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Recognizing and Utilizing Cultural Strengths in Child Welfare

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Abstract

In 2011, British Columbia (B.C.) held the second largest immigrant population in Canada with Vancouver in particular being home to over 913,300 immigrants alone (Statistics Canada, 2013). This figure has consistently grown with the influx of newcomers and refugees of varying ethno-cultural backgrounds into Canada, highlighting the importance of culture and its impacts on our clients and families. Clearly, understanding culture has important implications for how the child welfare system interacts and serves families of diverse cultural and ethno-racial backgrounds in B.C. However, it is unclear how child protection workers make meaning of their own culture and interpret cultural diversity as a strength when working with this population. Therefore, by applying a critical theoretical lens, this project aimed to learn how social workers are currently recognizing and utilizing cultural strengths when working with children and families of diverse backgrounds, as well as determine what additional supports and resources are needed to better inform child welfare practice and strengthen overall service delivery within a Eurocentric hegemonic system. In order to better understand how child protection workers are currently navigating the complexities of working with families of diverse cultural backgrounds, this study commenced with a systematic literature review. The existing literature demonstrated a need to further evaluate the extent in which child protection workers utilize and recognize cultural strengths when working with ethnocultural families in B.C.'s child welfare system. Also embedded within the existing literature was a widespread consensus that providing ample cultural training to workers contributed to improved services and outcomes for ethnocultural families. Following this comprehensive literature review, the researchers of this project sought to capture major themes and insights from child protection workers as to how cultural strengths were being recognized and utilized in existing practice in B.C. by recruiting 39 participants, all of whom identified as child protection workers in B.C., to complete an online survey capturing quantitative data. Analysis of data collected from this survey identified several themes, perhaps the most pertinent of which was an overall consensus amongst child protection workers in B.C. that their agency had not provided adequate training, and that staff at their agency would benefit from additional training initiatives aimed at increasing workers' competency and agility when working with ethnoculturally diverse families. Furthermore, those child protection workers with an educational background in a discipline other than social work appeared more vulnerable to feelings of distress and not being supported by their agency when working with ethnocultural families. The themes identified through dissemination of the data were clearly linked to the key findings embedded within the existing literature and these connections are explored in the discussion section of this report, followed by an acknowledgement of the limitations that may have impacted the study's overall findings and results. Key implications of the research findings were identified as: greater feelings of being supported and decreased moral distress amongst participants with a social work educational background, a lack of celebration and recognition of cultural diversity as a strength embedded within child protection agencies, and significant gaps in training aimed at strengthening child welfare practice with ethnocultural families received by child protection workers. These implications, along with the overall findings of this study and what is known from existing literature, informed the following recommendations for future directions of research, policy and practice pertaining to the use of cultural strengths in child welfare practice in B.C.: continued exploration of how child protection workers in B.C. are being supported to recognize and utilize cultural strengths in child welfare practice through future cohorts of the UBC/MCFD research partnership; advancement and development of policy initiatives aimed at strengthening child welfare practice with ethno-cultural, immigrant, newcomer and refugee families through the provision of adequate training and diversifying of staff composition; and increased establishment, engagement and consultation with community connections in an effort to enhance the experiences of culturally diverse families interacting with the child protection system.

Keywords: Child protection, child welfare practice, cultural strengths, diversity, Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)



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Introduction

In 2011, B.C. held the second largest immigrant population in Canada with Vancouver in particular being home to over 913,300 immigrants alone (Statistics Canada, 2013). This figure has consistently grown with the influx of newcomers and refugees of varying ethno-cultural backgrounds into Canada, highlighting the importance of culture and its impacts on our clients and families. Understanding culture and how various other social identities intersect with existing social systems of hierarchy, power, and oppression has important implications for how the child welfare system serves families of diverse cultural and ethno-racial backgrounds in Canada.

Culturally competent practice emerged as a means of allowing social workers to develop the required skills to function more effectively with people of diverse cultural and ethno-racial groups. Essential to social work practice is our ability to recognize our own biases and views, as well as how they may conflict with social work's capacity to empathize with others who differ from us. However, as our literature review demonstrates below, there are significant gaps in existing knowledge and practice guidelines available to assist child protection workers. Further, there is limited evidence on how best to recognize and utilize cultural strengths to better serve families of diverse cultural and ethno-racial backgrounds in the child welfare system.

In reference to the Family and Child Strengths and Needs Assessment conducted by MCFD, cultural support was identified as an integral item and vital component to the work of child welfare agencies. Thus, the purpose of this research project was to explore how cultural strengths are interpreted and applied by social workers in child welfare practice with immigrant families, newcomers, and/or refugees. This project also aimed to demonstrate how social workers can be further supported systemically to utilize and recognize their own cultural strengths and worldviews when working with culturally diverse families within the child welfare system. The literature findings revealed that there are varying frameworks currently being utilized in practice with immigrant families, including cultural competency, cultural awareness,

cultural humility, and cultural agility, however much of this literature is not specific to child welfare practice in B.C., and there is limited research on how workers from ethno-cultural communities make meaning of their own cultural knowledge and practices in professional practice. Consequently, there is limited evidence showing how these frameworks are being applied in practice and whether child protection workers are adequately equipped and informed to navigate these cultural nuances. The aim of this project was to gain insight into how social workers, whom possess their own cultural identities, are currently navigating the complexities of working with families of diverse cultural backgrounds within a Eurocentric hegemonic system, and to identify how they can be better prepared and equipped to recognize and utilize cultural strengths within this context.

To gather this insight, the researchers of this project sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How are child protection workers currently recognizing and utilizing clients' cultural strengths in child welfare practice?
2. How do child protection workers from diverse cultural backgrounds make meaning of their own culture and how are they utilizing their own cultural strengths in child welfare practice?
3. How can child protection workers be better supported to further recognize and utilize client and/or worker cultural strengths in child welfare practice?

