatment cases regardless of cultural or situational circumstances. Child abuse to a certain degree cannot be condoned even if there are cultural aspects to the situation (Beavers). Boundaries are put in place in America with disregard of culture for the purpose of keeping children safe. At times, making reports may appear to be insensitive, but it is necessary for the nation to have uniformity in regard to child protection. Issues occur when both the child welfare worker and the school social worker have different views on a situation. This creates communication barriers within the professional relationship.

Child Welfare and School Social Worker Satisfaction

The findings of satisfaction with child welfare services was well documented in Dale's (2004) research, which showed that parents were not satisfied with child welfare services. The study discussed how parents perceived the efforts being put forward were at times confusing and a lack of communication created barriers in services (Dale). This sentiment was also expressed in Parton (2012) where communication barriers were expressed by the sample as insufficient. The areas that were specifically described was follow-up communication, clarity of procedures moving forward, and open communication among all members involved (Parton). Some of the lack of communication is caused by confidentiality, but in the context of the study, it seems that more effort could be done.

School social workers, like child welfare workers, have findings that discuss both positive and negative satisfaction. Bowen (1999) discusses how interventions by school social workers are considered an important part of the educational learning process by parents. Also, communication among families and the school had positive reports. However, an area of concern was communication between teachers and school social workers (Bowen). The educational piece is an important part of a school social worker's job and must be addressed along with risk assessment. The information taken about satisfaction of both groups gives a basis of the communication among child welfare workers and school social workers. However, this information comes only from parents, teachers, and students of both social service agents. No direct information was found about child welfare workers and school social workers satisfaction regarding each other.

The purpose of the study is to explore communication among child welfare workers and school social workers. Some themes that were discovered were the role

confusion around confidentiality among both child welfare workers and school social workers (Gibson, 2013; Crocker, 1996). Another theme was improper training in reporting (Munro, 1998). These issues did not have substantial literature and need further research. Also, the role of overworked child welfare workers and school social workers may be a cause of communication barriers between both social service agents. A caseload that is too strenuous may cause an environment where it is impossible to properly do their work (Anderson, 2000). Lastly, cultural aspects of possible child treatment may cause conflicting ideology among school social workers and child welfare workers (Beavers, 1986; Humphreys, Atkar, & Baldwin 1999). This study will research areas where further information is needed to further the understanding about communication among child welfare workers and school social workers at a micro, mezzo, and macro level.

Methods

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to see how both the school social workers and the child welfare workers each viewed each other's role within the school setting and the community. More specifically, questions regarding communication barriers between each professional group of people will be explored. By administering an online survey to both child welfare workers in Hennepin, Wright, Washington, and Ramsey county and school social workers in the Robbinsdale Area School District and the St. Paul area schools, information regarding these topics were documented. A mixed method design was used for the online survey, which included both open and closed ended questions that focused on demographic information, open-ended questions regarding social workers' ideas about communication barriers between school social workers and child protection workers in schools as well as possible solutions for these problems.

Sample

The population in this study consisted school social workers within the Robbinsdale Area School District, St. Paul Public School social workers, Hennepin County child welfare workers, and Wright County child welfare workers. School social workers from an informal monthly meeting, which contained 20 to 25 social workers from around the area, were all given an opportunity to complete the online survey. Child welfare workers from within the Hennepin County area were also given the same survey. The scope of the child welfare worker was broad due to fear of lack of participation because of busy work schedules. Also the survey was sent out to St. Paul Public School social workers.

The sample used was a non-probability sample. Both the school social workers and the child welfare workers were sent an email with the attached Qualtrics survey (Appendix C). Addresses were acquired from both a monthly school social work and child welfare meeting. Also, email addresses were collected from Wright County from a child welfare worker as well as from a school social worker currently working within the St. Paul Public School District.

Protection of Human Subjects

The study was both reviewed by the chair and committee members and submitted to the St. Thomas University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Due to the informal nature of acquiring research participants, no special permission was needed by the school districts or counties involved. Also, a cover letter was attached to the Qualtrics survey and sent to the members who participated (Appendix B). It stated that by clicking on the link to the survey, they are voluntarily consenting to participate in the study. Within this cover letter, it stated that all information was confidential. This survey was also anonymous. The Qualtrics website does not make it possible for the researcher to see who responded to the survey. This study had no risk or benefit to the participant. Also, information collected was stored on the personal computer of the researcher which was password protected. After the completion of the study, the information found on the Surveys would be destroyed on June 1st, 2014.

Data Collection

All data was collected on Opus College of Business Qualtrics Survey Software. Questions on the survey (Appendix D) had been created by the researcher. All questions

stemmed from information from the Literature review. The survey itself had both 11 quantitative and 6 qualitative questions.

The committee chair and committee members of the researcher also reviewed the survey questions in order to make sure that the questions matched the literature review. They also analyzed the structure of the questions in order to increase participant answers. The two committee members were both licensed social workers. One was a school social worker that had currently worked in the St. Paul Public School District and the other was child welfare worker working in Wright County, a nearby county.