Literature Review

Our research process began with a systematic review of the existing empirical literature to identify and explore key areas and themes on how culture is recognized, understood, and utilized when working with diverse, ethno-cultural families in child welfare practice. This in-depth examination of the current discourse helped ground and inform our research questions, methodology and analysis. To summarize the key findings of our literature review, we began with Rajendran and Chemtob's (2010) study which examined factors that were associated with increased use of family support services amongst immigrant

families in the United States' child welfare system. This study was a secondary analysis of the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-being (Rajendran & Chemtob, 2010). The researchers found that increased hours of cultural competency training amongst caseworkers were associated with greater use of family support services, such as parenting education, resource assistance, support groups and counseling by immigrant families within the child welfare system (Rajendran & Chemtob, 2010). Moreover, a mixed-methods study conducted by Han and Osterling (2012) specifically examined the experiences of Vietnamese immigrant families involved in the United States child welfare system and also identified culturally competent workers as a key factor in facilitating the family reunification process. Earner's (2007) work upholds this finding underscoring case worker's lack of knowledge about immigration status, cultural misunderstanding, and language access issues as major barriers to child welfare services in New York City's child protection system. Clearly, the need for culturally competent or bicultural workers, who are "able to understand cultural nuances, norms and traditions... [and who were] nonjudgmental, supportive and encouraging" (Han & Osterling, 2012, p. 110) was identified as an important implication for best practice in child welfare settings.

Moreover, failure to incorporate concepts of cultural competency into clinical services can be harmful to clients, can fail to meet the needs of members of diverse ethno-racial communities, and can result in inappropriate services. Maiter (2009) proposes that a discursive anti-racist framework be embedded in child welfare practice that centralizes issues of race and the potential consequences of racial minority status for families. Maiter (2009) promotes the use of anti-racist frameworks in order to analyze social service situations and develop clinical strategies to better address the effects of race and racism in child welfare practice. This critical anti-racist theoretical lens provides clinicians with a conceptual framework to draw on the consequences of race and other social identities inflicted on vulnerable, ethno-racial immigrant and refugee populations.

Furlong and Wight (2011) proposed an alternative

framework to cultural competency, presenting a critique of the cultural competency model in that it implies this notion of the professional as the "expert". When working with immigrant, newcomer, or refugee families, the use of "cultural experts" narrows the idea of what culture can be which can result in cultural tokenism or even blanket generalizations about a given culture resulting in an assumed cultural competency (Furlong & Wight, 2011). Consequently, Anis (2005) prefers to examine culture as a fluid, always changing concept that is a "consequence of increased mobility and immigration" (p. 5) and thus challenges the nuances of cultural competency. Since many immigrants, newcomers and refugees experience structural disparities including high rates of unemployment, underemployment and poverty, Anis (2005) acknowledges the use of culture as a practical way for understanding existing conflicts in social worker-client interactions. However, Anis (2005) cautions the risk for social workers to "culturalize" problems, challenging the dominant, western way of deducing culture, "rather than culture itself, [as] the source of conflict" (p.14). Similarly, Este (2007), endorses the need for social workers to be cognizant of the shifting nature of culture. For instance, newcomers to Canada are likely to retain the parts of their culture they regard as important and to embrace certain aspects of Canadian culture, thus forging a new culture that will evolve, develop, and change over time (Este, 2007). Therefore, culture as an explanatory tool for child welfare encounters with ethno-racial families is likely to create discomfort that is forged by broader cultural biases. As described by Este (2007), this can create a 'slippery slope' for the culturalization of problems which can lead to generalizations, assumptions, and even harmful stereotypes about a particular culture based on common issues experienced among groups of similar ethnic origins.

Maiter and Stalker (2011) echo this "lack of a holistic approach to assessment and case planning" in existing social work practice when servicing South Asian immigrant families in the Canadian child welfare system (p. 140). This research cited a greater

need for a 'family centered' approach that recognizes culture as a source of strength and resilience given families felt that their cultural perspectives were not valued when planning for or making decisions around child protection interventions and support services (Maiter & Stalker, 2011). Recommendations for expanding 'in home' family services that are more culturally sensitive and inclusive of the entire family unit (i.e. diverse workers, interpretative services) received greater approval from participating immigrant families, allowing for the dismantling of structural power inequities and child welfare discriminatory practices (Maiter & Stalker, 2011).

Research also highlights the need to recognize culture as a "source of competence in situations requiring [immigrant/newcomer families] to adjust to the values and habits of their new environment" (Anis, 2005, p. 17). This encourages the social work profession to be accountable and apply a strengths-based, client-oriented approach when assessing each client's individual and cultural situations and de-centering one's own cultural or social location when engaging in the child welfare system. To avoid ethnocentric practice that is typically inherent to western social work practice, several revised frameworks to cultural competency have emerged including cultural awareness, cultural humility, and cultural agility. Accordingly, Furlong and Wight (2011), preferred the notion of cultural awareness as a systemic remodeling of social work identity and selfhood based on the premises of curiosity and an informed not knowing. Anis (2005) complements this idea but employs a more progressive stance by suggesting 'culture' be used as an explanatory tool as well as a 'methodical tool' when engaging in open dialogue about child rearing practices with immigrant clients (p. 8). In Anis (2005) study involving clients with Russian, Somali, and Vietnamese origin living in Finland, the author conducted interviews to capture how culture is contextualized in a meaningful and respectful way that fosters dialogue as a means of finding culturally appropriate and specific resources. Rather than resorting to typical Finnish child protection measures, the social worker employed a set of 'culture-based questions' to validate the client

articulates a paradigm shift that promotes an intersectional cultural humility perspective in child welfare practice that "liberate[s] workers from expectation of cultural expertise about others, and to actively engage the clients, inclusive of their cultural differences..." (Ortega & Faller, 2011, p. 27).

Beyond practicing cultural competence, Maiter et al. (2009) proposed that child welfare practitioners working with immigrant, newcomer, and refugee families must also be aware of and understand the significant stressors that arise as a result of the family's migration process. Stressors related to loneliness, language difficulties, finances and providing for the family, as well as overall feelings of betrayal and hopelessness about how their lives in Canada have not met their expectations were reported (Maiter et al., 2009). To support the influx of immigrants and refugees arriving in Canada, the Calgary Area Child and Family Services Authority joined forces with other immigrant serving organizations to address the "lack of cross-cultural communication" when working with diverse ethno-racial families (Williams et al., 2005). The Call-Center liaison program provided "vigorous intercultural linkages" that informed best practice in child welfare allowing for greater efficiency and continuity of care (Williams et al., 2005, p. 745). This intention to better understand the family's migration experience will equip child welfare workers in recognizing and utilizing the family's existing strengths and resources to improve their overall functioning and outcomes (Maiter et al., 2009).

Similarly, Lee, Fuller-Thomson, Fallon, Trocmé, and Black's (2017) mixed methods study prompts further inquiry into the complexity of working cross-culturally with Asian-Canadian children and families involved in the child welfare system. Several themes emerged in this research including a "lack of early intervention and supports for families..., [a] lack of culturally appropriate services..." and a greater need for "care and cultural sensitivity in understanding the family concerns" especially in the realm of "culturally normative disciplinary practices" upheld by Asian-Canadian families (p. 351). Focus groups found that and family's identity and experience of culture in

navigating familial affairs (Anis, 2005). This research although social workers engaged in critical self-reflexivity when investigating child abuse cases, greater cross-cultural education and training was needed to help social workers navigate culturally opposing views on family rearing practices especially in the presence of language barriers and cultural exclusivity.

At a local level, the 2016-2017 Report on Multiculturalism by the Government of British Columbia (2017) states that the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) utilizes a client-centered approach across a spectrum of services supporting children and families across the province. The report states that MCFD is committed “to providing programs and services that recognize and value cultural diversity and establishing a culturally safe, sensitive, and competent approach to practice” (Government of British Columbia, 2017, p. 19). While the report outlines several initiatives and programs implemented by MCFD to fulfill this commitment, the majority of these initiatives are presented as being tailored specifically to Indigenous peoples and families (Government of British Columbia, 2017). Comparatively, initiatives directed at improving outcomes for immigrant families are relatively limited, consisting primarily of language and translation services and initiatives aimed at bridging newcomer families into mainstream programs (Government of British Columbia, 2017). This highlights a significant gap in service provision and delivery when recognizing and fostering cultural strengths among ethno-racial/cultural families involved in the BC welfare system.

This literature review demonstrates the need to evaluate the extent in which social workers utilize and recognize cultural strengths and worldviews when working with diverse, ethno-cultural families within the child welfare system. The literature reveals that there are varying frameworks that are currently being applied in practice with immigrant, newcomer, and refugee families of diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds, including cultural competency, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, cultural humility and cultural agility. Despite emphasizing the use of cultural strengths in practice, there is limited discourse showing how exactly these frameworks are being applied in child welfare

practice within BC. Although MCFD has made a commitment to multicultural practice, the recent Report on Multiculturalism (2017) neglects to specify how this is being demonstrated in practice with ethno-cultural families beyond providing language services.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Consequently, we have identified an area in need of more research in learning how and to what extent MCFD workers from ethno-cultural communities recognize and utilize family strengths as well as how they make meaning of their own cultural identity, knowledge and practices when working with families of diverse cultural backgrounds. Focuses on ending oppression and subordination caused by powerful social, economic, and political institutions or structures. This oppression exists when social systems, policies, and/or legislation renders power and class divisions among people or groups of varying socioeconomic statuses (Hick, 2010). Anti-oppressive practice involves a deep understanding of oppression and its harmful effects on those who have experienced it (Heinonen & Spearman, 2010). It is based on the belief that every individual is unique and has the abilities, strengths, and resources to cope effectively with life's challenges. It encourages a mutually hopeful and respectful collaboration between the client and the social worker, does not deny the existence of one's struggles, but focuses on identifying the resources and strategies that a person in crisis has (i.e. culture) to resolve or cope with those problems and minimize future ones (Tong, 2011). Behaviours are influenced by a variety of factors that work together as a system. This approach focuses on how the family system interacts and affects with individual members and other formal/informal systems of support (i.e., child welfare, employment, friends, cultural community). Social work can assist individual members by understanding and working through cultural nuances, norms, values, beliefs, and customs, embedded in the family system as a means of empowerment (The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, 2018).

By applying an anti-oppressive, trauma-informed,

strengths-based and family systems approach as our theoretical framework, we hoped to address these research and practice gaps as well as determine what additional supports and resources are needed to better inform child welfare practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. As highlighted throughout the literature review, a strengths-based approach that affirmed one's cultural context, migration story, and overall family system is essential to building rapport and improving outcomes for immigrants, newcomers and refugees who are typically fraught by greater rates of oppression and marginalization at the hands of systemic structures like the child welfare system.

This critical theoretical social work lens is essential to providing child protection workers with a conceptual framework to draw on the lived experiences and consequences of culture, race and other social identities that impact immigrants, newcomers, and refugee populations encountering the child welfare system. Application of this theoretical lens challenges the Eurocentric hegemonic system that is typically inherent in traditional western social work practice allowing several revised frameworks to emerge that are more attune and reflective of the cultural complexities endured by families of diverse ethno-racial backgrounds. As found in the literature, a cultural competency framework calls for greater accountability and competency from social workers to develop their professional knowledge and skills base in order to work effectively across cultures in meaningful and relevant ways. Principles of this framework include "valuing diversity, developing cultural self-awareness, appreciating the dynamics of cross-cultural interactions, being knowledgeable of within-group cultural differences, and demonstrating an ability to develop service delivery that is relevant and responsive to the diverse and complex needs of individuals, families...and communities" (Ortega & Faller, 2011, p. 28). However, this framework has been criticized as it suggests this notion of the professional as the "expert" which narrows the idea of what culture is or is interpreted as. As a result, cultural awareness as a conceptual framework has been used as a systemic remodeling of identity and selfhood based on the premises of

curiosity and an informed not knowing to gain a better mutual understanding (Furlong & Wight, 2011). It establishes a context for practice that regards "the other" as a mirror in which the social worker can see their own cultural position, be it personal, professional, ideological, and/or cultural profile reflected back onto them. This promotes a sense of "decentering" oneself in order to gain understanding of the other persons (i.e. cultural difference) and to challenge what you have learned.

More recently, cultural humility has been widely cited in the existing discourse as it goes one step further by recognizing important and relevant concepts such as multiculturalism and intersectionality as critical to child welfare practice. Cultural humility reinforces the importance and autonomy of engaging families by identifying them as a source of strength "as active participants in maintaining a safe and permanent living environment that promotes child well-being" (Ortega & Faller, 2011, p. 31). Lastly, we introduced the concept of cultural agility which denote/refers the ability to engage respectfully and effectively with persons who differ from you and providing a sense of safety and accountability in the worker-client relationship. Cultural agility honours and appreciates personal and professional difference as unique while giving space to examine one's own identity and social location. This concept assigns value among differing cultural perspectives, beliefs, and values as a strength, while recognizing that this as an opportunity for growth and development (MCFD, n.d). However, as our literature review revealed, there is limited knowledge base around the use of this concept with ethno-cultural groups and more notably applied when working with indigenous families and communities. In summary, it was this conceptual framework coupled with our chosen theoretical modalities that helped ground and inform our research approach and methodology.