Data Analysis Plan

By using Qualtrics software, the quantitative results were tabled and analyzed. The qualitative responses from Qualtrics were copied into a word document and then coded accordingly. The information recovered from the study was compared and contrasted with the literature review. Coding was also used for the qualitative questions. Using Padgett as a guideline, narrative analysis was used in order to see the “big picture” of what the participants were saying (2008).

Strengths and Limitations

One of the limitations to this study was that the sample size was located in one 2 specific area within Minnesota. The demographics around the state and country vary to such a degree that this information may only be helpful to specific people. Another limitation was the lack of diversity among participants. The majority of the participants according to the research were white. Because of this, opinions in the qualitative information may be skewed especially in relation to the cultural themed questions. Also, the sample size was disproportionally recognized by school social workers. Though a

similar number of both child welfare workers and school social workers received the survey, only 5 child protection workers responded to the survey in comparison to 25 school social workers.

Some strengths to performing this study was that it gave social workers and child welfare workers the opportunity to discuss their opinions regarding child welfare within the school setting in a confidential environment. This area currently has no current research and further research is needed. Participants could say whatever they wanted in the open-ended question format. Also for school social workers, their frustration regarding communication between themselves and child welfare workers was able to be discussed. The documented research may lead to further research to better the relationship among both these professional social service workers. Another strength that is evident when researching this topic was the lack of information. This is a strength because of the fact that this topic needs further research. This study was created in order to start the process of collecting information about the topic.

Findings

The sample population in this study was school social workers and child welfare workers. There were 30 respondents to the survey; 25 of them were school social workers and five were child welfare workers. Both qualitative and quantitative data was analyzed. Findings are presented in four different sections, which are background information, confidentiality and cultural attunement, communication among social service colleagues, and qualitative data Analysis.

Background Information

Table 1. Sample Population

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-------------------------|---|----------|------|
| 1 | Child Protection Worker |  | 5 | 17% |
| 2 | School Social Worker |  | 25 | 83% |
| | Total | | 30 | 100% |

N=30

Table 1 shows the population size of this study, and also the distinction of occupations. Out of the 30 participants, 25(83%) of the population were school social workers and 5(17%) were child protection workers. Due to the higher number of school social workers, the qualitative data collected was much more substantial than for the child protection workers. Also, quantitative data from the child protection workers had less diversity due to the smaller sample size.

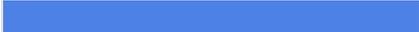
Table 2. Location of Child Welfare Workers

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-------------------|---|----------|------|
| 1 | Wright County |  | 2 | 40% |
| 2 | Washington County | | 0 | 0% |
| 3 | Hennepin County |  | 3 | 60% |
| 4 | Ramsey County | | 0 | 0% |
| 5 | Anoka County | | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | | 5 | 100% |

N=5

Table 2 showed the county that the child protection workers worked. Two (40%) of the participants were located in Wright County and three (60%) were located within Hennepin County. According to this specific survey, the location of the child welfare worker respondents did not appear to have an affect on the answers.

Table 3. Location of School Social Workers

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-------------------|---|----------|------|
| 1 | Wright County | | 0 | 0% |
| 2 | Washington County | | 0 | 0% |
| 3 | Hennepin County |  | 3 | 12% |
| 4 | Ramsey County |  | 22 | 88% |
| 5 | Anoka County | | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | | 25 | 100% |

N=25

Table 3 showed the location of school social workers that participated in this study. Twenty-two (88%) of school social workers were within Ramsey County and three (12%) were in Hennepin County. The location of the school social workers appeared to have little effect in terms of differing responses.

Table 4. Contact with Child Welfare Worker

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-----------------|---|----------|------|
| 1 | 0-1 time |  | 1 | 20% |
| 2 | 2-4 times |  | 0 | 0% |
| 3 | 5-7 times |  | 0 | 0% |
| 4 | 8 or more times |  | 4 | 80% |
| | Total | | 5 | 100% |

N=5

Daily contact with school social workers was common within this sample size. Five (80%) of child protection workers contacted school social workers 8 or more times a week and only one (20%) was in contact with a school social worker once a week. The one participant who only made contact with school social workers once a week was from Wright County.

Table 5. Contact with School Social Worker.

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-----------------|---|----------|------|
| 1 | 0-1 time |  | 19 | 79% |
| 2 | 2-4 times |  | 5 | 21% |
| 3 | 5-7 times |  | 0 | 0% |
| 4 | 8 or more times |  | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | | 24 | 100% |

N=24

School social worker contact with child protection workers was less common than with their social service colleagues. Nineteen (79%) of school social workers only contacted child protection workers 0-1 time a week. Five (21%) contacted child protection 2-4 times per week. Of the three respondents from Hennepin County, all stated that they contacted child protection 0-1 time per week.