Methodology

Sampling Procedure

Recruitment for the online survey was facilitated via email invitation by the MCFD sponsors and distributed broadly to team leaders throughout B.C. to be shared with each of their respective employees.

The student researchers created a recruitment poster which contained all pertinent research details as part of the email invitation. To capture more child protection workers (i.e. research participants), the MCFD sponsors forwarded this email invitation on to team leaders in other service delivery locations of the Greater Vancouver area as well as province wide. Furthermore, the MCFD sponsors assisted in the recruitment process by promoting the research project to team leaders and staff at various MCFD offices during team meetings and through internal agency communication portals.

Prospective participants were identified by the MCFD sponsors and team leaders of participating MCFD offices since they were responsible for forwarding on the research details to their respective teams. Therefore, this project's recruitment methodology used purposive sampling to screen potential participants with the goal of obtaining a total of 50 participants for the quantitative online survey. A stratified purposive sampling procedure targets a particular population (i.e. MCFD child protection workers) that work with a specific group (i.e. ethno-racial/cultural groups) for the purposes of capturing major themes or variations in our research findings (Patton, 2001).

Since participation in the research study was voluntary, recruitment for survey participants occurred over a two-week time period, allowing potential participants a fourteen-day timeframe to decide whether they wished to participate. In the event that not enough participants were recruited within this timeframe, the student researchers planned for an additional phase of recruitment which extended the recruitment period for an additional two-week period, giving all participants a maximum of one month to decide if they wanted to take part in the study. Each wave of the recruitment process occurred with the assistance of the MCFD sponsors who continued to provide support in promoting participation of the research study during team meeting and by using internal agency communication portals.

As per the MCFD project sponsors, there was no specific inclusion criteria to be considered for selecting research participants. Any and all MCFD workers actively employed as child protection workers in the

greater Vancouver area were eligible to participate in the research project. However, child protection workers that solely work with indigenous families were excluded since this research project did not consider indigenous children, youth, and families. This project was not intended to exclude aboriginal culture from the Canadian child welfare context, rather, it was aimed to focus on how and to what extent child protection workers currently serve families of other diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds in B.C.

Data Collection and Storage Methods

A quantitative research methods approach was applied to our data collection process which included an online survey (using Qualtrics) comprised of quantitative, closed-ended questions utilizing both multiple choice and Likert scale formats. To ensure content validity, our measurement instrument (i.e. online survey) was reviewed by the MCFD sponsors, the Principal Investigator, Dr. Barbara Lee and the MCFD Ethics Review Committee, in which any proposed changes or edits were made prior to implementation. Criterion and construct validity was not established as there is little research available that can be utilized for this purpose.

The participants of the online survey were actively employed child welfare workers from several agency offices within the Lower Mainland. Research participants who decided to participate in this research were given instructions (via email invitation) to access the online survey portal (i.e. UBC Qualtrics). All research participants were prompted with an online consent form in which they were required to read and agree to before proceeding to the survey questionnaire. Additional study information and terms regarding privacy and confidentiality were also outlined on the online survey prior to beginning the survey. Once the survey date closed, the completed surveys were accessed and analyzed by the student researchers/investigators.

Survey participants were informed on the online survey window prior to providing consent to participate that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time prior to completing the survey by closing the survey window. If participants closed the

survey without completing the survey to its entirety, their answers were not included in the study's data results as any incomplete surveys implies withdrawal and were manually removed from the data collection process by the student researchers. To ensure that only incomplete surveys that were the result of withdrawn consent were removed from the data, and not those containing skipped answers, a function was implemented in Qualtrics that did not allow participants to skip questions and still proceed through the survey. In order to ensure confidentiality, survey participants were informed that the data will be anonymized and therefore the researchers will not be able to link their answers to their identity once their responses have been submitted. Therefore, survey participants were only able to withdraw consent prior to submitting their completed survey. Furthermore, participants were unable to withdraw consent after completing the questionnaire as the researchers had no way of identifying and/or removing their responses amongst the collected data.

Survey data was collected using University of British Columbia's (UBC) Qualtrics software, which is a secure Canadian data collection platform that creates surveys and generates reports. Qualtrics complies with the BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). A SIUE e-id and password was required, as only people that have shared/collaborated were able to view the data. All electronic data was stored on an encrypted USB drive and was only opened and accessed on password protected computers belonging to the student researchers. There was no physical data material (i.e. paper, manual notebooks) collected during this research study and thus we were not required to pursue physical storage protocols as per UBC policy. The student researchers and primary investigator were the only individuals who had access to the raw data to ensure confidentiality. There were no additional copies of the data and therefore no considerations were made for storage of additional copies. The data retention period, as per UBC policy, is five years, after which time the encrypted USB drive will be formatted to remove all existing files. Furthermore, to protect participants' personal information, no identifying information was sought or

presented in the findings of this research, with the exception that the participants' professional occupation was known as it was a criterion for participation, as was the geographical area they work within, as the distribution of the survey was limited to a particular geographical area. Participants were informed of these potential limitations to confidentiality when obtaining consent.

Method of Analysis

Quantitative survey data was analyzed using computer statistical analysis software called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to identify descriptive as well as inferential statistical relationships within the data. This codified data as analyzed throughout this report identified conceptual relationships and overall patterns and themes to better inform our recommendations for future child welfare practice and more effective service delivery outcomes in B.C. Included in our findings and results section of this report are visual graphs and tables that illustrate the quantitative research outcomes.

Our sample size totalled thirty-nine participants, all of which identified as MCFD child protection workers spanning across BC. The quantitative data was then exported from Qualtrics into SPSS for analysis. The analytic strategy consisted of both univariate and bivariate approaches including Chi-Square, T-Test, or Fisher's Exact Test measurements.