Confidentiality and Cultural Attunement

Table 6. Discussion of Confidentiality Among Child Protection Workers

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|--------|--|----------|------|
| 1 | Yes | | 4 | 80% |
| 2 | No | | 1 | 20% |
| | Total | | 5 | 100% |

N=5

Among child protection workers, Four (80%) stated that they have discussed the importance of confidentiality among child protection workers. Only one (20%) stated that they have not discussed the issue with school social workers.

Table 7. Discussion of Confidentiality Among School Social Workers

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|--------|--|----------|------|
| 1 | Yes | | 21 | 84% |
| 2 | No | | 4 | 16% |
| | Total | | 25 | 100% |

N=25

Among school social workers, the majority of participants stated that they have discussed the importance of confidentiality. Twenty-one (84%) of participants that they have discussed confidentiality with school social workers, and four (16%) stated that they did not. There was not a distinct correlation between the location of the school social worker and their discussion of confidentiality.

Table 8. The Understanding of Confidentiality (Child Welfare Worker)

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-------------------------|---|----------|------|
| 1 | The Same Understanding | | 0 | 0% |
| 2 | Similar Understanding |  | 3 | 60% |
| 3 | Different Understanding |  | 2 | 40% |
| 4 | Opposite Understanding | | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | | 5 | 100% |

In terms of a mutual understanding of child protection workers with school social workers in confidentiality, none of the participants viewed their understanding as the same. Three (60%) of respondents viewed their views as similar, and two (40%) viewed their understanding as different.

Table 9. The Understanding of Confidentiality (School Social Worker)

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-------------------------|---|----------|------|
| 1 | The Same Understanding |  | 4 | 16% |
| 2 | Similar Understanding |  | 16 | 64% |
| 3 | Different Understanding |  | 5 | 20% |
| 4 | Opposite Understanding | | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | | 25 | 100% |

N=25

For school social workers, Four (16%) of the sample population viewed the understanding of confidentiality as the same, Sixteen (64%) viewed it as similar, and 5(20%) viewed it as different. None of the participants thought that their understanding

among each other was opposite. All of the participants from Hennepin County viewed their understanding of confidentiality as similar or the same.

Table 10. Importance of Cultural Dynamics in Family (Child Welfare Worker)

| # | Answer | Response | % |
|---|----------------------|----------|------|
| 1 | Very Important | 5 | 100% |
| 2 | Somewhat Important | 0 | 0% |
| 3 | Not Very Important | 0 | 0% |
| 4 | Not at all Important | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | 5 | 100% |

N=5

Cultural importance in the work of both child protection and school social work was considered very important with both groups. Five (100%) of child protection workers viewed cultural dynamics in family as very important. All other responses were not considered.

Table 11. Importance of Cultural Dynamics in Family (School Social Worker)

| # | Answer | Response | % |
|---|----------------------|----------|------|
| 1 | Very Important | 23 | 92% |
| 2 | Somewhat Important | 2 | 8% |
| 3 | Not Very Important | 0 | 0% |
| 4 | Not at all Important | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | 25 | 100% |

N=25

School social workers also had a similar view on the importance of Cultural dynamics in the family. Twenty-three (93%) of the sample population viewed these dynamics as very important. Two (8%) of the population viewed the dynamics as

somewhat important. None of the participants thought that the issue was not very important or not at all important.

Communication Among Social Service Colleagues

Table 12. Rating of Professional Communication (Child Welfare Worker)

| # | Answer | Response | % |
|---|-----------|----------|------|
| 1 | Excellent | 0 | 0% |
| 2 | Fair | 4 | 80% |
| 3 | Poor | 1 | 20% |
| | Total | 5 | 100% |

N=5

In terms of professional communication, none of the child protection workers viewed professional communication as excellent. Four (80%) viewed the communication as fair and one (20%) viewed it as poor. This data differed from their school social worker colleagues.

Table 13. Rating of Professional Communication (School Social Worker)

| # | Answer | Response | % |
|---|-----------|----------|------|
| 1 | Excellent | 7 | 29% |
| 2 | Fair | 14 | 58% |
| 3 | Poor | 3 | 13% |
| | Total | 24 | 100% |

N=24

School social workers seemed to have a more positive outlook on the professional communication with child protection workers. Seven (29%) of school social workers viewed the communication as excellent, fourteen (58%) viewed it as fair, and three (13%) thought it was poor. No participants within the Hennepin County system viewed interactions as poor.

Table 14. Agenda Alignment with Colleague (Child Welfare Worker)

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-------------------|--|----------|------|
| 1 | Completely Aligns | | 1 | 20% |
| 2 | Somewhat Aligns | | 3 | 60% |
| 3 | Rarely Aligns | | 1 | 20% |
| 4 | Never Aligns | | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | | 5 | 100% |

Agenda alignment between school social workers and child protection workers also had different perspectives. With child protection workers, one (20%) believed that the agendas completely aligned, three (60%) thought that it somewhat aligned, and one (20%) thought it rarely aligned.