The data contained 25 non-standardized closed-ended questions in a Likert scale format such as: agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat disagree, disagree, which at times did not allow for suitable analysis as it produced a 4x4 table, which would in turn violate the assumption of a Chi-Square test. In order to successfully perform such test, the statistics had to be recoded into a 2x2 table of the form: agree or somewhat agree and neutral, somewhat disagree, or disagree. In some cases, this provided a valid assumption and the Chi-Square Test could be supported; however, in most cases the Chi-Square Test was still violated, leading to the use of the Fisher's Exact Test of independence, which is used when there are two nominal variables to see whether the proportions of one variable are different depending on the value of the other variable, and to

prove statistical significance or insignificance.

The data was analyzed by categorizing each of the survey questions according to the research question it would answer to determine their statistical significance to one another. The significance was determined by referring to the Asymptotic Significance column for Chi-Square and the Exact Sig. (2-sided) column for Fisher's Exact. If the p-value for these respective tests were less than 0.05, then the data was statistically significant; and if the value was greater than 0.05, then the data was not statistically significant.

Results

The following section discusses the findings attained from performing a quantitative analysis on a sample size of thirty nine MCFD child protection workers. Both univariate and bivariate statistical approaches were measured in order to completely comprehend the data. This segment of the report will focus solely on elucidating the results using visual graphs and charts to ground the research content presented.

Figures 1 and 2 display the most significant analysis of our research, evidenced by MCFD participants who felt that their agency was in need of incorporating more training initiatives to further recognize cultural strengths and inform interventions in child welfare practice.

Moreover, one of the research questions posed to child protection workers across the province was if they had been provided with enough training in cultural competency frameworks in order to better work with immigrant or refugee families of culturally diverse backgrounds. As per Figure 1, 99% of participants responded that they had not received adequate training to effectively respond to the cultural complexities and nuances experienced in practice. Furthermore, staff were asked whether they would benefit from additional cultural competency training as well as learning about the various ethno-cultural groups. According to Figure 2, 100% of participants responded yes, agreeing that additional training and education would be beneficial for MCFD staff.

Figure 3 shows that 77% of participants believed that the staff composition does not adequately reflect the client population being served in the region.

Additionally, while 100% of participants were in favour of children remaining connected to the culture of their biological family, whether they are in care or not (Figure 4),

Figure 1: Workers perception on amount of training received

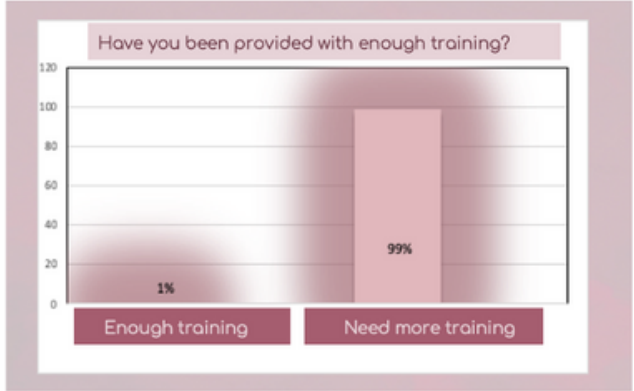


Figure 2: Workers perception on amount of training required



Figure 3: Staff composition compared to client population

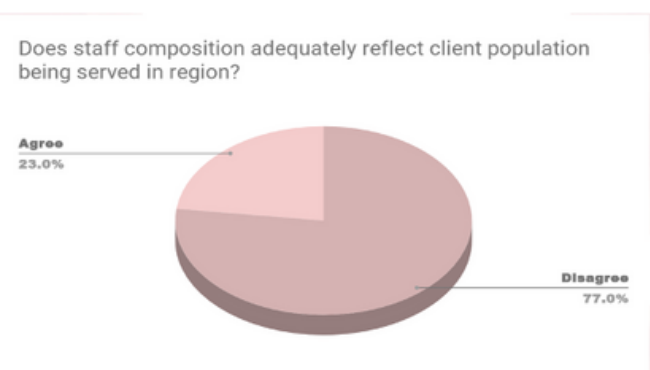
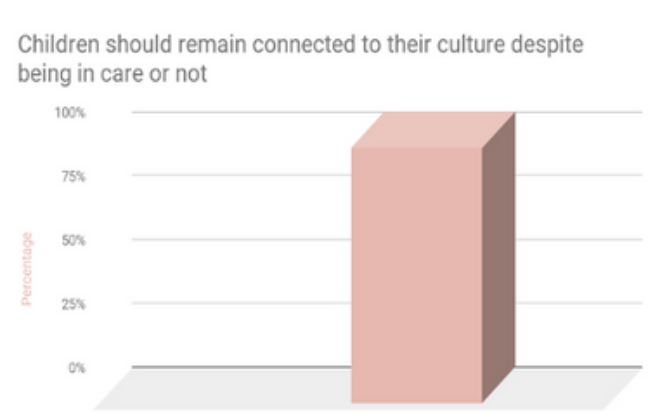


Figure 4: Opinion on children from diverse cultures: Should children remain connected to their cultures?



97% disagreed when asked if children from diverse cultures should adapt to the Canadian culture once in Canada (Figure 5). Consequently, all thirty nine child protection workers who participated in the survey voiced the importance of children remaining connected to the culture of their biological family irrespective of whether they are in care or not and prioritized this issue as a vital strength for their development.

Figure 5: Opinion on children from diverse cultures: Should children adapt to the Canadian culture?