Table 15. Agenda Alignment with Colleague (School Social Worker)

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-------------------|--|----------|------|
| 1 | Completely Aligns | | 5 | 20% |
| 2 | Somewhat Aligns | | 17 | 68% |
| 3 | Rarely Aligns | | 3 | 12% |
| 4 | Never Aligns | | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | | 25 | 100% |

N=25

For school social workers, five (20%) thought that the agendas completely aligned, seventeen (68%) thought that they somewhat aligned, and three (12%) thought it rarely aligned. Overall, both social service workers viewed their alignment similarly.

Table 16. Frustration Level of Child Welfare Worker

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-----------------------|--|----------|------|
| 1 | Very Frustrated | | 2 | 40% |
| 2 | Somewhat Frustrated | | 3 | 60% |
| 3 | Not At All Frustrated | | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | | 5 | 100% |

N=5

The frustration level of child protection workers was higher than expected. Two (40%) of respondents were very frustrated with school social workers, three (60%) were somewhat frustrated, and none of the participants were not at all frustrated.

Table 17. Frustration Level of School Social Worker

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-----------------------|--|----------|------|
| 1 | Very Frustrated | | 2 | 8% |
| 2 | Somewhat Frustrated | | 15 | 63% |
| 3 | Not At All Frustrated | | 7 | 29% |
| | Total | | 24 | 100% |

N=24

The frustration level of school social workers was not as high as expected. Two (8%) of participants were very frustrated by the contact with child welfare workers, fifteen (63%) were somewhat frustrated, and seven (29%) were not frustrated at all. There was not a distinction from what county the school social worker was from and their frustration levels.

Table 18. Perceived Professional Treatment from Child Welfare Workers

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-------------------------|--|----------|------|
| 1 | Very Professional | | 1 | 20% |
| 2 | Somewhat Professional | | 2 | 40% |
| 3 | Not Very Professional | | 2 | 40% |
| 4 | Not at All Professional | | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | | 5 | 100% |

N=5

Child welfare workers from this study viewed the professional treatment from school social workers differently. One (20%) of child welfare workers viewed their contact as very professional, two (40%) viewed it as somewhat professional, and two (40%) thought that it was not professional at all. The qualitative data explores in greater detail the meaning behind their answers.

Table 19. Perceived Professional Treatment from School Social Workers

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|-------------------------|--|----------|------|
| 1 | Very Professional | | 10 | 42% |
| 2 | Somewhat Professional | | 10 | 42% |
| 3 | Not Very Professional | | 4 | 17% |
| 4 | Not at All Professional | | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | | 24 | 100% |

N=24

The perceived professional treatment of the school social worker from the child welfare worker had different responses. Ten (42%) of respondents viewed the communication between them and their social service colleague as very professional. Ten (42%) viewed it as somewhat professional and four (17%) thought that it was not very professional. None of the participants thought that the communication between both parties was unprofessional. All participants who were in Hennepin County thought that the communication between them and the child welfare workers were very professional.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Interpretation of Findings from the Child Welfare Worker

Due to the smaller sample size of child welfare workers, less substantial qualitative information was found. Out of the 5 child welfare participants, only 2 responded to the qualitative questions. However, both of them both discussed 3 themes. The first theme, which they both agreed upon, was an issue was cultural understanding within the school district. Both mentioned that communication is different within cultures.

“An example would be many middle Eastern and African cultures. These people yell at each other all of the time. They do this not out of anger, but because that is just how they communicate”.

“Many school social workers do not understand that different cultures have different standards for punish. This cultural piece is important to consider when working with children.”

Even though there was only two respondents, the emphasis placed on cultural awareness cannot be ignored.

The second theme that was evident was communication barriers. One participant stated that school social workers often want immediate action when working with a student that they feel is in danger. They stated in question 14, which discussed communication barriers that come up with a case for the protection of a child, is a long process which takes time.

“The largest challenge is finding the time to communicate with school social workers on a consistent basis. It is simply not possible for me to call about every kid on a daily basis.”

The final theme was that participants were being overworked. Out of the 10 responses to the qualitative questions, 4 responses pertained to this issue. Question 15 discussed how the professional relationship could be improved.

“I believe that the only thing that can change the relationship would be more funding. I would love to improve the relationship with school social workers. This is not possible because all of the child protection workers in my county are overworked.”

“I believe one way would be for school social workers to understand the challenges that we face and the large quantity of children we see.”

In question 16, the question asked what challenges do child welfare workers face when dealing with school social workers.

“The largest challenge is finding the time to communicate with school social workers on a consistent basis. It is simply not possible for me to call about every kid on a daily basis.”

“The biggest challenge is that their(sic) is significant misunderstanding among both social service colleagues. School social workers want us to be more involved. Sometimes we cannot. We are only human.”

These responses also showed possible frustration in regards to the communication between themselves and their social service colleagues.

Interpretation of Findings from the School Social Workers

In the qualitative portion of the survey, I found 4 themes that came up regularly within the data from the school social workers. The first theme was lack of overall communication. Out of the 13 responses from question 12, 69% of respondents mentioned a lack of communication from the child welfare workers. They specifically mentioned lack of clarity, not sharing information, poor communication when a child welfare case is being closed, and also confusion due to hectic schedules. Some quotes that showed some of the feelings school social workers experience:

“The lack of communication we have especially when CPS wants to close a case and doesn't consult with a SSW before they close. This is highly frustrating!”