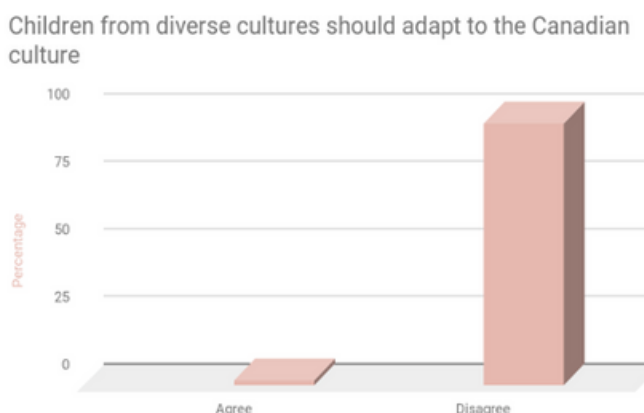


Figure 6: Opinion on support

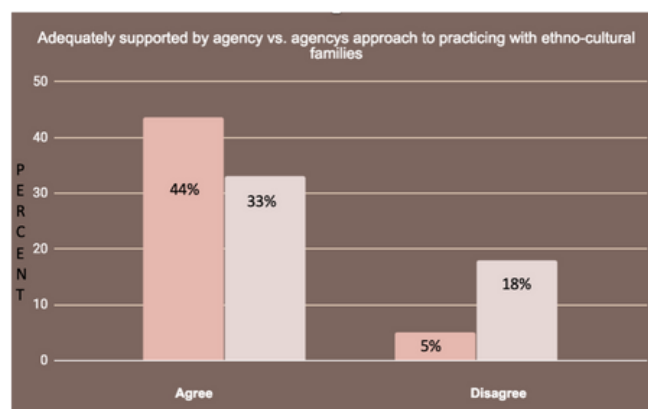


Table 1: Chi-square tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	Exact Significance (2-sided)	Exact Significance (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.29 ^a	1	.070		
Continuity Correction	2.05	1	.152		
Likelihood Ratio	3.45	1	.063		
Fisher's Exact Test				.127	.075
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.20	1	.073		
N of Valid Cases	39				

^aTwo cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.38.

Figure 7: Perception of support from agency by education level

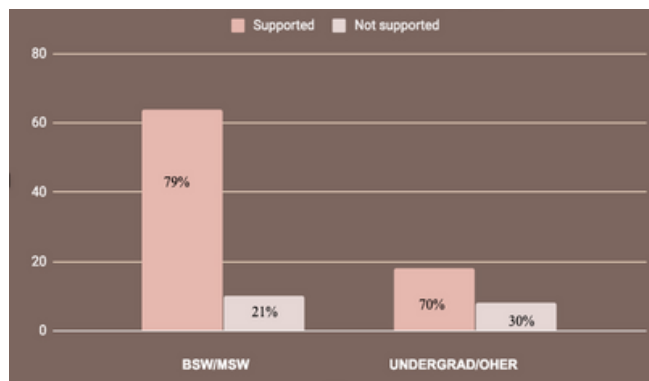
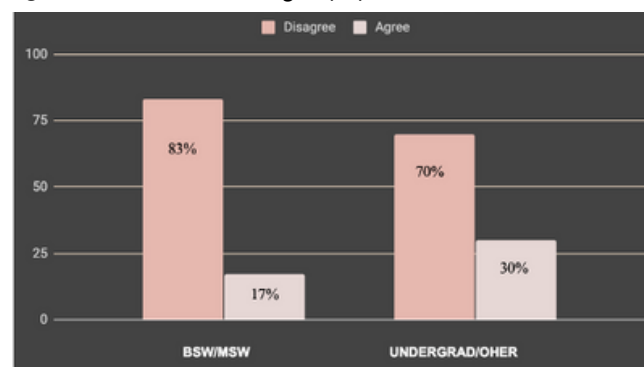


Figure 8: Moral distress at agency by education level



As per Figure 6 and Table 1, the number of people who agree that their agency's approach to practicing with ethno-racial and culturally diverse families is culturally appropriate (43.59%) felt that they are adequately supported by their agency to recognize and utilize client's cultural strengths in practice, this was not statistically significant ($n = 39$, $p = .127$).

Figure 7 shows that 79% of the child protection workers who hold either a BSW or MSW voiced they felt supported by their agency when working with a family or child of a different or unfamiliar culture, compared to 70% of those with other education backgrounds, who felt supported. Finally, Figure 8 shows that 17% of the child protection workers who were surveyed, held either a Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) or a Masters of Social Work (MSW) agreed that their agency's approach to practicing with ethno-cultural, immigrant, newcomer and refugee families caused them moral distress, compared to 30% of those with other educational backgrounds, who reported as agreeing with this statement.

Discussion

Our most valuable analysis found that the majority of MCFD survey participants acknowledged a greater need for their agency to incorporate more training initiatives that further recognize cultural strengths when working with ethno-diverse families in child welfare. This finding is congruent with the existing discourse where more cross-cultural education and training was identified as being important in supporting workers in navigating ethno-cultural complexities and nuances. This is reflective of the ongoing need for workers to engage with cultural conceptual frameworks that are grounded in a critical theoretical lens. As our results indicated, participants acknowledged a lack of adequate training by their respective agencies suggesting that although varying cultural conceptual frameworks exist, there is little evidence on how these frameworks are being incorporated into practice to improve the service outcomes for culturally diverse families. Similarly, existing barriers to accessing culturally appropriate services and resources, beyond language services, continue to persist in child protection. Participants unanimously reported in favour of more staff training and education around ethno-cultural groups to help contextualize the lived experiences of the migration process. Although one runs the potential risk of 'culturalizing' problems as manifest in that particular culture, application of a more robust, reflexive, and intersectional approach that is both family-centered and trauma-informed will help mitigate this risk of worker bias.

Furthermore, our research findings complemented existing themes in the literature that implied an emerging paradigm shift away from the traditional, Eurocentric modalities that are inherent in B.C.'s hegemonic child welfare system. As illustrated in Figure 4 and 5, all participants asserted being strongly in favour of children remaining connecting to their biological culture. The majority of participants also opposed the notion that families of diverse backgrounds should abandon their cultures of origin in order to assimilate to a new Canadian cultural identity. This finding is parallel to the evidence base that views culture as a source of strength and

resilience within the family system and not a barrier to better service outcomes. This signifies a shift in child welfare practice that conceptualizes culture in a way that fosters meaning and dialogue such as when sourcing out culturally appropriate or specific resources. As demonstrated by child protection workers in Finland, the use of 'culture-based questions' to validate the family's identity and lived experience and expertise around managing familial affairs was an important implication for consideration in child welfare practice (Anis, 2005). This theme permeates through in our research results in which more than half of the study participants did not feel supported by their agency in making meaning of their own culture and utilizing their own cultural strengths in their respective practice. Subsequently, the majority of our research participants identified the staff composition of their agencies as inadequately reflective of the client population being served in B.C. Clearly, the need for culturally competent or bicultural workers that not only diversifies the staffing composition but also renders an expansion of the agency's ability to understand, relate, and inform best practice is an important consideration for future child welfare practice in B.C. Overall, these findings contribute to the growing evidence base which has important implications for future child welfare policy, practice, and research as it demonstrates a lack of acknowledgment or commitment in the promotion of cultural strengths, multicultural values, and diversity among child welfare agencies spanning across the province.

Limitations

There were several key limitations that may have had potential impacts on the research findings and outcomes. The student researchers' decision to utilize a one group cross-sectional design research methodology presented a limitation to the findings, as the researchers were only able to capture participants' responses at one point in time. However, utilizing a one group cross-sectional design approach also allowed the researchers to be less concerned with internal threats to validity, as internal threats to validity typically only apply to pretest-posttest one group designs and not to one group cross-sectional

designs (Grinnell & Unrau, 2014). However, the researchers were still concerned with selection bias as a potential internal threat to validity. Selection bias threatens the internal validity of a study when participants are members of preformed or already existent groups (Grinnell & Unrau, 2014). Although the participants belonged to the preformed group of child protection social workers in British Columbia, the researchers attempted to mitigate the risk that selection bias posed to the internal validity of the study by widening the geographical region that participants were recruited from and gathering a sample comprised of child protection workers across various regions of British Columbia rather than targeting workers at a particular office or region.

Selection bias may also have posed a threat to the study's external validity, however, as the researchers needed to consider what other external factors may have led certain child protection workers to participate in the research, while others did not. Perhaps those child protection workers who chose to participate felt particularly strongly about this research topic or had had particular experiences in the workplace that influenced them to participate. These child protection workers' motivations to participate may have led to the collection of data that would not necessarily be replicated in another sample of child protection workers at another point in time.

Another external threat the researchers identified as potentially impacting the validity of the study's findings was researcher bias. As Grinnell and Unrau (2014) state, "researchers, like people in general, tend to see what they want to see or expect to see" (p. 341). The researchers identified early on how their own experiences and identities as first-generation Canadians from culturally diverse immigrant backgrounds could potentially impact anticipations and interpretations throughout the study. Thus, as researchers striving to remain impartial, it was important for the researchers to consistently remain reflexive of how their own cultural nuances and biases may have been impacting the interpretation of the data and informing the study's findings in an effort to mitigate the threat posed by researcher bias.

One final critical limitation that impacted the

findings of the research study was that the researchers were unable to recruit any participants to participate in facilitated focus groups. The researchers' intention had been to conduct a mixed-methods study that would capture both quantitative and qualitative data through both surveys and facilitated focus groups. The researchers were unable, however, to recruit participants for focus groups due to a variety of barriers and technical issues that arose throughout the timeframe available to conduct the groups. Despite repeated efforts to recruit focus group participants, the researchers were unable to supplement the quantitative data collected with qualitative focus group data and were therefore unable to provide more subjective and robust results and interpretations as they had intended.

Recommendations/Implications for Policy

Reflecting back on the study's primary research questions, the researchers identified several key implications, or responses, to each of the three research questions following analysis and interpretation of the quantitative survey data collected. The implications derived from analysis of the survey data are categorized by the research question they respond to and outlined below.

Research Question #1: How are child protection workers currently recognizing and utilizing clients' cultural strengths in child welfare practice?

As demonstrated in Figure 7, the researchers found that although the majority of respondents did feel supported by their agency to recognize and utilize cultural strengths in child welfare practice, those with an educational background in social work reported feeling more adequately supported by their agency in recognizing and utilizing cultural strengths in child welfare practice than did those who had differing educational backgrounds. Furthermore, those participants with an educational background in social work were also less likely to feel morally distressed by their agencies approaches to practicing with ethno-cultural, immigrant, newcomer and refugee families than participants who had differing educational backgrounds.

Although the researchers cannot say for certain why this finding was observed, it is suggested that

perhaps this is due to the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier being engrained within social work education. These theoretical frameworks provide social workers with a conceptual framework that recognizes the intricacies and nuances of culture which they can draw on when working with ethno-racial, immigrant and refugee populations.

This implication is important given the current recruitment and hiring initiatives being implemented by MCFD. The research findings demonstrated that those without the theoretical lens developed through specifically social work education may feel less supported and more distressed when working with ethno-culturally diverse families, thus putting into question the appropriateness and effectiveness of services provided to families in such circumstances. Further, it is suggested that workers who feel more supported and less distressed likely will feel more competent in their abilities, which may in turn lead to greater job satisfaction and perhaps longevity within the agency.

Research Question #2: How do child protection workers from diverse cultural backgrounds make meaning of their own culture and how are they utilizing their own cultural strengths in child welfare practice?

The researchers identified that more than half of study participants did not feel supported by their agency in making meaning of their own culture and utilizing their own cultural strengths in child welfare practice. This implication is important, as it demonstrates that cultural identity and diversity was not celebrated as a strength within the agency, thus suggesting Eurocentric organizational values rather than values that recognize and promote cultural diversity as a strength in child welfare practice.

Research Question #3: How can child protection workers be better supported to further recognize and utilize client and/or worker cultural strengths in child welfare practice?

As demonstrated in Figure 1 and 2, the researchers identified that the study participants overwhelmingly felt that they did not have enough cultural training and unanimously agreed that they would benefit from more training pertaining to cultural competency when

working with immigrant, newcomer and refugee families. This implication is important, as it demonstrates a significant gap identified by child protection workers in the training they are currently receiving.

Research Recommendation

The researchers recommend continued exploration of this research topic through subsequent cohorts of the UBC/MCFD research partnership. The researchers recommend that this topic be proposed again next year and explored by UBC MSW students utilizing a strictly qualitative research methodology to further explore and expand on this study's quantitative data findings. Having knowledge of the successes and challenges encountered in obtaining participants and data during this study, the future student researchers would be better informed when selecting a methodological design for their study.

Policy Recommendation

The researchers recommend advancement and development of policy initiatives aimed at strengthening child welfare practice with ethno-cultural, immigrant, newcomer and refugee families within MCFD. This recommendation would see the implementation of training initiatives informed by cultural humility and agility and aimed at increasing comfort and flexibility of child protection workers when working with clients from diverse cultures, in particular for those child protection workers without a social work background. It would also include policies aimed at honouring cultural strengths of workers themselves and better supporting cultural diversity within the organization, as well as initiatives towards reflecting the cultural diversity of client populations by diversifying staff composition within agencies.