“It seems as though the ONLY concern for child protection is safety, and in the school social work role I am usually looking for a more comprehensive service for a student and/or family. I usually know very little about what a child protection worker is doing with a family and often need to chase them to get information.”

One participant also mentioned that the blame should not just be placed on the child welfare worker. She mentioned that both social service colleagues are often overworked and need to “scramble” in order to make each other’s schedules work.

The second theme described was the issue of confidentiality. Question 14 specifically asked participants about communication barriers that inhibit work between both parties. Out of the 12 respondents who replied to the question, 58% mentioned confidentiality as a huge issue; also informed consent was brought up.

“HIPPA while it is a protective procedure also limits access to necessary and valuable information a school social worker may need to actually service the student during the day. If the child protection report was not made by the school social worker the CPSW does not release any information and often leaves us working in the dark with our students in regards to their behaviors and any other needs.”

“Lack of ability of county worker to provide comprehensive information about the situation because of confidentiality issues. County worker being too busy to talk.”

Though this was a theme brought up in the data, there was a general understanding among the participants that the confidentiality is needed in order for professionalism to be upheld. One participant said,

“Confidnetiallity(sic) is a barrier(sic). A necessisary(sic) and critical one but a barrier just the same.”

Collaboration is the third theme, which was touched on throughout all of the responses. The biggest complaint among school social workers was the lack of phone calls answered in a timely manner. In question 17, which discussed what was the biggest challenge among school social workers, participants wanted specifically a better closing session to the cases with children.

“There has been a mutual working relationship between cps and school social workers in my experience of over 13 years in the district. I think that there has not always been follow up on the outcome of a CPS report, i.e. substantiated, unsubstantiated.”

“It has taken up to 2 weeks for a child protection worker to return a call, provide releases of information, or even an update on placement and transporation(sic) for a student. These all negatively impact the student and greatly hinder the work that can be done on the school social workers side if we are unable to contact the person reasonable for the child during times they are in out of home placement or under investigation.”

The final theme, which was described in all of the qualitative questions, was that child welfare workers are overworked. Out of the responses from school social workers, the idea of being overworked was talked about 13 times. Many participants believe that increased funding would solve much of the problems. All the previous 3 themes correlate with this final concept. One participant simply stated in the question discussing how to improve communication, *“Less clients for both of us!”* Another stated that it was hard to

describe because of the client load each of them had. Another specific participant mentioned in every qualitative question the idea of increased funding in order to give proper care to children within the school system.

Not all school social workers believed that there are communication barriers between child welfare workers and school social worker. Out of 12 respondents from question 14 discussing causes of communication barriers one participant said that they had not noticed poor communication barriers. Another participant when asked what could be improved in communication stated that nothing needed to be changed. Both of these participants were from Ramsey County, which could be a correlation. To see all qualitative responses, see appendix C.

Discussion

This study explored how both school social workers and child welfare workers communicate with one another. The purpose of the study is to discover whether or not communication is considered an issue among both social service agents, and how it can be improved at a micro, mezzo, and macro level. Due to limited data in the literature currently on this topic, much is unknown about the professional relationships between these two social welfare agents. The views expressed in this study from both the Child Welfare workers and the school social workers perspective will be valuable in further research of this topic.

Background Information

This study included both school social workers and Child welfare workers from two different counties. The study showed that most child welfare workers made contact with school social workers on a regular basis. In the case of school social workers, they only made contact with child welfare workers generally one time a week. This showed that communication from the child welfare worker was more common and in turn, may be a cause of the communication barriers that have been a issue in previous research. Parton (2012) discussed how communication barriers were expressed by the sample as insufficient. The areas that were described as problem areas were follow-up

communication, clarity of procedures moving forward, and open communication among all members involved (Parton). These findings were confirmed in the findings in this study.

Role of School Social Worker in Schools

The school social worker had similar data overall with the child welfare worker. With the topic of confidentiality school social workers viewed that confidentiality was an important factor. As discussed in the literature, confidentiality and legal obligations from child welfare workers, and interpretation of organizational roles are requirements for child welfare workers (Gibson, 2013). This was understood by the school social workers. This however was a source of irritation for some as is discussed in the report of qualitative data. Many school social workers understand the importance of confidentiality, but they still expressed that it is a reason for the poor communication among both social service colleagues.

Cultural attunement was another issue that school social workers viewed as very important. The quantitative data showed nearly all participants that it was necessary to be culturally attuned in order to give proper services to the clients. The qualitative data mirrored their feelings on the topic.

With the issue of communication, 14(58%) viewed communication as fair, and 3(13%) thought it was poor. Also, the question about agenda alignment from school social worker showed that many viewed it as only somewhat aligned. The qualitative data showed that many school social workers viewed confusion in the roles that they had as social service agents. This correlates with the literature review and the findings regarding

perceived lack of professionalism in regards of proper communication (Dodge & Daro, 2009).

The frustration level and perceived professional treatment of school social workers in the data showed that many school social workers were frustrated with the child welfare system. However, most school social workers viewed child welfare workers as professional in terms of communication. The qualitative data expanded the view of many school social workers discussing the fact that many child welfare workers are being overworked. This directly connects with the findings from the literature review, which discussed how many caseworkers are being overworked (Parton, 2002). This expresses that though there is much frustration in terms of communication, school social workers understand the reasons for the gap in services.

Role of Child Welfare Worker in Schools

The data regarding the child welfare worker showed similarities and differences with the school social workers. One difference was the concept of confidentiality. None of the participants in the study viewed school social workers as agents who viewed confidentiality as a priority. The qualitative and quantitative data however showed that child welfare workers thought that it was an important topic.

A major complaint from child welfare workers however was the idea that school social workers are not culturally competent. The qualitative data showed that some think that school social workers do not take into account how some cultures speak to their children in different ways. As discussed in the literature, cultural aspects of possible child treatment may cause conflicting ideology among school social workers and child welfare workers (Beavers, 1986; Humphreys, Atkar, & Baldwin 1999).

Lastly, the idea that school social workers need to understand that they have many different cases was discussed. Both qualitative respondents discussed that they have many cases of child maltreatment. They simply cannot give attention to all children at the same time. This data connects many articles in the literature review.

Implications for Practice and Education

After analysis of the findings, it is evident that this information is important to discuss at universities who teach social work. The topic of communication is commonly discussed within the educational realm, but very little is found in communication between both of these specific social service colleagues. It is evident that there is a gap in communication that needs to be addressed. From a macro-perspective, one could say that the system as a whole may need to be reevaluated. A possible solution would be mandatory orientations every year between child welfare workers and school social workers. This way, from the very beginning of the year, both social service agents would be able to discuss their own ideas regarding how they will conduct their work. This could lead to more responsive measures from both agents.

Future Directions

When looking at the previous research, it is unfortunate that this topic has not been discussed further. The data in this study found substantial gaps in both communication, confidentiality, and clarity of roles between social service agents. Also, the issue of services not being administered properly due to the fact that both social service agents, especially child welfare workers, are being overworked was discussed heavily by the respondents of this study. Future research on each specific area discussed in this research may lead to a better understanding of how to solve the problem at a

macro, mezzo, and micro level. A suggestion that may lead to answers would be round table discussions from both school social workers and child welfare workers. The issues could be presented, and through careful and constructive dialogue, a solution could be found.

There are also additional topics that could be discussed further in research. First, research about social service agents in specific grade levels may give a more detailed picture about what is going on in the relationship between social service agents. Little, if any, data has been found about students from a high school level and their relationship with both social service agents. Also, the topic of cultural sensitivity among school social workers should be studied further. Due to the child welfare workers view that many school social workers need to be more culturally attuned may mean there is a gap in learning at that level.

Lastly, a possible area where research could be done would be on the topic of better communication methods between both social service agents. It is evident that there is a gap in this area. There is much frustration from school social workers regarding this topic. Could a new system be created that would give school social workers immediate information about students that are considered high risk? Further research of these topics would greatly expand the quality of services provided to the children of the United States.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

Hello, my name is Daniel Gibbel, and I am performing a study on communication between both child protection workers and school social workers. I invite you to participate in this research. Please read this form before clicking on the Qualtrics survey link.

This study is being conducted by Daniel Gibbel, a graduate student at the St. Thomas/ St. Catherines University. This student is supervised by Dr. Karen Carlson, MSSW, PhD, LICSW. My research committee also includes a Child Protection Worker from Wright County and a School Social Worker from the St. Paul Public School system.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to learn how both child protection workers and school social workers communicate with one another. The information learned from the study will help both school social workers and child welfare workers discover how their roles could be improved or possibly changed for the betterment of the field and the clients.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, please click on the link below.

risks and Benefits of being in the Study: There are no risks or benefits to participants.

Confidentiality: Using the qualtrics data collection website, all surveys completed will be confidential. It is not possible for the researcher to discover the name of any participants who submit a survey individually. Only the answers to the survey will be seen by the researcher.

Voluntary Nature of Study: Your participation in the survey is completely voluntary. You are free to not take the survey or even partially complete it. Attached to this survey is an informed consent form. Please review the consent form and reflect on the following questions.

As part of the informed consent process, I am asking you to read and reflect on the following 3 questions.

- 1) How do you understand the risks and benefits of this survey?
- 2) Do you understand how I am going to protect your confidentiality?
- 3) How would you explain the purpose of this study?

If you cannot answer these questions or are not comfortable taking this survey for any reason, I encourage you to contact me. Information directly below.

Contacts: Email: ??????????????
 Phone number: ??????????????????

Appendix B: Survey

What is your professional role?

- Child Protection Worker
 School Social Worker

What county do you primarily work in?

- Wright County
 Washington County
 Hennepin County
 Ramsey County
 Anoka County

Have you ever discussed the issues of confidentiality between yourself and your social service colleague?

- Yes
 No

To what extent do you feel that you have the same expectations and understanding surrounding the issue of confidentiality with your social service colleague?

- Same Understanding
 Similar Understanding
 Different Understanding
 Opposite Understanding

On a weekly basis, how often do you typically have contact with your social service colleague?

- 0-1 time
 2-4 times
 5-7 times
 8 or more times

Please indicate how important you believe it is to understand the client/family culture when dealing with a child who is open with Child Protection?

- Very Important
 Somewhat Important
 Not Very Important
 Not at All Important

How would you rate your communication with your social service colleague?

- Excellent
- Fair
- Poor

To what extent do you believe that your goal or agenda with your client is in alignment with that of your social service colleague?

- Completely Aligns
- Somewhat Aligns
- Rarely Aligns
- Never Aligns

Please rate your level of frustration while working with your social service colleague.

- Very Frustrated
- Somewhat Frustrated
- Not at all Frustrated

How professionally do you feel you are treated by your social service colleague?

- Very Professional
- Somewhat Professional
- Not Very Professional
- Not at all Professional

Please explain what frustrates you about the working relationship with your social service colleague.

Please provide any examples of how different cultures may parent children in a way that is not commonly understood by the majority culture in the United States? (e.g. Disciplinary style, communication patterns, family expectations and roles etc.)

Please describe any communication barriers you believe exists when discussing clients with your social service colleague.

Please explain what you believe could improve your relationship with your Social Service Colleague.

(Question for child protection workers only) As a child protection worker, what kind of challenges are you faced with when dealing with school social workers?

(Question for the School social worker only) As a school social worker, what kind of challenges are you faced with when dealing with child protection workers?

Appendix C. All Qualitative Responses for Questions 12-17

12. Please explain what frustrates you about the working relationship with your social service colleague.

School Social Worker Responses

Most know their resources and how to operate the system. occasionally I have worked with one or two that can use more training.

only frustration would be connecting with them (goes both ways due to our hectic schedules). Some times it takes a couple of tries or days to get through to the worker.

The lack of communication we have especially when CPS wants to close a case and doesn't consult with a SSW before they close. This is highly frustrating!

I do not always agree with decisions that are made and often feel a lack of communication or clarity on the part of CPS.

It seems as though the ONLY concern for child protection is safety, and in the school social work role I am usually looking for a more comprehensive service for a student and/or family. I usually know very little about what a child protection worker is doing with a family and often need to chase them to get information.

n/a

Lack of ability of county worker to really significantly change things in a positive way for students. Lack of communication. Misunderstanding of the county worker regarding what the school's role is or what the school can do.

this is not specific to any one specific colleague, but the systems need to learn each other's language. more cross systems trainings.

communication is often a frustration, and lack of follow-up

Communication is limited and rare on what is happening with the child or family. It is never made clear who should be called, if a parent has retained legal guardianship, and what the expectation for school is during times of transition.

Lack of communication, calls not returned, at times not sharing information or doing things with the case (I have also worked in CP, so am familiar with guidelines, etc.)

not frustrated

Sometimes I wish that child protection could do more to protect kids and that the system is more focused on protecting the adults.

Child Welfare Worker Responses

Many school social workers do not understand that different cultures have different standards for punish. This cultural piece is important to consider when working with children.

An issue that frustrates me is the lack of cultural awareness within family systems.

13. Please provide any examples of how different cultures may parent children in a way that is not commonly understood by the majority culture in the United States? (e.g. Disciplinary style, communication patterns, family expectations and roles etc.)

School Social Worker Responses

whooping with hand or belt on backside.

Some of the Hmong disciplinary style, I am not familiar with.

I have students that provide financial support to the family as whole. They play a large role in translating and family expectations in the community. Disciplinary styles may also be different. Some beleive in spanking and don't understand the consequences of that behavior.

In thinking about many immigrant/refugee cultures that resettle in the twin cities area, there are many that use physical punishment as a primary form of discipline that may be considered abuse in the US. In these families, children may have more power than parents in many situations because they speak English and parents do not. In these families it may be culturally acceptable that older childern have heavy care giving responsabilites for younger childern in the family.

Some parents themselves have negative school and county experiences which in turn fuel their perceptions about school and county support. Some cultures feel a lot of shame when CPS is involved and therefore may not be on board with communicating with them or following through.

There are many differences. Many cultures are very male dominant (Somali, Hispanic) so the man of the house has a lot of free reign. Also many immigrants come from countries where much violence existed so that has become a way of life for them (Some Laotian camps, african countries).

Use of physical discipline.

not sure what majority culture is? but, there is Shaman use in the Hmong culture for example

Respecting elders is of great value to the Asian culture, often students translate for parents which impacts communication

Many of our African immigrant populations come with a physical discipline culture and it would be odd for a school official to correct a parents discipline style. In addition, the same holds true for our Latino population.

by beating or whooping them.

Hmong - shaming, discipline, situations of alleged incest; African American - whippings with objects,

Child Welfare Worker Responses

An example would be many middle Eastern and African cultures. These people yell at each other all of the time. They do this not out of anger, but because that is just how they communicate.

All examples given

14. Please describe any communication barriers you believe exists when discussing clients with your social service colleague.

School Social Worker Responses

No signed consent.

Just returning phone calls.

Some times it is the cultural piece that is not understood. Some social Service believe that because the families are living in the United States that they need to assimilate and have a strong understanding of the American culture in the areas of communication and family expectations.

Sometimes we don't get releases when we request them from CPS. CPS not returning calls or unable to provide us more info about why student is involved in CPS.

When referring a student/family to child protection I rarely hear from the assigned worker. I typically need to call them or even track down who the assigned worker is. It is difficult to know if child protection workers don't value the school social worker role, don't understand what we do, or don't have time to follow through with us.

Confidentiality is a barrier. A necessary and critical one but a barrier just the same.

Lack of ability of county worker to provide comprehensive information about the situation

because of confidentiality issues. County worker being too busy to talk.

There really are no barriers, but educators share academic, social/emotional and behavioral(discipline) info whereas social service colleague shares perhaps more info about the family dynamics, family crisis, etc.

I think our role difference may impact communication, the social service colleague has a different focus at times

HIPPA while it is a protective procedure also limits access to necessary and valuable information a school social worker may need to actually service the student during the day. If the child protection report was not made by the school social worker the CPSW does not release any information and often leaves us working in the dark with our students in regards to their behaviors and any other needs.

Presumptions on both parties.

Have not experienced this

Child Welfare Worker Responses

School social workers do not want to protect the student. They often jump to conclusions before actually knowing all of the facts. Cultural competency is a big factor.

Constant communication barriers. School social workers want immediate action and that is not possible.

15. Please explain what you believe could improve your relationship with your Social Service Colleague.

School Social Worker Responses

That is hard to answer because I work with so many.

Less clients for both of us!

More professionalism and respect - we are both trying to help the student - more team work especially before closing cases.

It simply would be helpful to know what is going on with a case from their standpoint, what services they are providing, or what their views/findings are regarding what is going on with a family.

It has been helpful when CP workers have been able to meet with School Social Workers (as a large group) at the beginning of our school year. They've also participated in some on-going

prof. development given by the school district for School Social Workers.

Phone calls being returned in a timely manner. Perhaps a face to face meeting to discuss the family/child we have in common.

I don't feel there is anything to improve.

communicating our goals in initial conversation

I think part of the initial process is that a CPSW get a release to the school and reach out to the school social worker in regards to working with a family or student and then they could collaborate on their efforts, plans, and goals.

not sure.

I often find that when we meet in person about a more challenging client system, more collaboration can happen.

Cultural competent training and keeping open communication with all departments.

Child Welfare Worker Responses

I believe that the only thing that can change the relationship would be more funding. I would love to improve the relationship with school social workers. This is not possible because all of the child protection workers in my county are overworked.

I believe one way would be for school social workers to understand the challenges that we face and the large quantity of children we see.

16. (Question for child protection workers only) As a child protection worker, what kind of challenges are you faced with when dealing with school social workers?

School Social Worker Responses

N/A

Child Welfare Worker Responses

The largest challenge is finding the time to communicate with school social workers on a consistent basis. It is simply not possible for me to call about every kid on a daily basis.

The biggest challenge is that there is significant misunderstanding among both social service colleagues. School social workers want us to be more involved. Sometimes we cannot. We are only human.

17. (Question for the School social worker only) As a school social worker, what kind of challenges are you faced with when dealing with child protection workers?

School Social Worker Responses

some follow through. A majority of the case managers are good. All of the intake screeners are extremely resourceful. Most of the intake workers are good.

Not knowing when a case has been closed or opened.

Open communication between school social worker and child protection workers.

They are very busy so communication may be somewhat delayed however, this is not a major concern.

More professionalism, communication and respect - we are both trying to help the student - more team work especially before closing cases.

Already stated

The challenge of knowing that in many cases while a student/child may be suffering greatly in his/her family system, it often doesn't meet legal criteria for abuse.for

Their focus is very different from our focus. And they have legal pieces to work within to be able to report to the court.

There has been a mutual working relationship between cps and school social workers in my experience of over 13 years in the district. I think that there has not always been follow up on the outcome of a CPS report, i.e. substantiated, unsubstantiated

I have had challenge of lack of follow thru and communication

It has taken up to 2 weeks for a child protection worker to return a call, provide releases of information, or even an update on placement and transportation for a student. These all negatively impact the student and greatly hinder the work that can be done on the school social workers side if we are unable to contact the person reasonable for the child during times they are in out of home placement or under investigation.f

both of us are away from our desks often, therefore time to communicate, lack of understanding of what SSW do/ can do

I had one very good experience where they intervened and the abuse stopped and education was offered to the parent!!

Communication, accessing them when there is a crisis, figuring out how to connect with them and the client.

Child Welfare Worker Responses
N/A