Practice Recommendation

Lastly, the researchers recommend increased engagement, by child protection workers and amongst child protection agencies, in practices that enhance cultural connections and utilize clients' cultural nuances and strengths. This recommendation would see the development of more cross-cultural community connections utilized by agencies, as well as more engagement in consultations when working with individuals from unfamiliar cultures. The researchers

recommend increased use of services aimed at enhancing the experiences of culturally diverse families interacting with the child protection system, such as translators and bicultural workers.

Conclusion

This project and the research components obtained through the demonstrated and disseminated quantitative data analysis aimed to learn how child protection workers are currently recognizing and utilizing cultural strengths when working with children and families of diverse backgrounds as well as determined what additional supports and resources are needed to better inform and strengthen overall services. The following implications for future directions included: recommendations to continue exploring this research topic through subsequent cohorts of the UBC/MCFD research partnership; recommendations for the advancement and development of policy initiatives aimed at strengthening child welfare practice with ethno-cultural, immigrant, newcomer and refugee families within MCFD, and lastly, the researchers recommend increased engagement, by child protection workers and amongst child protection agencies, in practices that enhance cultural connections and utilize clients' cultural nuances and strengths.

Our preliminary findings and analysis of the quantitative survey data has identified unanimous agreement amongst many survey participants that echo the primary research questions answered within this report. As a measure of accountability to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) sponsors, this final report provided a comprehensive summary of the literature review, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, data collection and analysis, findings and key reflections as well as insightful but practical recommendations and implications for child welfare policy and future directions for practice. Despite unforeseen challenges with the focus group recruitment process, we worked proactively and collaboratively with our MCFD sponsors and employed strategies to best analyze the final deliverables and ensure that child protection workers can make meaning of their own culture and interpret cultural diversity as a strength when working with these children and families in the future.

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We also humbly acknowledge that this research study was completed on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish People, including the territories of the x^wməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

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Appendix A

Study Questionnaire

Q1 What ethnicity do you identify as?

- ☐ Indigenous (Inuit, Métis, North American Indian)
- ☐ White (Caucasian)
- ☐ South East Asian
- ☐ South Asian
- ☐ Arab/West Asian (e.g., Lebanese, Egyptian, Iranian, Moroccan, etc.)
- ☐ Korean
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Japanese
- ☐ Filipino
- ☐ Latin American
- ☐ Black (e.g., African, Haitian, Jamaican, Somali)
- ☐ Multi-ethnic (Please specify): _____
- ☐ Other (Please specify): _____

Q2 What gender do you identify with?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Q3 What is your age?

- ☐ Under 20 years old
- ☐ 21-25 years old
- ☐ 26-30 years old
- ☐ 31-35 years old
- ☐ 36-40 years old
- ☐ 41-45 years old
- ☐ 46-50 years old
- ☐ 51-55 years old
- ☐ 56-60 years old
- ☐ 61-64 years old
- ☐ 65 years and/or over
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Q4 What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ Diploma
- ☐ BSW
- ☐ MSW
- ☐ Undergraduate degree other than Social Work
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Q5 Do you feel you are adequately supported by your agency to recognize and utilize clients' cultural strengths when working with families of diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q6 What is your comfort level in working with a child/family who is of a different culture than you or who's cultural identity is unfamiliar to you?

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ Somewhat comfortable
- ☐ Neutral or N/A to experience
- ☐ Somewhat uncomfortable
- ☐ Very uncomfortable

Q7 Do you feel you are supported by your agency in making meaning of your own cultural strengths in your practice?

- ☐ Very supported
- ☐ Supported
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Minimally supported
- ☐ Not at all supported

Q8 In your opinion, is your agency flexible in how policies and practices are implemented and interpreted to reflect the cultural nuances of ethno-culturally diverse families?

- ☐ Very flexible
- ☐ Flexible
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Minimally flexible
- ☐ Not at all flexible

Q9 Has your agency provided you with enough training for working with immigrant, newcomer, and refugee families of culturally diverse backgrounds (aside from Indigenous families)?

- ☐ More than enough training
- ☐ Enough training
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not enough training
- ☐ No training

Q10 If yes, how useful was this training?

- ☐ Very useful
- ☐ Somewhat useful
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not at all useful
- ☐ Not Applicable

Q11 When working with families of immigrant, newcomer, and refugee families of diverse cultural backgrounds, how often do their cultural experiences, beliefs, values, and protocols inform your approach to practicing with them?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Q12 Does your agency have existing connections to community resources for different cultural groups?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Q13 **Only displayed if "Yes" was selected for Q12.* If you answered yes, how often do you utilize these resources when working with culturally diverse families?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Q14 In your opinion, how often are family's cultural dynamics and perspectives considered when making important child welfare decisions about the family?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Q14 In your opinion, how often are family's cultural dynamics and perspectives considered when making important child welfare decisions about the family?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Q15 How often are translators sourced out and used in your practice when working with families who speak minimal English?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Q16 How often do you consult with members of a particular culture when a family from that cultural community presents with characteristics or nuances that you do not understand or identify with?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

* The following questions on the next few pages are statements in which you are to provide your level of agreement (e.g., Strongly agree to strongly disagree).

Q17 My agency's approach to practicing with ethno-racial and culturally diverse families is empowering to me.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q18 My agency's approach to practicing with ethno-racial and culturally diverse families is culturally appropriate and empowers the children and families I work with.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q19 My agency's approach to practicing with ethno-cultural immigrant, newcomer, and refugee families causes me moral distress.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q20 My agency's approach to practicing with ethno-cultural immigrant, newcomer, and refugee families is oppressive to the children and families I work with.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q21 My agency's staff composition adequately reflects the client population being served in the region.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q22 Children should remain connected to the culture of their biological family irrespective of whether they are in care or not and prioritized as a vital strength for their development.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q23 I am familiar with emerging cultural practice frameworks including cultural awareness, cultural humility and cultural agility, and feel they are relevant to my work with ethno-cultural diverse children and families.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q24 Children from diverse cultures should adapt to the Canadian culture once in Canada even if it means they risk losing aspect of their original culture (i.e. language, values, beliefs, customs).

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q25 Staff at my agency would benefit from additional cultural competency training and learning about the various ethno-cultural immigrant, newcomer, and refugee groups that make up the community in which we serve.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree