

MSW Thesis – A. Takk

McMaster – School of Social Work

THE EFFECTS OF AGENCY RESTRUCTURING ON SOUTH ASIAN SOCIAL  
WORKERS

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WORKERS

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### **Abstract**

Using a critical, feminist anti-oppressive framework approach this research study investigated the effects of restructuring on South Asian social workers in mainstream and ethno-specific agencies. This exploratory study examined the experiences of South Asian social workers and how restructuring has played a role in their practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five participants. The results indicated that the participants were concerned with 1) increase in bureaucracy and decrease of the social aspect of their work; 2) influence of the Eurocentric foundations of social work and its racist undertones, as well as its implications regarding cultural sensitivity; 3) exercising resistance as a result of the negative impacts of restructuring. The findings demonstrated that the social work profession needs to consider how restructuring uniquely impacts South Asian social workers and their practice. Mainstream and ethno-specific agencies need to consider how increasing bureaucracy and integrating culturally sensitive approaches can be inter-laced with racist undertones. More importantly, these agencies must evaluate how this will impact workers' practices. Implications for culturally sensitive social work practice and the impacts of restructuring on South Asian social workers and service users are discussed.

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I would also like to acknowledge my grandfather, Hari Singh Takk, to whom this research study is dedicated. My grandfather was a man who led by example and had a great sense of pride in his culture and identity. He taught us to never back down from asking uneasy questions and to speak up for those who are not being heard. Lastly, I would like to thank the participants who were interviewed for this study. I am forever grateful for the openness, honesty, and enthusiasm you brought to the table. Thank you for sharing your stories with me and I hope I have done them justice.

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Mainstream agencies tend to employ universal methods to meet the needs of as many people as possible; conversely, ethno-specific agencies orient their framework to the needs of a specific race and/or ethnicity. For the purpose of this document, mainstream agencies will be considered in the context of North American mainstream social work practice; as Dellgran and Hojer (2001) have astutely noted, mainstream is contextual. Due to the increasingly neoliberal context that permeates North American social work as a whole, the line between mainstream and ethno-specific agencies is currently not as definitive anymore (Baines, 2008; Johnson and Munch, 2009; Yan, 2008). It is not as definitive in the sense that the very profession of social work is a Western construct; therefore, the core values of social work are entrenched in Eurocentric culture (Graham, Bradshaw, and Trew, 2010; Johnson and Munch, 2009; Spencer, 2008; Yan, 2008). Combined with an increasing integration of bureaucratic practices and policies in the social work profession altogether, both mainstream and ethno-specific agencies are being affected, albeit to different degrees.

Therefore, while mainstream and ethno-specific agencies are largely noted for their differences, there may be more similarities among them than are visible at first glance. In spite of the growing diversity of Canada, actually projected to increase significantly in the next two decades (Statistics Canada, 2010), the Eurocentric context in which the social work profession was founded continues to dominate social work practice and policy today (Fenster and Rose, 2004; Yan, 2008). Core Western social work values continue to be taught and promoted through academic literature and implemented in

schools in which the tension is even more likely to increase as the student population continues to diversify (Yan, 2008).

On a daily basis, social work practitioners work on a very micro and individual level with service users; however, it is undeniably dictated and impacted by meso and macro level forces (Aronson and Smith, 2010; Baines, 2006). These forces have a far reaching effect on political ideologies that influence the direction of policy and funding. Not only do these macro and micro level influences impact the political context, but they are also instrumental to an individual agency's unique policies and values that can be affected by numerous factors. For example, the values and beliefs of senior management can influence agency policy; in turn, even an agency's service user population can have influential power (Michalski, Creighton, and Jackson, 2000). As a result of all of these unique and intersecting forces that have an effect on policy and practice, restructuring in agencies is a common occurrence as agencies attempt to meet constantly evolving demands and goals. In addition constant cuts in funding and growth of the private sector have increased the rate of restructuring in social work agencies (Baines, 2008). The outcome due to the continued popularity of neo-liberal policies since their introduction in the 1980s in Canada, is that the restructuring of social work agencies has been a steady reality for those working in mainstream agencies and ethno-specific agencies (Baines, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to learn about the lived experiences of South Asian social workers through agency restructuring. Specifically, the study explored the effects restructuring had on their practice in a mainstream agency setting versus an ethno-specific agency setting. This paper is composed of four chapters. Firstly, the literature review explores and analyses the current academic literature as it relates to the research topic, followed by a chapter on research methodology and a description of the research framework and methodological approach utilized in the study. The third chapter focuses on the findings of the study; and the last chapter is composed of discussion about the study and future directions of research as it pertains to the research topic.

## CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review factors impacting agency restructuring will be explored on both a broader macro and smaller micro level scale. Specific attention is given to the role of cultural sensitivity and how it influences and is influenced by agency restructuring. This chapter has been organized into four sections: restructuring over time, restructuring and professionalization, implications of cultural sensitivity on ethno-specific agency restructuring, and binary division of mainstream and ethno-specific agencies.

### **Restructuring Over Time**

It has been argued that the introduction of the first neoliberal federal budget in the mid-1980s essentially jumpstarted the restructuring of social work agencies in an unprecedented way (Baines, 2008). Since the 1980s restructuring has been a constant reality for those working in mainstream agencies as well as in ethno-specific agencies (Baines, 2008). During the 1990s a period of recession and harsh fiscal restraint swept through Canada (Heinonen, MacKay, Metteri, and Pajula, 2001). Consequently social welfare was a large target of policy decisions aimed at reducing costs and increasing efficiencies (Globerman, White, and McDonald, 2002; Heinonen et al., 2001). The continued dominance of neoliberal restructuring over the past twenty years has led to many social workers wondering if the profession's social justice values, orientation, and practice wisdom have remained intact or begun to diminish (Baines, 2006). Pressured by

federal and provincial government funding cuts the social work profession has been the focus of re-evaluation in an attempt to decrease costs while improving quality, and providing services in a more accountable manner (Globerman et al., 2002).

Restructuring in itself is not a negative action much in the same way that any change can be positive or negative, depending on the context. The process of agency restructuring within a larger or small organization level introduces changes within an agency regarding functionality and operations. It is the consequent effects that result from these changes that can define and shape its negative or positive perception to the workers. In this paper, restructuring was intentionally loosely defined as changes and modifications employed by an agency that impacted how the agency functioned and operated. The main reason the definition was not strict was it allowed for the participants to choose and describe agency restructuring in their own terms and how they perceive it.

A study by Michalski et al. (2000) on the impact of hospital restructuring in social work, explored the negative impacts of restructuring that arose as unforeseen consequences of well-intentioned changes. For example, due to the intended effect of decreasing overlapping in staff roles and functions, the researchers discovered that social workers actually felt a heightened sense of isolation from other social work colleagues following restructuring (Michalski et al., 2000). The decrease in overlapping roles had been intended to be beneficial for the workers and service users. However, this resulted in

negative consequences, such as feelings of isolation, something that had not been considered as a possibility before restructuring took place.

The contextual and influencing factors that pressure the restructuring of social service agencies can produce unforeseen by-products that conflict with the core values of social work. As Baines (2006) noted in her study on social service workers and restructuring, “...responding to pressures to become leaner and more efficient, many social service organizations have adopted business-oriented job designs, labour force organization and management of agencies” (p. 20). Business oriented job designs view service users more as commodities and minimizes the uniqueness and complexity of people. In addition, the decision making bodies that are facilitating restructuring of social services, who in most instances are not social workers themselves, are not thoroughly and sufficiently aware of the potential effects of implementing their proposed changes (Heinonen et al., 2001). Some common effects and results associated with restructuring are commoditization, cooptation, and bureaucratization (Baines, 2006; Reissman, 1990). The social aspect, vital in social work, is being minimized in favour of streamlining services, speeding up the delivery of systems and meeting workplace quotas and demands (Aronson and Smith, 2010; Baines, 2006). As Reissman (1990) succinctly noted, the prototypical professional practice is based on systematic knowledge and scientific methodology, promoted by viewing social work as a commodity to be bought, sold, promoted and marketed.

### **Restructuring and Professionalization**

The costs of sustaining an efficient and affordable welfare state in times of economic doubt and uncertainty, combined with a breakdown of the political consensus regarding the need of such services has placed the social work profession on the defensive (Reissman, 1990). Throughout the profession's history it has struggled to define its professional identity (Walter, 2003). In its pursuit of a professional status the social work profession has inevitably conformed, like other aspiring professions, to a practice model that approaches problem solving with a rigorous application of scientific theory and technique (Walter, 2003). The rise of neoliberal politics of the past years has embraced critical ideas about bureaucracy, linking them to the increasing costs of welfare. Therefore these politics are justifying the restructuring of welfare along free market lines (Hugman, 1991). In reaction to this shift in ideology social work agencies began to incorporate aspects of professionalism at a higher rate to meet the demands and expectations placed on the welfare state.

Hugman (1991) associates the professionalization of social work with the inherent oppression found within social provision. The author adds that the skills and criteria utilized and promoted by professionalism are constructed around Eurocentric approaches to knowledge, used in the pursuit of occupational autonomy. However ethnocentric concepts, founded through a Eurocentric lens, that are incorporated within professional practices are often realized in a manner that projects pathology on minority populations

(Fletcher, 1997; Hugman, 1991). For example, the definition of what constitutes appropriate family life can be quite different from one culture to another. By defining a particular behaviour as the norm, by default others are labelled as abnormal. It is no surprise there has been widespread resistance to changes brought on due to professionalization, despite the fact that restructuring is simultaneously being advocated and endorsed by many professionals (Reissman, 1990). Nevertheless, it is important to question who are the professionals advocating for and resisting restructuring? What kinds of restructuring are more likely to be met with resistance? What are obstacles that challenge how much resistance worker can practice? On the whole the advocating practitioners, managers, and academics are overwhelmingly Caucasian. Thus, they tend not to give proper recognition to the Eurocentric philosophy that fuels professionalism; consequently, they structure the frameworks that organizations adopt (Hugman, 1991; Reissman, 1990).

A 2004 NASW study of the demographics of social workers in the United States of America, found that eighty-five percent of licensed social workers were Caucasian. Furthermore, until quite recently, a common practice found among mainstream social services involved the exclusion or minimized representation of workers of colour from esteemed positions of power (Baines, 2008). Additionally, senior management within mainstream organizations commonly set rules and regulations. Thus, they directed their front-line workers to adhere to their conditions (Michalski et al., 2000). Therefore not only are workers of colour a minority within the social work profession, but they also

have little representation in positions of significant power. Hwang's (2007) study of the perceptions of Asian social workers found that the majority of Asian social workers worked in agencies in which the senior managers were European Americans or from other ethnicities. This also ties in with Baines (2006) who stated that the role of gender and race correlates to decreasing chances of gaining higher employment than a White male or female counterpart. Heinonen et al. (2001) added that the consequence of these conditions is that generally people who are the least visible are the ones who are heard the least.

With the re-election of the Conservative Party in Canada who won a majority in 2011, the neo-liberal direction of the political landscape is not expected to change any time soon. Presently, the social work field must be even more critically conscious of how restructuring is adopted and executed, in a way that remains true to the core values of the profession. Seminal studies in the area of social service restructuring and its relationship with workers of colour are by Baines (2006; 2008). It is argued that given their location in ethnically specific services and programs, workers of colour are affected differently by restructuring (Baines, 2008; Fenster and Rose 2004; Hwang, 2007). Baines (2008) and Hwang (2007) also found that during times of restructuring and downsizing, it is ethnically specific programs and diversity strategies that are likely to be the first cuts. Therefore, another way in which restructuring directly impacts workers of colour is that they are statistically more likely to lose their job or experience the closure of their programs compared to their White co-workers.

Workers of colour often find themselves expanding their skills in ethnically specific areas; simultaneously, they deskill in the same areas as their White colleagues (Baines, 2008). For instance, workers of colour are expected to develop a diverse range of skills, such as being interpreters on behalf of clients and providing cultural translation in a way that is simply not expected from White workers (Baines, 2008). This trend is particularly troubling because by deskill in the same areas as their White colleagues, who are statistically more likely to occupy positions of higher power, workers of colour are further marginalized from possible employment opportunities because of their particular skill set. Exactly how resistance is viewed and expressed by South Asian social workers in mainstream and ethno-specific agencies has not currently been extensively researched.

While translating materials and programs does aid in eliminating a language barrier, there is more to translation than just those aspects. In a study of organizational and cultural competency in Latino organizations, Uttal (2006) noted a common response by many mainstream agencies. To increase their cultural sensitivity and competency, mainstream agencies translate their informational brochures, pamphlets, and flyers into other languages; however, the author noted this is not sufficient. As the author discussed, in the case of Latino immigrants, they needed to have concepts and policies explained to them in greater depth than was usually done with English speaking applicants. Language is attached to culture. Without a deeper understanding of the relationship between culture and language, literal language translations simply are often not effective when working

with clients. There is no universal guide to aid South Asian social workers in translating Eurocentric values and ideas to South Asian service users in their native language. Accordingly, this aspect of practice is highly variable depending on the worker's degree of knowledge of their native language, and how they understand the social service terminology they interact with on a daily basis. Furthermore this is also an aspect that can be easily overlooked during times of agency restructuring.

New terminology and ideas are routinely introduced in social work. For example, at one time service users would have been referred to as the deserving poor or the needy. Now they are usually referred to as service users or clients. However the impact of introducing new terminology to South Asian workers, who must then translate these new terms and concepts into another language when working with service users in South Asian languages, is a fairly unexplored and undocumented concept in North American research. Therefore as the language of practice models and approaches evolve to reflect the evolving nature of social work, the effects this has on social work being practiced in other languages besides English is something to be considered.

### **Implications of Cultural Sensitivity on Ethno-Specific Agency Restructuring**

The professionalization of social work as autonomous inherently requires the maintenance of some distance and inequality with service users (Reissman, 1990). This can cause conflict among cultures that are traditionally more family-centered and community-based and are accustomed to less stereotypically professionalized service

delivery (Ejaz, 1991; Graham et al., 2010; Reissman, 1990). A distinguishing aspect of ethno-specific agencies is to what extent their agency practice revolves around cultural sensitivity. For over twenty-five years now in the social work field, cultural sensitivity has contributed to ongoing discussion and debate (Graham et al., 2010). However, in general, it largely addresses how social workers from the dominant culture can become more sensitized to working with minority populations (Amodeo, Robb, Peo, and Tran, 1996; Fenster and Rose, 2004; Graham et al., 2010; Owens and Randhawa, 2004).

Existing literature that examines the experiences of social workers in times of restructuring minimizes or overlooks how culture or ethnicity can play a significant role (Yan, 2008). Instead most of the current literature that looks at cultural tensions from the perspective of social workers does so exclusively from the experience of White workers working with visible minorities (Fenster and Rose, 2004; Yan, 2008; Woods and Kurtz-Costes, 2007). According to Fenster and Rose (2004), cultural diversity was intended to expand awareness on the part of mostly White middle class professionals. In times of increasing diversity among social workers there is a need to explore how cultural diversity of clients effects workers of colour, especially for minority workers working with service users from the same minority population.

There is an existing tension that arises in social work practice from attempting to make practice as culturally relevant and attuned as possible, and yet having to do so in the context of neoliberal restructuring. A neoliberal agenda that promotes values which

can conflict with social work values, such as: standardization, efficiency, and productivity. In actuality these values de-personalize people. The ongoing discussion surrounding cultural sensitivity is highly unlikely to cease because culture is essentially fluid, changes over time and varies between people, communities and circumstances (Graham et al., 2010; McPhatter, 1997). Johnson and Munch (2009) believe there to be possibly hundreds of unique definitions for cultural competency. Culture is heavily contextual and intersects with many variables such as gender, race, sexual orientation, geography, ability, and socioeconomic status (Graham et al., 2010; Johnson and Munch, 2009).

As Graham et al. (2010) noted in their study of Muslim communities, they found no major differences between the Muslim communities and other immigrant communities that tend to emphasize collectivism over individualism. Their study analyzed the cultural consideration for social service agencies working with Muslim clients. They raise an interesting point about what aspects and findings can be solely attributed to a person's culture. Ultimately, when determining which aspects person can be attributed to a person's culture as opposed to other factors becomes incredible complex and variable. As well, due to its contextual nature, the ways in which cultural sensitivity plays a role in the restructuring of ethno-specific agencies is equally variable.

For example the social work code of ethics tends to emphasize the service user's autonomous individual intrinsic worth; as a result, it overlooks the prevalence of

collectivism in other cultures (Yan, 2008). The need for culturally sensitive services is apparent, however due to environmental restrictions, such as funding policies, providing culturally sensitive services becomes difficult. Furthermore because of the nature of social work knowledge, human growth and development is categorized as normal or deviant, and these categorizations are often culturally blind (Yan, 2008). In other words, while social work strives to provide more culturally competent services, its own core values and environmental restrictions compromise the full extent to which culturally sensitive approaches can be realized and incorporated (Johnson and Munch, 2009).

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2007) defines cultural competence in social work practice as, “...a heightened consciousness of how clients experience their uniqueness and deal with their differences and similarities within a larger social context” (p. 9). Essentially, the intention behind striving for a more culturally sensitive mode of practice is by overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers that attribute to misunderstanding, the practitioner’s understanding of another’s culture will result in a more sensitive and responsive delivery of service (Ahmad and Atkin, 1996). Furthermore, in terms of cultural competence or sensitivity a notable trend has been emerging. There is a growing recognition that culture is less divided between a minority and majority and rather it is simply comprised of many different groups (Johnson and Munch, 2009).

In this paper, the term cultural sensitivity will be used unless referring to literature that specifically uses another term, such as cultural competency. As Johnson and Munch

(2009) state, semantics matter; merely changing the word competence in the term cultural competency to sensitivity or even humility instantly conveys different expectations.

Different expectations arise, such as openness, respect, and most importantly, that it is a life-long process. These expectations are required for the worker to reach a place of more effective and relevant practice (Johnson and Munch, 2009). However, it is one thing to recognize this distinction in the definition of terminology and through the medium of literature; it is yet another to have this translate to practice in the field.

Fenster and Rose (2004) studied cultural competence from the perspective of students of colour interning at mainstream agencies. Some examples of difficulties faced by workers of colour included: regularly occurring discriminatory slights and reflections, and the possibility of racist attitudes and behaviours from clients (Fenster and Rose, 2004). Further, there was the risk of being seen as the race ‘expert’ in the agency, and thus asked for ‘the answers’ on how best to work with or solve the problems of a particular group (Fenster and Rose, 2004). Among the South Asian community, this tokenism is quite damaging considering the diverse diaspora of the South Asian community. Consequently, workers tend to be placed in situations in which they are interpreting and explaining a culture not their own, but it is viewed as close enough by outsiders.

Furthermore the experiences of White social workers are presented as universal while the experiences of ethnic social workers are presented as unique and specific to that

population (Woods & Kurtz-Costes, 2007; Yan, 2008). Some authors in the literature made no indication of or minimized the race of the workers of whom they were representing (Amodeo et al., 1996; Graham et al., 2010; Johnson & Munch, 2009; Yan, 2008). Considering the fact that the articles specifically highlighted the race of the service user as an important and undeniable factor to be contemplated, it is interesting that the same would not apply for the social workers themselves. Among reviewed articles that researched the experiences of ethnic social workers, they were vocal about portraying their findings as only applicable among a racially specific participant group (Akutsu, Castillo, and Snowden, 2007; Fletcher, 1997; Hwang, 2007). In other words, unless the workers in the study were people of colour, the race of the worker was presented as a non-issue that did not impact the data in any way. The opposite was not true if a significant proportion of the workers involved with the study were from ethnic populations.

In addition, very little is known about how social workers of colour experience and process cultural tensions in cross-cultural social work or even those working within the same community, also referred to as same-race practice in the literature (Fletcher, 1997; Yan, 2008). The literature that specifically explored or explicitly incorporated the experiences of South Asian workers as opposed to racially unidentified social workers continues to slowly grow (Baines, 2008; Fletcher, 1997; Hwang, 2007; Yan, 2008). Therefore some of the articles in the literature review refer to findings among other ethnic minorities such as African Americans (Fletcher, 1997) and Asians (Hwang, 2007).

Understandably cultural sensitivity plays a large part in how ethno-specific agencies are structured and is given greater consideration in the process of restructuring than may be expected or found in mainstream agencies. Yet as Baines (2008) posits, mainstream agencies are also influenced by cultural sensitivity, especially when new programs are explicitly created to work with a specific racial group. How agencies introduce and implicate structural changes brought on by cultural sensitivity and how social workers address and work through these changes was also explored in this study.

### **Binary Division of Mainstream and Ethno-specific Agencies**

Borum (2007) discusses the inherent dualism found in Eurocentric language in depth, wherein a binary logic exists that leads to a separation and disconnection between cultural and ethnic realities. Borum (2007) argues, “when one will see concepts of gender (read: White women), sexual orientation (read: White gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender), disability and/or deafness (read: White deaf community), and so on” (p. 122). Arguably through this dualism found in Eurocentric language the voices and experiences of South Asian social workers, when referred to simply as social workers, read as White social workers. Although there may be social workers of colour questioned for a study, unless their race is specifically highlighted by the study the default assumption of the term social worker is that they are a White social worker. This categorizing and labelling of social workers is troubling and minimizes key factors such as the worker’s race, ethnicity, and cultural background. Understanding that the South

Asian community itself is very diverse, in terms of the languages, dialects, religions, and cultural practice, shows just how detrimental it can be to minimize culture. At the same time a common or shared history, identity and experience among South Asians cannot be ignored (Borum, 2007). When research minimizes intersecting external conditions impacting ethnic individuals by attempting to classify and therefore limit specific values and beliefs as cultural, it reinforces the oppressive conditions being placed on the individual (McMahon and Allen-Meares, 1992). Just as certain characteristics can be associated exclusively with women or men, identifying certain characteristics as exclusively cultural can, to a degree, jeopardize heterogeneity of a community. Therefore, while the study investigated the greater South Asian diaspora, the diversity of the group was not overlooked and neither was their common identity.

Arguably, it is practices such as labelling individuals in either/or categories that justify the division and continued gap between mainstream and ethno-specific agencies. Both types of agencies play a vital and crucial role in the profession; however, the dichotomous language used to describe them is misleading and minimizes the existing similarities between the two. The restructuring in social work agencies combined with the trend of professionalization is blurring the dichotomy of mainstream and ethno-specific agencies further. For example, while ethno-specific agencies are more transparent about their commitment to cultural competency, mainstream agencies are similarly committed. This is especially true for mainstream agencies that are located in ethnically diverse areas. However, some of the methods utilized by mainstream agencies in an attempt to

provide more culturally sensitive services and programs for their service users are being challenged by academics.

A common example found in practice is the hiring of workers of colour through special funding, or promoting a new job opening for a special program that will be specifically targeting a minority population (Hugman, 1991). Hugman (1991) strongly disagrees with the practice of acquiring a worker of colour through the use of special funding instead of changing existing employment practices. Hugman (1991) further argues that by simply indicating that these services will be special shows the extent to which they have not been incorporated into the mainstream services. The word “special” essentially becomes a euphemism for the word “marginal”. Thus, this exposes a failure of the mainstream to take responsibility for changing and developing services relevant to the needs of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Hugman, 1991). Essentially instead of mainstream agencies critically looking at the core policies of their agency and pinpointing where they have failed to address the needs of different ethnicities, a band-aid solution of creating an ethnic specific program is introduced. All the while the core policies remain unchanged. Therefore when restructuring takes place it is important not only to look at what changes were introduced, but also what remained the same.

The literature review provided a solid foundation for the proposed research study. The study by Baines (2008) on race, resistance and restructuring was particularly

impactful. It reaffirms the notion that workers of colour are affected differently by restructuring and just as importantly, it also voices the types of resistance that have emerged as a result of the impacts of the restructuring. As Baines (2008) stated, restructuring produces new and innovative ways of resistance among marginalized workers of colour due to their unique experiences. Combined with the Baines (2008) study, the earlier Baines (2006) study introduces many relevant research questions probing resistance and different ways the effects of restructuring impacts workers. To build on the work already done by Baines (2006, 2008), I explored aspects of demonstrated worker resistance due to the negative effects that workers experience cause by restructuring.

The reviewed literature indicated that agency restructuring arises largely from funding constraints and the professionalization of social work. Both funding constraints and the professionalization of social work are closely linked with the influence of neo-liberalism on the social work profession (Baines, 2006). Furthermore workers of colour are particularly affected by restructuring in terms of how they successfully practice cultural sensitivity, especially workers in ethno-specific agencies, within new and, at times, restricting policies. How and by whom effective culturally sensitive practice is defined has been greatly impacted by the Eurocentric foundations of social work (Hwang, 2007; Fenster and Rose, 2004; Johnson and Munch, 2009). Overall my research problem was conceptualized around three sensitizing concepts derived from the literature review: influence of neoliberalism, Eurocentric foundations of social work, and resistance.

As a South Asian female social worker much of the literature reviewed echoed my own experiences in the field and was able to add more depth and insight into my own experiences. The literature gave language to conceptualized ideas that had not been properly formulated or fleshed out. What I gathered from all of this is when doing an exploratory study on how restructuring effects South Asian social workers, there are many influencing factors. To absolutely attribute an individual's beliefs and actions to their culture and ethnicity would be naive and nonsensical. As a result, it was important to recognize the ways in which the participants adapted to agency restructuring; yet, it was equally important not to assume these adaptations were exclusively linked to a person's culture or ethnicity.

## CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### **Foundations for Research**

Above all, social work research is, at its very core, a diverse collection of varying methods are used to produce knowledge (Kreuger and Neuman, 2006). Before discussing the specifics of the methods that were used in this study, it is important to speak to how my research project was conceptualized and what implications this carried for my methodology. Kreuger and Neuman (2006) state that people learn most of what they know by an alternative to social work research; namely, alternatives such as traditional knowledge, common sense, and ideas and images perpetuated by the media. The alternative to social work research that has had the greatest impact on me and leads me to pursue it at an academic research level is personal experience. My personal experience as a South Asian social worker has immensely fuelled my curiosity and desire to learn more about the experiences of other South Asian social workers.

To best explore the intersecting oppressions affecting the participants, I rooted my research project in a critical social science (CSS) and a feminist anti-oppressive theoretical framework. This specific framework provided me with the knowledge and guidance to address the structural oppressions, power inequality, and gender inequality that I wanted to incorporate into my research project (Dankosko, 2000; Jackson and Verberg, 2007; Kreuger and Neuman, 2006).

CSS links the academic literature with the underlying power structures in society, through the discursive practices on which the text is drawn from (McGregor, 2003). For my study, I did not want to restrict the focus to only the restructuring in agencies and the effects of this restructuring on the workers. I also wanted to explore and draw connections to the academic literature and political context that influences the direction and goals of restructuring. CSS explores all levels of practice: micro, macro, and the meso level. By engaging the topic on different levels the issue was given needed depth so a greater understanding of relevant context and history can be connected and conveyed. This also related to the feminist anti-oppressive theoretical framework of my research project. The personal is political; how the current political context impacts agency policy and restructuring was consciously pursued. Also, as a self-identifying feminist, I felt that by establishing a feminist framework as part of my methodology, it would not only strengthen the study but provide more transparency in terms of how I situate myself.

While my research project did not exclusively work with female participants, I felt that disregarding a feminist framework would have been a misstep for the following reasons. A person's sex and gender identity is a significant factor that I believe needed to be highlighted, especially when working within a minority population and gendered profession such as social work. South Asians in North America face incredible familial pressure; the women in particular are pressured to adhere to traditional values and customs such as established gender roles and family obligations (Inman, 2006). Furthermore male participants were interviewed in this study to gain a rounder and richer

picture of how restructuring impacts both male and female South Asian social workers. Just as uncontested Eurocentric values and perspectives overshadow minority values in literature and policy, the feminist framework draws attention to how research over generalizes the experiences of men to all people and ignores sex as a fundamental social division (Kreuger and Neuman, 2006). I wanted to interview male participants and glean data to compare and contrast with the data collected from female participants. I saw the potential of over generalizing female participants' perspectives and values with their gender identity; to combat that, male participants were also interviewed to minimize that probability.

As Kreuger and Neuman (2006) state, gender cannot be isolated and separated from the social processes of academic inquiry. Although there is no one true definition of feminist research, the popularly cited feminist academic Reinharz (1992) defines feminist research simply as methods used by self-identified feminists. Feminist research incorporates sensitivity in how relations of gender and power infiltrate all aspects of social life (Bachay and Cingel, 1999; Kreuger and Neuman, 2006). Due to the action-oriented nature of feminist research, I incorporated an anti-oppressive theoretical framework to facilitate that characteristic. A feminist anti-oppressive theoretical framework is dedicated to consciousness raising and helping individuals find, recognize and utilize their own power bases. At the same time, it is recognized that individuals react differently to similar oppressive circumstances (Millar, 2008). It was important to engage the participants in talking about the different layers of their practice and making meaning

of these connections to critically analyze and reflect on them. Only by beginning to name and make meaning of their role in practicing social work within their practice context can relevant social and political action begin to take place. As McMahon and Allen-Meares (1992) astutely noted, there is no neutral position: not taking a stand is a political statement in itself because it reinforces the present institutional oppressions.

### **Conceptualization of Research Problem**

The methodology I selected for my research project was a combination of phenomenology and a grounded theory approach. Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are based on the idea of personal knowledge, subjectivity, and emphasize the importance of personal perspective and interpretation (Singer, 2005). The phenomenological approach aligned well with the exploratory nature of my research as the, “...goal of phenomenology is to establish a close connection with another’s experience in order to understand it better and to transform that experience into consensually validated knowledge.” (Boss, Dahl, and Kaplan, 1996 as cited in Singer, 2005; p. 272). Similarly, feminist social work research is principally not about the researcher being detached, rather it entails interacting and collaborating with the people who they are studying (Kreuger and Neuman, 2006). While I had hoped for a more collaborative relationship with the participants, the reality of time constraints did not allow for a truly collaborative process. Therefore the study produced a preliminary glimpse of the participants’ experiences.

In addition to emphasizing inductive logic, phenomenological research relies on qualitative analysis for data. It is not primarily concerned with generalizations to larger populations, but instead is focused on a contextual description and analysis (Gray, 2004). Therefore the richness of the individual participant's data does not have to be compromised. Grounded theory complimented the inductive nature of a phenomenological approach as it is founded on the idea that the best way to build a theory, is to be faithful to the evidence (Bowen, 2006; Kreuger and Neuman, 2006). According to grounded theory, theory is developed during the data collection process. As such, any theory resulting from this process represents participants' responses and an interpretation of the events as voiced by the participants (Somekh and Lewin, 2005). This does not mean that the research has no preconceived ideas or expectations; instead the openness of the grounded theory approach allows for greater variety and latitude for the discovery of the unexpected and unanticipated (Somekh and Lewin, 2005).

Many grounded theory researchers now view sensitizing concepts as a starting point for a qualitative study (Bowen, 2006; Patton, 2002). Sensitizing concepts are different than definitive concepts because they lack clear and specific attributes (Bowen, 2006). Sensitizing concepts provide the researcher with, "...a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances...merely suggest directions along which to look." (Bowen, 2006, p. 14). Gilgun (2002) noted that research usually begins with sensitizing concepts, whether or not researchers are aware of them. My research study was conceptualized around the three following sensitizing concepts derived from the

literature review: influence of neoliberalism, Eurocentric foundations of social work, and resistance. Admittedly, a weakness is that sensitizing concepts can direct attention away from other important aspects; however, to minimize this weakness, the sensitized concepts were not absolute. If unforeseen aspects arose, they were to be incorporated accordingly. As a result of the small numbers in this research study, no new concepts arose; yet, facets of the established sensitizing concepts that had not been considered did emerge.

### **Data Collection**

The method for collecting data consisted of one on one unstructured interviews combined with observation of the interview participants (Gray, 2004). For the purposes of my research project I conducted individual, in-depth, unstructured interviews with five participants. Phenomenological research uses small samples of individuals, roughly between 5 to 15 participants who are studied in depth (Gray, 2004). I had intended to interview eight participants; however, due to time constraints and scheduling conflicts, a total of five participants were interviewed. The social workers' participation in the study was completely voluntary and confidential. Once participation was confirmed, the participants signed a consent form and selected the location and time that the interview took place. One of the participants chose their place of employment. Two of the interviews were done at the participants' homes; the remaining two, in a public library setting.

The participants were selected through non-random purposive sampling (Kreuger and Neuman, 2006). According to Kreuger and Neuman (2003), purposive sampling is less focused on generalizing findings to the larger population and instead centers on gaining a deeper understanding of a unique population. Selected participants were required to meet specific criteria and a few prerequisites, including: having at least acquired a BSW education, and work experience at social agencies that were located within the greater Toronto area (GTA). If they were not currently working, they would have worked within the past five years and been at their place of employment for a minimum of one year. The one year minimum was required because participants needed to have been at their employing agency long enough to have witnessed some structural or significant changes and developed an understanding of the agency's functions and daily operations.

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment was initiated once ethics clearance was obtained. I contacted twenty known social worker contacts that I had gathered over the past couple of years and e-mailed them the letter of information (See Appendix A) and e-mail recruitment letter (See Appendix B). In some cases a recruitment poster was also sent if requested (See Appendix C). If a reply was not received after a week a follow up, a reminder e-mail was sent (See Appendix D). In two known instances, possible participants seemed hesitant because participation necessitated critique of their place of work. In those instances,

individuals were asked to forward information about the study to known contacts who might want to participate. At the same time, I e-mailed and phoned five organizations I found online and asked if they were interested in participating in the study. These agencies were found through a basic Internet search looking for South Asian social work agencies. I then sent my letter of information to the staff member(s) I had spoken with on the phone, who in turn, if they approved, would forward the e-mail to all staff. I was able to recruit four participants through known contacts and one participant through my online search.

Before the interviews took place, I spoke with potential participants on the phone or through e-mail to ensure they met all of the qualifications, address any questions they might have, and arrange a place and time to meet for the interview. At the participant's request, an information package containing the interview guideline and other documents was sent to them before the in-person interview took place. Participants were also reminded that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished and their confidentiality and anonymity would be ensured throughout the study.

The participant group was composed of three female participants and two male participants between the ages of twenty four to forty five, with a median age of thirty three. Two of the participants were born in Canada; the other three, in India, Sri Lanka and England. However, among the participants born outside of Canada, two of them

moved to Canada at a young age and were explicit that they self-identified with Canadian culture rather than their country of birth.

As the study was not centered on any particular branch or field of social work the participants came from a range of work settings. Three participants were or had been active in the mental health field, one worked with the South Asian HIV/AIDS community, another in child protection. All five of the participants were also employed in front line positions with titles that ranged from site observer, case manager, and support coordinator. The participants self-identified in many different ways, from South Asian, Punjabi, Sikh, spiritual being, to Indo-Canadian.

Initially I had sought participants who either had mainstream or ethno-specific social work experience. My intent had been to compare and contrast the interviews done with workers that had mainstream agency experience with the interviews with workers that had ethno-specific agency experience. However, I quickly found that many of the South Asian social workers that I was interviewing had experience working in both agency contexts, In fact, all five participants in this study reported having had exposure and experience in both settings.

### **Interview Process**

Using an interview guide (See Appendix E), the goal was to have an unstructured free form conversation with the participants and allow them the space to discuss any issues they wished to bring forward, as well. They were requested to read through the

letter of information and consent form; once they were satisfied, they were to sign and date two copies. Once again, they were reminded that they could withdraw at any time without any negative consequence. The participants' verbal and written consent was obtained to audio record the interviews. Permission was also requested to take hand written notes. None of the participants had any objections to these requests.

Early on in my interviews with the participants they were asked to briefly speak to all of the different experiences they had acquired in the social work field. From there, it was mutually agreed upon whether they had more intensive mainstream or ethno-specific social work experience. At that point, the participants were requested to refer to the agency context in which they had the most experience. For example, one participant had volunteered at a community based agency early on in her career that exclusively worked with racialized communities; however, her subsequent work experience had been in mainstream agencies. Thus, it was decided that for the purpose of the interview I would ask her questions about her experiences in mainstream agencies. However, as she had the experience and perspective of both agency contexts, she brought that analysis forward in the interview and would compare her experiences in her responses. This type of comparison was done by all of the participants.

Once all of these aspects had been clarified and permission had been given, the actual interview took place. After the recorded interview was completed, I would leave a little bit of time to debrief with the participants. Many had questions they wished to

clarify after the recording device turned off. This time was devoted to clarifying any possible confusion the participant may have had and expanding on issues addressed in the interview.

To work against the limitations that are associated with personal experience, I utilized the practice of bracketing, a common tool in phenomenological research (Singer, 2005). The tool is designed to enable the researcher to get close to another's experience while also setting aside, or bracketing, any preconceptions and to keep asking questions such as what the researcher may be taking for granted in the situation (Singer, 2005). Without bracketing, a researcher risks letting preconceptions guide and/or obscure the research process. In this process, I felt that bracketing was especially important. I used the bracketing tool employed by the phenomenological approach to keep my biases in check throughout the research process.

I also kept a journal during the research process to help with bracketing my assumptions. Keeping track of how my views and perceptions evolved and transformed, led to, more importantly, challenging those changes to understand what contributed to them. At the same time, the phenomenological approach recognizes that zero influence on the data by the researcher is impossible, especially in a one-on-one interview setting. Hence, reflexivity was used to remain conscious of how my identity as the researcher is an important component in the research process (Singer, 2005).

### **Data Analysis**

Patton (1980) notes there is no one right way of stating what is found in the data. Instead, the researcher can only find more or less useful ways of expressing what the data reveals. Ultimately, I would have liked to have a more collaborative relationship with the participants, including an opportunity to follow up with participants and clarify their statements. I would also have appreciated the opportunity to ask them to elaborate on some points; however, time limitations prevented this from happening. I feel that if there had been more collaboration between the participants and me, it would have strengthened the study. Instead, to the best of my ability, I attempted to analyze the data from the interviews and take handwritten notes during and after the interviews, as well.

I personally transcribed verbatim all of the audio interviews to prevent any bias that can result if a third party were to have transcribed the interview. The data were analyzed using a constant comparison method, the essence of grounded theory, which involved sorting similarities and differences into categories and dimensions (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This was accomplished by reading each sentence and paragraph segment of data that I had transcribed from the interviews (Bowen, 2006). Although sensitizing concepts were used for the foundation of the research, the study was also an exploratory research study; hence, analysis of the data was also open to new emerging concepts from the data collected from the participants. However, due to the small participant size, new emerging concepts were not discovered; conversely, the data echoed the established

sensitizing concepts. Yet, as was aforementioned unforeseen aspects of the sensitizing concepts did arise.

The data were coded following several different steps. The first step required listening to the audio recording of each interview and transcribing them verbatim. This was followed by listening to the audio recordings several times and reading through the corresponding transcriptions to verify their accuracy and correct any mistakes. As I read over the transcripts, I also compared them with my hand-written notes to ensure I did not miss anything and to find further insight and depth. This was done both in terms of context and to reflect what was discussed before and after the recorded interview. Ultimately, the transcribed interview data were given more weight in the analysis compared to my own observations of the participants to avoid losing transparency of the participants' voices.

The third step involved reading each fully transcribed interview and summarizing the key issues and topics addressed by the participants in their responses. These issues were written directly on the pages in the margins. For example, when a male participant self-identified as Indo-Canadian, the term was highlighted in the transcript and the word "self-identity" was written beside it in the margins. Furthermore, when this same participant spoke about his practice of referring service users to other agencies because it was more expensive to work with them at his agency, beside this section in the transcription, I recorded effects of funding constraints. This step was repeated twice in

total to assure that the margin notes accurately summarized and represented the key ideas and issues vocalized by the participants.

I was also constantly practicing reflexivity and questioning how my identity could influence the data. This meant asking questions such as ‘Why am I looking at these details?’, ‘Where did this concept come from? The literature, my experience, or the analyzed data?’, or even ‘Did I miss anything?’ (Singer, 2005). Lastly the transcriptions were again read twice. This was done to identify any contradictions within individual interviews and also make connections among the interviews as a whole.

### **Insider vs. Outsider Perspective**

As has been aforementioned my research project was prompted by my own personal experience which impacted my theories on how one’s workplace context effects South Asian social workers. While I may be an insider in some situations, because of the inherent diversity of the South Asian community, I was inevitably an outsider in others. This diversity within the community stems from intergenerational issues and leads to cultural, religious, language, and even regional differences among South Asians. As a South Asian social worker, I had to be mindful and critical of my own biases; as CSS notes, social reality has multiple layers and it is subjective (Kreuger and Neuman, 2006).

Yet, I did possess some strength in many aspects due to being an insider of the community. There was a sense of shared experience and camaraderie that I felt, and some of the participants mentioned that this helped facilitate an honest and open discussion. At

the same time, between two people belonging to the same minority group there may be certain assumptions of cultural similarity in terms of family background, economic experience and political ideologies that exist (Fletcher, 1997). At times this was advantageous because participants felt more comfortable discussing their beliefs and values as they essentially assumed that my own echoed theirs. Furthermore, as South Asians in Canada we are likely to have faced many similar experiences in our lives as people belonging to minority groups. This personal experience provided me with a tacit perspective to direct questioning and understand answers on a level that would not be as apparent to an individual that did not share the same personal experiences. Additionally, being an insider of the community was also beneficial for gathering participants. During the recruitment process, people were quite receptive and excited about the idea of a South Asian worker doing research involving other South Asians. I felt as if this sense of quickly established unity allowed me easier access to possible participants because I was an insider of the community.

There are also limitations of personal experience that must be acknowledged such as selective observation, wherein an individual begins to take special notice of some people or events that strictly reinforce our previous beliefs and theories (Kreuger and Neuman, 2006). For example, from my own experiences, I am more likely to remember and recall conversations with other South Asian social workers that verify and validate my own experiences and views versus the ones that conflict with my point of view. However, during the first interview, I did not view these limitations as negatively

impacting my research. Instead, by acknowledging them and directly confronting them I believed they were used as strength. For example, from my own experience, I have extensively heard about the shortfalls of mainstream agencies working with ethnic communities; however, I explicitly asked participants to list the perceived strengths and weaknesses mainstream agencies had when working with ethnic communities.

After my first interview, I realized a small buffer was needed before the interviews began. As an insider of the South Asian community, asking the participants questions about South Asian culture and community that are believed to be common knowledge had the potential of negatively impacting my relationship with them. I did not want to be perceived as incompetent or oblivious to South Asian culture; yet I wanted to get as much data from the interviews as possible. Therefore, before further interviews began, I informed the participants that I would be asking them questions throughout the interview that may have obvious answers to people within the South Asian community, but not to community outsiders. Hence, I needed them to be very descriptive and detailed in their answers. In this way, I was able to maintain my status as a knowledgeable insider of the community in the eyes of the participants and ask questions without fear of jeopardizing my relationship with the participants. It was important to maintain my relationship with the participants so they felt comfortable confiding their experiences with me as an equal rather than feeling as if they had to explain and justify their experiences from a defensive standpoint.

Regardless of the buffer, during the interviews, many of the participants would end statements with phrases such as, "...you know how it is". To illustrate, when one participant was describing an example of witnessing cultural insensitivity towards Hindus and the disregard people outside of the South Asian community had toward the incident, he followed up by telling me I knew how it was. In many of the instances, I actually did know to what the participants were alluding. On one hand, I wanted to push the participants further when they would say "...you know how it is" to obtain an explanation in their own words. Conversely, my insider status was in jeopardy if I simply did not nod and agree that I knew about what they were talking. When participants made "you know" statements they were essentially validating our possibly shared experiences. If I did not reciprocate the validation, the participants could possibly begin to question my status as a South Asian. I was in the unique position of being able to relate, in many ways, with the people who participated in the study. In turn, this provided a unique insight to the research. While the buffer did allow room to ask for further clarification about cultural issues at times, that was not always the case.

### CHAPTER 3. FINDINGS

At the time the interviews took place, all of the participants were frontline workers; therefore, they were not always completely aware of or privy to all of the factors and details influencing restructuring at their workplace(s). Instead, they spoke to how they had observed the restructuring process and after-effects at their places of work; in terms of how these changes affected their practice and relationship with service users and their co-workers. Depending on the structure and the amount of time spent at the agency, some were able to comment more thoroughly about the restructuring process than others. This was especially true for those participants who were in less formally operated agencies. They reported feeling more connected with their peers, which translated into workers acknowledging that they had a more comprehensive understanding of the inner workings of their agency.

The three sensitizing concepts derived from the literature were echoed in the interviews and are presented in this section. The first concept, which has ultimately led to a decrease in the social aspect of their work, related to the participants' comments about the increase in bureaucratic approaches, largely influenced by neo-liberalism. The second concept, which linked back to the Eurocentric foundations of social work, concerned cultural sensitivity and undertones of racism. An unforeseen facet of the undertones of racism that arose was the emotional reaction and impact it had on the participants. Lastly, resistance was a prominent concept that was present in the data in terms of how the participants coped and adjusted to undesired changes brought on by restructuring.

### **Increase in Bureaucracy, Decrease in the Social Aspect**

The participants reported having mixed feelings about the increase in bureaucracy they have witnessed at their places of work, both in mainstream and ethno-specific contexts. In general, the participants reported experiencing less restructuring within the mainstream agencies they are or were situated in compared with ethno-specific agencies. This was partially attributed to the larger size and longer existence that mainstream agencies generally possessed compared to ethno-specific agencies. The participants attributed the increases they were witnessing as an inevitable process that all agencies must undergo to grow and maintain funding. However, they noted that as a result of increased administrative demands, they felt the quality and time spent with service users had decreased. A male worker in an ethno-specific agency detailed the merit in the changes that arose from increased bureaucracy in daily methods of practice.

There's more accountability and more standardization and that kind of stuff. So there's been good change that has been brought. (Interview A4)

By the same token, when talking about the restructuring of a program at a previous place of work, he acknowledged that in some cases more accountability can actually decrease efficiency and become more of a nuisance for workers.

The only hindrance was there was a lot of accountability and lots of red tape that was implemented. And lots of reporting, tons and tons of reporting. Like three sets of reports for everything. Once for the city, one for the office, and one provincially. So that took a lot of my time, like really ate into my time like crazy. (Interview A4)

This threefold increase in the participant's work was an immensely negative consequence of the restructuring of his program. While the amplification in reporting was effective in increasing the accountability to the city and province, on a micro level it negatively impacted the worker's daily routine. The participants contradicting views on increased bureaucracy conveys the complexity of the issue.

Other participants also commented on the negative ways that the increased bureaucratization of their agency affected their daily practice. When speaking about the restructuring of staff positions and duties to accommodate a managerial model, a male participant discussed the loss of the social aspect of his work.

Like they [service users] could go and sit in the manager's office without making an appointment and just say what they had to say and the manager would take action right away. Because, you know, the manager would feel that. Now the manager is a bit hidden and they have to come to us [front line workers]. And then we have to approach the managers or they have to—there's general meetings like once every month or once every two months and then they raise the issues there...and that's how they address it. There is no face to face conversation anymore. The organic feel that, I mean, it's just people stats now instead of people and that's where you start losing the quality of services and you start gaining quantity because people are being pushed through the system now. (Interview A3).

While the efficiency of the services did increase, the participant noted that there was a significant loss of human interaction and personal connection. He believed this personal connection to be an essential and integral part of his practice that was ultimately lost after restructuring commenced at the agency. The change in management style to a hierarchal system, as was the case in this instance, also impacted the way that staff interacted with one another, causing tension among the workers.

[frontline workers were] No longer able to relay their thoughts and ideas straight to management but we had to take the proper—now there were steps and there was red tape to go through. We had to tell our supervisor and say if the problem was with the supervisor, how would you relay that to the supervisor? You had to tell the head [senior level staff]. (Interview A3)

The notion of red tape disrupting and prolonging a participant's work was a common complaint associated with increased bureaucracy in agencies. Participants admitted they generally had a higher tolerance of bureaucratic procedures in mainstream contexts as it was expected in that setting; however, they found this increase more challenging in ethno-specific agencies. This was largely because they believed the bureaucratic changes being introduced in ethno-specific contexts were intended for mainstream agency settings; consequently, an adjustment period ensued to incorporate cultural sensitivity into new procedures. When a participant was directly asked why the ethno-specific agency he worked at had initially pushed for restructuring, he stated that it was mainly done so to become more like a mainstream agency.

I think they changed it to get more funding and to become more mainstream...it hasn't been positive change in terms of quality of services but in terms of showing numbers to the ministry and their funders? Yes. (Interview A3)

A strain can develop among staff when they feel that changes being brought into the agency are not in the best interest of the service users or even their own methods of practice. The intent behind bureaucratic changes greatly influences workers' perceptions and openness to these changes. One participant noted that while change is inevitable, it must be thoroughly vetted and considered before it is implemented.

Change is good but the right change is good and brought in the right way at the right pace, it can't be too fast paced. Because changes that fast can injure a company, and it will collapse as well. And I've heard of that happening before, so yeah. (Interview A3)

When discussing his work at an ethno-specific agency, another participant spoke favourably about current changes introduced by a new female executive director at the agency. He particularly liked the opposition to rigidity and standardization she brought forth.

She basically has a good style about her, and the impact is she's receptive to change, and she's also receptive to being flexible so it's better for the organization that way. (Interview A4)

However the reality and impact of funding on the structure, direction, and daily operations of methods at the participant's agency was made quite clear by the participant when he stated:

As far as the funding changes that's coming down the pipeline, no one really knows what's going to happen with that. That's unpredictable, it's going to be tough for all, you know, the grassroots organizations and how funding [is] going to be affected and how it's going to be cut. I don't even know if my programs going to be around next year, so. (Interview A4)

Finding the balance between an increase in bureaucracy that leads to assisting and improving practice for social workers rather than becoming an obstacle and interference was something that was voiced by many of the participants. They agreed that there is no definite right answer to be found; alternatively, it depends on many intersecting factors such as the type of agency, in terms of size and services available, and the makeup of the service user population. All five of the participants expressed that there is a fine line to

tread when introducing bureaucratic policies and practice into an agency. They agreed there was merit in increasing efficiency of services; yet, sometimes this also meant a compromise and decrease in the social aspect of their work.

This was not a trade-off they felt comfortable making as it opposed their views of what constituted effective practice. The participants stated that an agency's progress can be followed on a hierarchal guide with successful agencies comprised of typical mainstream agency qualities such as: greater accountability, efficiency and generalized protocol. These qualities were deemed to be something for which agencies aspired for and goals to reach to improve the quality and public perception of an agency. Most importantly, how these qualities impacted the perception of the funders who effectively have the power to determine the success of agency. In this process, the needs and demands of the service users are at risk of being overlooked in favour of meeting the needs and demands of the funders. Unfortunately, according to the participants, in some cases meeting the demands of the funders was detrimental to the quality of services being provided to the service users.

### **Undertones of Racism**

The different layers of discreet racism and oppression that exist within mainstream and ethno-specific agencies were addressed by all five of the participants. Participants disclosed racism they had encountered that was directed at them personally,

their service users, or other staff members. Regardless of mainstream or ethno-specific context, racism was experienced in both settings. As one participant stated:

It's also racism embedded [in] our culture as well, I mean there is racism at the institution and the policy level and the individual level so it's like a triangle so what [are] you going to...you can't really take out the individual racism until you take out the structural racism. (Interview A3)

The above quote highlights how the participant understood incidents of racism in his practice in both mainstream and ethno-specific contexts. They both operate within the parameters of the same system and are influenced by the same structures. As the participant noted, structural racism impacts other levels of practice and one cannot be addressed without considering the others. As a result, the participants spoke about undertones of racism they had observed on macro, meso and micro levels in different agency contexts and the implications this had for their practice.

Looking at mainstream agencies, a participant working in child protection traced and linked the racist undertones at her place of work and consequent practice to the Eurocentric roots of social work.

I think that a big barrier in mainstream agencies [is] that they're very Eurocentric in their frameworks, and I see that as a limitation. Um, sometimes they're much more towards the medical model, even though they say they are not. Which to me is very Eurocentric in its ways as well. (Interview A1)

She noted throughout the interview that there was a vast difference between the 'talk' and the 'walk' of the agency. While the agency claimed to be integrating an AOP model, they were continuing to utilize a medical model, as well. The Eurocentric roots

were attributed to categorizing and perceiving service users of colour in specific ways. She stated there were certain labels and assumptions that further stigmatized the service users, resulting from the agency's variations on what was labelled as 'normal' family behaviour versus what was not. The participant wished for her co-workers to:

Have a little bit of an analysis looking at how are families talked about, what context are they talked about? How is poverty addressed and how is poverty labelled? You know, when we look at the families we serve and we look at the many barriers that they look at, they fall under, and then you look at how this is addressed by workers and how they--the families get stigmatized on a constant basis and the labels and assumptions that they go through. (Interview A1)

Moreover, the participant reflected that these descriptions of family behaviour were rooted in a traditional Eurocentric family ideology that was not necessarily applicable for families from other cultures.

Language was also identified as rooted in Eurocentric ideology. A participant spoke to the implications of this language in his daily practice at an ethno-specific agency. Language does not only create the ways in which we see and understand our world, but it also acts as a powerful ideological instrument that conveys barely conscious assumptions that shape and give coherence to the world (Hawkins, Fook, and Ryan, 2001). At times, this can mean practicing in a language other than English. One participant spoke about the barriers that professional language poses and the semantics of translating words, which in his case also consisted of a lot of medical jargon as he worked with service users affected by HIV/AIDS.

What we do is we decimate the knowledge and we put it in a language that's acceptable. I kind of make it very very simple. And a lot of our clients don't even read or write, a few of them actually, not a lot of them. So what I do is pictures and stuff. I use picture cards and that kind of stuff and that gets the message across. (Interview A4).

Another participant echoed this particular challenge in his own practice.

Like terminology, say even schizophrenia, we don't – in Punjabi there is no word called schizophrenia. If we talk depression in Punjabi, we would have to describe depression in a few words or few sentences actually cause there is no word for depression. (Interview A3)

The extra work of then translating terminology or concepts in culturally sensitive ways becomes the responsibility of the individual workers in mainstream agencies.

Participants also spoke about non-verbal racist undertones and how they can impact South Asian service users, especially in a mainstream agency context. A participant at an ethno-specific agency discussed how he had encountered many South Asian service users who reported feelings of unease and discrimination at mainstream agencies that required them to remove religious garments or cultural indicators.

They [mainstream workers] might not say anything, but it's the way they relate to them. You know, you don't even have to say anything. But if someone's wearing a Bagri (turban) or someone's wearing a Hijab, and if they're looked at and treated in a different way than the other clients are different. But it could even be the other drop-in clients who are there; they might look at them strangely. Not understand[ing] where they are coming from, make derogatory comments and stuff. So it's that kind of stuff that comes...and then actually having a case worker who is White. (Interview A4)

A female participant at a mainstream agency echoed the scrutiny and oppression that female service users of colour experience at mainstream agencies.

They're stereotyped and the racist undertones are, may not be so overt in a mainstream agency, but they're there ,and if you're working with families, they definitely sense it and the power and control that goes with it. (Interview A1)

Understandably, when safety is a concern, this request is arguably warranted.

However, if the agency and worker making such a request do not understand the cultural significance or history of such items, cultural sensitivity is then overlooked. The subtlety through which racism can be communicated was raised by all of the participants.

Additionally, people of colour are adept at reading the slightest nuances or clues that carry even the most carefully concealed message of disapproval, discomfort, or non-acceptance attributable to an individual's race, ethnicity, culture or religion (McPhatter, 1997). Therefore, when racism becomes subtler, it does not necessarily imply that service users or workers of colour are any less likely to discern it; in fact, there is a greater likelihood that they will.

When participants were asked about the practice of connecting South Asian social workers with South Asian service users in a mainstream agency context, there was a mixed response. One participant simply saw this as another aspect of subtle racism.

Sometimes what happens is the racism takes on a different tone. Which is that because you're identified as South Asian with the South Asian is a very big vast, it's vast, I mean linguistically, culturally, religiously, it's very different depending on what region you're from...um, they think that you're South Asian and this family is South Asian [and] that you connect. But that doesn't necessarily mean anything. (Interview A1)

Although the participant acknowledged that sometimes linking workers with service users from the same ethnicity is beneficial, it can just as easily be detrimental. The

participant noted that this type of stereotyping was particularly dangerous because it led to superficial labelling of service users, as well.

Young black women [are] labelled a certain way sometimes. People who don't identify as being heterosexual have that as looked upon...racism continues to exist within the agency. (Interview A1)

Another participant saw this as somewhat counter intuitive because it contradicted why a service user of colour would seek out a mainstream agency in the first place.

In terms of mainstream, I mean, I think a lot of ethnic minority people, they, most of them I feel they prefer mainstream because they don't want to connect with their own agency because they feel a bit like they don't want to talk to their own kind. If they feel embarrassed or whatever, but they feel more comfortable opening up at a mainstream agency because they don't really have that connection. (Interview A5)

Therefore, the participants not only raised the importance of understanding culture as a whole and how it impacts service users but also addressed the dangers that come from this type of grouping and stereotyping of cultural values. Specifically, it pinpoints how Eurocentric definitions of minority populations' cultures and culturally sensitive practice can produce and promote practice that has racist undertones embedded within it. As a result, the participants noted that the individuality of service users must also be given consideration and that assumptions based on a person's culture can be destructive to the relationship between an agency and its service users. This also brings into question the trend of mainstream agencies that introduce culturally specific programs. These agencies are hoping to target certain cultures without realizing that some

service users of colour may be specifically seeking their services not to work with someone from their own community.

### **Emotional Impact of Racism at Workplace**

Eurocentric foundations of social work were one of the initial sensitizing concepts derived from the literature review. However, an added aspect to this concept that emerged from the data was the emotional impact that this had on the participants' lives. The participants linked contributing factors to their experiences with racism to the continued dominance of mainstream ideology and values within social work. One of the participants became especially anxious when relaying a story about experiencing racism at her placement in a hospital setting during her BSW program. This particular story is explored in further detail in the resistance section of the findings.

Participant: And therefore I didn't want to continue this placement so I terminated the placement at the end. But initially, they were the one who wanted to terminate me from the placement.

Interviewer: Yeah. Wow.

Participant: Every time I talk about this, it's just like a big, it's anxiety and tension just builds up right? (Interview A5)

After the interview finished, the participant noted that she had not particularly wanted to discuss this example during the interview. Ultimately, though, she felt her story needed to be told. She noted that her hesitancy had less to do with feelings of embarrassment or shame, but more about having to essentially re-live the scenario. This was something she preferred to avoid because of the feelings of anxiety ignited by telling

the story. This story also exemplifies the reality of the barriers and challenges workers who practice resistance face. In this case, practicing resistance literally cost the participant her placement position.

Participants also exhibited signs of fear and discomfort in negatively discussing their current places of work. During one of the interviews, a participant was relaying a scenario involving herself and finding allies within her workplace to talk about racism. While describing her example, she unconsciously stated her own name:

That I can actually then to and go to and have been able to talk to and they've been able to then say to me [participant's name] that's racism you faced or [participant's name] that was sexism...and umm...you'll cut out my name right? (Interview A1)

Only after I explained that the participant's name would be removed from the transcript and reassured her that her anonymity would be preserved did she continue with the interview. Another participant simply refused to discuss the agency outside of his own program.

Interviewer: What are some examples of some programs you [agency] run or just different types of services?

Participant: Well, I'm just going to talk about my program.

Interviewer: Ok, alright.

Participant: I don't want to talk about them. I'll talk about my program.

Interviewer: Right, no problem. (Interview A4)

Exactly why this participant did not wish to discuss his current place of employment outside of his program was not explicitly addressed because I did not want

to place the participant on the defensive or cause discomfort. Some of this participant's co-workers were aware he was participating in the study; possibly, he felt that by critiquing other programs at his agency, his employment would be in jeopardy. This exchange occurred early on in the interview. A connection of trust was still being established therefore the subject was not pushed. However, even though participants knew that their anonymity and confidentiality was a high priority, they were still wary about how much information they disclosed about their current places of work.

### **Challenges of Cultural Sensitivity**

When discussing cultural sensitivity with the participants, it became apparent that generational factors and self-identity greatly influenced participants' perspectives on cultural sensitivity in terms of working with South Asian service users. A third generation Canadian born South Asian individual is likely to identify more with mainstream culture rather than traditional South Asian culture (Graham et al., 2010). A first generation Canadian born Punjabi female discussed a recent revelation she had at a workshop on diversity at her place of work.

It's actually funny because I thought I knew about my culture. I thought I knew a lot about the Punjabi culture, the Hindu culture, but I had a lot to learn at that conference. (Interview A2)

One participant, who moved from England at the age of five, related the generational and also regional issue when discussing how South Asian social workers can sometimes be purposely connected with South Asian service users.

But [it] doesn't necessarily mean anything. You could be from totally, completely different regions, and it could be the same as working with a non-racialized family who you may actually have more in common with. (Interview A1)

Although this practice was also discussed within the context of racist undertones, its cultural sensitivity aspect is noteworthy. While some participants spoke supportively of this practice, they all noted that it was not an infallible method. Sometimes, a South Asian service user simply does not want to work with someone from the same community.

Participants were asked what they believed to be the strengths of ethno-specific agencies serving South Asian service users; their responses were quite similar. When talking about the benefits of connecting workers and service users of similar backgrounds they referred to language accommodations and cultural sensitivity that can be conveyed by the worker.

Somebody can walk in, and they know they are going to see someone who they look at who represents them and that they're going to understand their context. More than likely there's someone there they speak their language. (Interview A1)

I would read some of the Punjabi newspapers and so they could connect with what was going on back in their...from the region they are from. So we would read the Punjabi newspaper, and you know they would be like, I would speak to them in their own language. We would talk about some of the songs that are coming out and so...which I guess mainstream would not be able to do. (Interview A3)

We have Bengali speaking people here. We have Hindi, we have Urdu, we have Gujrati. So yeah. And then our volunteer base too. (Interview A4)

On the other hand, mainstream agencies were largely associated with their generic and universal approaches to practice. A participant who was recently employed at a

mainstream agency in a hospital setting discussed the approach her agency had when working with their service users.

I think we pretty much did the same thing for everybody. I wasn't—I didn't change...like I mean of course worker to worker it's different. They use different strategies when they work with clients. In terms of organization, the way they expect a worker to practice their thing, I think it's the same for everybody. (Interview A5)

The participant then acknowledged how a more generalized approach is problematic.

At the same time, some of the mainstream agencies don't know how to accommodate to their [South Asians] needs because they don't know where they're coming from, right? And the background is still—like there is a lack of knowledge and education in mainstream agencies. (Interview A5)

An example of knowing where South Asian clients are 'coming from' as the participant in the quote above alluded to was provided by a participant working at a mainstream mental health agency.

There's that fear I notice amongst South Asian service users that they don't know how to ask for certain types of services, and that's culturally there too because people that come from South Asian, if they're more quiet that's seen as a strength versus if you're North America[n] the more you speak up that's seen as a strength. So they have a different mindset when they come. (Interview A3)

In fact, when talking about the philosophy of an agency where he had been employed; one that exclusively worked with service users of colour, the participant stated these were the types of situations that were easily addressed and understood by the staff.

Because mainstream agencies are serving them [White service users] so these were culturally appropriate services, and we had people speaking

languages so, it was [an] easier gateway to them to open up and feel comfortable and feel safe and secure. (Interview A3)

The participant noted that due to the high representation among all levels of staff, even when restructuring was executed, there was an automatic, almost unconscious, examination of how cultural sensitivity issues would interact with new policies. Consequently, this aided the transition for workers.

In general, participants who were currently working in mainstream agencies had experienced little restructuring as their agencies were already well-established. Nonetheless, this does not imply that mainstream agencies are not susceptible to neo-liberal restructuring. When all five of the participants were asked about how much restructuring they had experienced at their current or previous mainstream agency of employment, four of them responded they had not experienced any significant restructuring within the past year. Although, when minor restructuring did happen in these agencies, culturally sensitizing the services was a common reason, given that their agencies were located in ethnically diverse areas. The following was noted by the only participant who stated that the mainstream agency she worked at had recently undergone significant restructuring:

We had a conference talking about how we can make our services more culturally appropriate and culturally inclusive for the clientele that we were now serving. It was a great restructuring we did for our organization. My director, she was the one who really organized and wanted this to happen...she wanted to make sure that we were reaching out to them [South Asian service users] as hard as we can and you know exhausting all resources so we can make it accommodating to them because it is their first time using our services or not. (Interview A2)

This particular participant believed that South Asian service users were not open to mainstream agencies in general because they do not feel comfortable in that setting. She believed this was precisely because mainstream agencies do not effectively promote their cultural sensitivity skills and methods. The mainstream agency at which she is employed did attempt to publicize and show their service users how they were attempting to make the agency a more culturally inclusive place. Yet, the participant felt that, on the whole, mainstream agencies do themselves a disservice by not showcasing relevant services to their South Asian service user population.

On the other hand, a participant employed at a mainstream mental health agency, located in a significantly diverse community, noted that there was very little diversity to be found among the service user population. This is especially true in terms of the amount of South Asians the agency served.

It is [located in] a fairly diverse community in Toronto. There still should be a significant amount of South Asians but I can't think of any client from South Asian background. (Interview A3)

The participant working at the mental health agency was unsure why they had little diversity among their service users. This was quite interesting and intriguing as the participant himself noted the agency was located in a diverse area. However, the participant could not explain the lack of diversity among the service user population.

At the same time, all five of the participants noted that a major strength of mainstream agencies is that their more generalized practice structure and lack of cultural

sensitivity compared to ethno-specific agencies may appeal more to South Asian service users.

They [mainstream agencies] could service them better because they have the resources. Another thing that sometimes occurs, people from culturally specific worker and clients, the clients do not want to meet the workers. So, say that I'm Punjabi, someone else that is a service user that comes in and he's Punjabi, he might not want to see me or she might not want to see me because of the fear that I'm Punjabi and know what's going to happen. And I might end up saying something in the community and saying you know what, you know so and so has this issues and so and so. (Interview A3)

I think a lot of ethnic minority people, they, most of them, I feel they prefer mainstream because they don't want to connect with their own agency because they feel a bit like they don't want to talk to their own kind. If they feel embarrassed or whatever, but they feel much more comfortable opening up [at] a mainstream agency because they don't really have that connection. (Interview A5)

Yet another participant spoke about the financial disparity between mainstream and ethno-specific agencies.

The strengths of mainstream agencies, I think that they have more resources to work with. They have more ways to kind of—more money I think to accommodate the population that they're trying to reach at. So, I think, you know, they have a lot of money, they have a lot of resources and they ultimately can do it. (Interview A2)

As exemplified by the participants, integrating cultural sensitivity into social work practice is far from being a simple task. It is important to ask who is defining what cultural sensitivity is and how it should be applied in practice. here is also a danger in oversimplifying and stereotyping cultural values and beliefs. Thus, workers and agencies must be consciously critical and sensitive as to how they approach and label values and

beliefs. By the same token, the individuality of service users cannot be underestimated: a person's culture cannot be expected to be the most significant factor that defines them.

### **Exercising Resistance and its Challenges**

All of the participants spoke thoroughly about the importance of exercising resistance in their places of work as well as the challenges and barriers that they have faced when exercising resistance. In terms of personal benefits gained, a female participant working at a mainstream agency reported that resistance provided her with a sense of sanity about her work. Furthermore, she noted that making allies at the workplace is a key part of resistance.

I think, you know, you find your allies, and I think those allies is what helps you stay there and get through those days when you think you really just want to crawl under a rock and hide, um, and you kind of just breathe your way through. (Interview A1)

A majority of the participants stated that if salary were not a factor, they would prefer to work in ethno-specific agencies. In fact, one female participant who mainly had mainstream agency experience stressed the importance of diverse representation within mainstream agencies. She strongly felt that the solution was not less representation within mainstream agencies, but rather more representation was needed.

I started realizing that I had to work through the cracks. So I thought instead of complaining, and you know what, if we want to make changes and shift in mainstream organizations, we need workers to go in there who work from a different lens and look at people's realities and try to see their reality for that person. So, if we want to make a shift in a mainstream agency, we need to work from the inside out. Otherwise, we're just going

to get more and more mainstream workers in there, and that's not going to help us. (Interview A1)

Simultaneously this participant noted more representation in an agency did not necessarily equate to solving problems or overcoming barriers.

I've been in smaller more, not in ethno-specific agencies but in, um, feminist agencies, but the politics and the bureaucracy that goes on in those agencies is ridiculous and the power and the control and the fighting for power that went on was just too much...and there was representation in those agencies, I mean, it wasn't all White, it was quite ra—there was a lot of racialized staff, but it was horrible where I was. And I didn't want to deal with it anymore so I decided to come here [mainstream agency] because I guess, the way, I just started looking at things, oppression is everywhere. (Interview A1)

This specific participant believed that staying within mainstream agencies was a necessity for her in terms of practicing resistance. While her negative personal experience at a smaller agency factored into her initial decision to work at a mainstream agency, as she states, she found oppression in both agency contexts. Although this participant had seen how more representation did not always translate to the changes for which she hoped, she was still adamant that more diverse representation within mainstream agencies was a positive step forward.

The participants were also vocal about the challenges of practicing resistance. A participant working in mental health unpackaged the intersecting factors influencing agency policy. Also, because of all of the distractions that focus their energy elsewhere, people who are facing mounting pressure from senior staff and are simultaneously overworked, do not easily practice resistance.

I mean, you know, you can't change the system so how do you change the system from within. How do you, you know, someone needs extra tokens and you give them extra token but it's not change on a grand scale. So, funders want to see numbers, the more numbers you produce, the more numbers you get as a agency. Managers are you know, have pressure from their E.D to produce because the E.D's want the agency to grow. So, the workers are stressed out because they see a lot more clients than they should be seeing so it's just...everyone's overworked. (Interview A3)

While the participant noted that resistance was an important aspect of practice, he questioned how realistically it could be exercised in the workplace due to time and money constraints.

Another participant relayed an incident of attempting to practice resistance, and subsequently facing negative consequences. This participant was briefly working within a hospital setting and was assigned a South Asian service user. She ascertained that the workers had not been culturally attuned to the needs of this particular service user. Therefore, she integrated cultural sensitivity into her practice; as a result she began receiving positive feedback from the service user. However, the progress raised concern among senior staff.

I was [in a hospital setting] and my supervisor, she's from the mainstream community, she was sort of questioning my practice my social work practice. She didn't understand my culture, and when I did use my culture, she said that I'm hiding behind my culture in terms of practice. (Interview A5)

This scenario shows that a lack of understanding of other cultures can not only damage relationships between co-workers, but it may also ultimately unproductively affect the service user in an unproductive way. The participant had identified a cultural

gap in the services her agency was providing and attempted to address those gaps by incorporating cultural sensitivity into her practice approach with the South Asian service user. The same participant further explained that when working with this particular service user, she had found that working from a more community-based perspective had been more effective than the agency's individualistic approach.

I had to justify everything and sort of explain and she's [supervisor] like oh that's crossing boundaries, you can't be that close to this person. (Interview A5)

The participant noted that after reflecting on the incident, it would have been helpful to have allies on staff who could have supported her, or at least, understood her culturally sensitive approach. This illustrated many aspects of resistance in the workplace, such as barriers South Asian workers face. In this particular example, because it included a practice framework that did not recognize cultural differences, led to the workers in the agency generally being uneducated or un-aware of cultural issues.

Other participants echoed the importance of representation and having allies within the workplace, especially in terms of resistance. Representation was discussed in terms of: gender, racial and cultural background, and also how it contrasted with the population of the service users. One participant discussed the ratio of representation between the service users at her mainstream agency and staff.

More than fifty percent of the children that are in care are from racialized families, and I would not, I don't think that fifty percent of our staff is racialized. I could be wrong. Is it representative of the specific communities? We have representation, but I don't know if it's to that

extent. As you move up higher, I mean, at our management level, it's less and less representative. It's more White as you move up. (Interview A1)

Consequently, this particular participant asserted that resistance was even more pertinent because representation of the service users was lacking among staff; thus, she felt a responsibility to speak on their behalf. She noted this meant she had to:

Fight for my families and seeking ok how could I do this in a way so that they're being treated as equitably as possible and having a say so I—so for me, for example, from the moment I walk in, I will tell them these are your rights. And they'll say no, no, no, no because they are intimidated. No. These are your rights, if you don't think I'm doing my job you have the right to do A, B, C, D, E. If you think my supervisor is not doing their job, you have the right to this, this, this, and this. And then I'll work with them. (Interview A1)

As a result, this participant exercised resistance by using the system to hold herself and her co-workers accountable for their actions. She also attempted to balance the power in the worker and client relationship by informing the service users of rights they may not otherwise have been aware.

Another participant echoed previous sentiments about less and less representation in staff increasing as one looked higher in staff ranks.

Like the organization in itself is very Caucasian based. I mean you probably would see one Brown person to like White people, White workers. And even manager level. Even though a lot of staff are women, but the manager was like, is a male and he's a Caucasian male in his forties/fifties, I guess and you know, it's like their way of practicing is totally different from what's needed I thought, ok. You know they're very status quo. They have certain ways of practicing, and they're just trying to follow those things. Whereas the need—like what a client is expecting is totally different. I see that there is a little bit of a gap. (Interview A5)

As a result, she believed that for positive change to happen, in terms of greater representation among staff, structural level changes need to occur:

I think that there are structural changes I would definitely say there needs to be—the organization needs to hire ethno-specific workers who can make the decision as well...cause right now I—like I even at [mainstream children’s services agency], the higher authorities are basically Caucasians, so, and the decisions are made by them so that needs to change. If that makes sense...yeah so more representation cause right now the person up there doesn’t really care—doesn’t really understand anything, they’re just going to, he or she, is just going to go with what they know. (Interview A5)

Nevertheless, not all participants reported low representation within mainstream agencies. At an agency that served an estimated fifty percent South Asian service user population, another participant felt this representation was equally reflected in the staff.

I definitely believe our staff is the most diverse staff I’ve seen that I’ve worked with. Out of all my social work experiences. (Interview A2)

Low representation among staff members also effected how fervently workers felt they could respond to and challenge changes brought on by agency restructuring. It was a matter of a “strength in numbers mentality”. The participants were less likely to question restructuring practices of which they did not approve if they did not feel they had a solid support system in place.

A participant working in a mainstream child protection agency related the importance of allies and remaining critical of one’s practice through time.

It’s really easy to assimilate to a organization and how do I keep myself and keep my awareness while recognizing wait a minute this is racism going on, wait a minute this is really sexism going on...you find your allies

in management...to kind of cope and survive and those are the people that I've actually turned to. (Interview A1)

Equally, two other participants also reported feeling more comfortable practicing resistance in agencies with a higher representation present in the staff.

Advocacy was another aspect of resistance that was addressed by the participants. Advocacy was identified as a significant avenue for practicing resistance. The participants spoke about the different types of advocacy they had observed throughout their practice experiences. One participant compared her observations of advocacy in an agency that worked specifically with racialized women with her experience at a mainstream agency.

[you] see how it encompasses and how it respects people and really fights in the struggles with people versus where here [mainstream agency] I don't think we really fight in the struggle with, I think we advocate...what does advocacy really mean? And who still is holding the power in terms of advocacy I think is very different. (Interview A1)

The participants also discussed the importance of networking and building partnerships between mainstream and ethno-specific agencies. Due to the funding restraints that ethno-specific agencies face at a higher rate compared to mainstream agencies, ethno-specific agencies have the potential of gaining a lot of resources and access through partnerships with mainstream agencies. Likewise, ethno-specific agencies can help fill a culture sensitivity gap for mainstream agencies. A participant working at an ethno-specific agency discussed the importance of partnering with other agencies:

So they [mainstream agency] offer a food bank, they offer massage services that we can't even begin to afford. Right? So what we do is we basically do the mainstream service out here, and then, if our clients need food, we refer them and tie them in with them. And for massage, we do the same. It's like a collaboration. And they often send, if a client goes there for intake and is a South Asian, and they see that there's kind of a gap then they send them right over here. (Interview A4)

When participants were asked if they preferred to work in mainstream agencies or ethno-specific agencies, four of the five stated, if salary were not a factor, they were partial to working at ethno-specific agencies. One participant felt that workers of colour had an obligation to work in mainstream agencies and change the system from within. The participants were quite blunt about the impact that salary had on their decision, as it was one of the greatest determining factors the participants considered when seeking employment.

In terms of mental health, I started off at an ethno-specific agency and then I came into, you know, [mainstream mental health] where I'm at now. The reason I guess...money. I mean, if I was making good money there [ethno-specific agency] there's really no reason to leave although I did not like their restructuring model. But, I came into this mainstream agency and you know, everything's even more structured. (Interview A3)

Right now, it's more of a financial thing, I'll be honest. So whatever comes up for me that's what I'm going to take. And then once I've kind of stabilized myself, then I'm going to be more picky, and then when that happens, I probably will gravitate towards my own ethnic communities. I prefer to work there. Cause I feel at home there. At home, working for some organization that I can relate to. But sometimes, if there's a agency, a mainstream agency that are also accommodating to workers who are from different—I'm willing to work there as well. I don't know how many that exist that are like that. (Interview A5)

One participant stated that she really enjoyed applying a culturally inclusive framework, which was not something she was able to accomplish at her mainstream agency. Hence she preferred working at an ethno-specific agency.

I'm always like very you know, trying to understand other people's cultural trying to you know. But the other [mainstream] agency it's not really about that. It's just really understanding about the individual...so that's really challenging for me. (Interview A2)

In general, the participants expressed an ultimate desire to work at ethno-specific agencies over mainstream agencies. One of the participants stated that this trend is damaging because there needs to be more representation of workers of colour in mainstream agencies. Many of the participants were aware of this need for more representation in mainstream agencies; yet, in terms of their own careers, they would prefer to work in ethno-specific agencies. However, the participant who advocated for the need for more representation within mainstream agencies felt that because of the influential current political climate, the same issues and frustrations would arise for South Asian social workers, regardless of agency context.

I just think it's, you know what? It doesn't matter what mainstream agency you're working with and with the political era it's brutal. I don't know how people do it even in progressive agencies or ethno-specific. (Interview A1)

The participants reflected on the loss of the social aspect in their practice that was impacted by and related to the restructuring of their workplace. Participants' perceived cultural sensitivity and diverse representation among staff were seen as major factors not

only for the direction that restructuring took, but also how favourably it was considered.

The Eurocentric roots of social work were identified as augmenting present undertones of racism that exist in social work practice. The emotional impact felt by the workers includes: fear of publicly speaking out, shame, anxiety and embarrassment. Four of the participants reported less instances of representation among management level staff at their current or most recent places of work. Exercising resistance was a large part of participants' daily practice and they believed it to be a necessary part of their work.

## CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION

The discussion chapter is divided in two sections: substantive discussion and strengths and limitations. The first section discusses the findings of the study and connects them with findings from the literature review. Also in this section, the future research implications and directions are explored. The second section discusses reflections about the strengths and limitations of the study.

### **Substantive Discussion**

The interviews with the participants provided the opportunity to begin examining while reflecting on the lived experiences of South Asian social workers. Their diverse backgrounds and work experience begin to reveal a picture of how restructuring affects South Asian social workers. Several issues emerged from this research study. First, all of the participants agreed that agency restructuring was inevitable, regardless of mainstream or ethno-specific agency setting. However, in many cases, considering their own experiences, the participants reported higher rates of restructuring at ethno-specific settings. These experiences are consistent with the current literature that has found that funding cuts are experienced at a higher rate in community and ethno-specific agencies (Baines, 2008; Ilcan and Basok, 2004). The constant pressure of funding cuts loom over ethno-specific agencies, which in an attempt to sustain themselves, requires them to reshape and reorganize at a more frequent rate than mainstream agencies (Ilcan and Basok, 2004).

At their ethno-specific agency workplaces, participants had also witnessed a shift towards adopting more mainstream approaches to practice. Specifically, they reported that ethno-specific agencies have begun to incorporate greater levels of bureaucracy. However, the participants felt that this deterred service users of colour from approaching their services or continuing to use their agencies services after witnessing these changes, a pattern also supported in the literature (Akutsu, Castillo, and Snowden, 2007; Fletcher, 1997). This is attributed to the notion that when ethno-specific agencies increase their level of bureaucracy, they begin to reflect a mainstream agency model. This runs counter to why a service user may have sought out an ethno-specific agency in the first place, specifically looking for an alternative to a mainstream agency.

A couple of the respondents noted that some of the ethno-specific agencies they have worked at adopted a more hierarchal organizational structure. Respondents were hesitant about this restructuring trend because they felt that not having a hierarchal structure was the one aspect that separated ethno-specific agencies from mainstream agencies. The findings suggest the need for raised awareness among ethno-specific agencies in terms of how they can sustain their services without compromising cultural sensitivity, which is incredibly vital to their practice. Understandably, this is not an easy task. Eurocentric bias is deeply entrenched in social work practice to the extent that it is difficult for even the most adept professionals to begin to effectively dissect and dismantle it (McPhatter, 1997; Yan, 2008).

Yet, there are alternatives that can be utilized by these agencies or at least observed and considered. For example, a patient-focused approach reorganizes care away from functions to a central concern with the patient; this approach is successfully used in some hospital settings (Michalski et al., 2000). The model is intended to be anti-hierarchical and anti-bureaucratic in nature and has been developed to: enhance service, increase patient and staff satisfaction, improve the quality of care, and reduce cost (Michalski et al., 2000). Therefore, regarding how ethno-specific agencies can appease funders and still accommodate cultural beliefs and values, there are working alternatives already being utilized in practice.

In terms of agencies that were structured in a hierarchical fashion, many of the participants stated that personal experience and observations in these contexts, there was less representation to be found as one looked higher up the staff ranks. The literature also supports this finding as minority social workers are concentrated primarily within lower ranks of organization hierarchy (Hwang, 2007). While the respondents were more likely to comment on the cultural and ethnic background of senior staff, a male participant and a couple of the female participants also addressed the gender bias and the lack of female representation among senior staff positions they had observed. According to Hugman (1991) and Hwang (2007), gender and race are key features of management and practice divisions. The respondents reported more female representation among front line staff and less representation as one looked at senior level positions. Hwang (2007) states that

the message this lack of representation conveys is for what jobs workers of colour are potentially eligible for and how far-reaching promotional opportunities might be.

A theme that emerged from the study involved undertones of racism, something that participants linked not only with the ideologies that influence restructuring, but also as an after-effect of restructuring. Undertones of racism were highlighted from micro level concerns to the macro level. It was significant that the participants acknowledged how macro issues played an integral role in their everyday domain given how they uniquely affect minority populations in particular (McPhatter, 1997). It was also evident how passionate the participants were about the apparent oversight and disregard that policies had shown for cultural issues and their resulting frustration with the continuance of said policies and practices.

Some of the participants discussed the emotional impact of experiencing racism in the workplace. For one such participant, re-telling an example of experiencing racism resulted in an emotional reaction during the interview. Reactions ranged from frustration, anger and disbelief to shame, and embarrassment. One of the most painful things about racism is its invalidation, which can be even more impactful than the specific cause or incident initiating racism (Spencer, 2008). Two of the participants specifically noted it was the invalidation of racism that was particularly frustrating for them. In their cases, one participant was told to “stop hiding behind her culture” when practicing cultural

sensitivity with another South Asian service user. Another sought validation from allies when she experienced or observed racist practice approaches.

Racism is an issue that historically has tended to be either marginalized or ignored in the interests of the furthered professionalism of social work (Hugman, 1991). For example, how mainstream agencies in particular perceived and labelled specific behaviour as the norm was questionable to the participants. One of the respondents working in a mainstream child protection agency discussed how she felt the definition of what constitutes an acceptable family life was based on a very stereotypical White ideal. The literature echoes this sentiment and notes that idealized models are generally based around the White middle class, leading to the values and practices of minority families being constituted as problematic (Hugman, 1991).

At the same time, restructuring impacted the participants' work regarding cultural sensitivity. They acknowledged the convoluted, intricate, and, at times, contradictory layers of cultural sensitivity. One of the greatest challenges that cultural sensitivity requires from an individual: being honest and forthright with oneself, having tremendous humility, and understanding that becoming culturally sensitive is a process and there is no ideal completion (Johnson and Munch, 2009; McPhatter, 1997; Spencer, 2008). Similarly, some sort of competence in cultural sensitivity cannot be achieved through short-term solutions such as one-shot workshops or classes (Graham et al., 2010; McPhatter, 1997). Workshops on cultural sensitivity tend to be received as token gestures rather than any

concrete, substantial effort by agencies to address serious issues (McPhatter, 1997). As McPhatter (1997) noted, restructuring one's personal worldview and developing a sound foundation of knowledge and skills is a long-term professional endeavour.

Both mainstream and ethno-specific agencies can assist with incorporating cultural knowledge and sensitivity into their policies and practice. The key is not to base services around an essentialist conception of what it means to be South Asian in North America (Graham et al., 2010). Instead, services should also consider the specific needs of individual and familial services users of the agency in question. In fact, many of the respondents had suggestions and ideas in terms of how their place of work could become more culturally sensitive. At the very least, they identified current gaps in their agency's structure; however, they felt they did not have the power or authority to voice their concerns.

A common issue that the participants had conflicted views with concerned the notion of aligning South Asian social workers with South Asian service users. The contradiction existed about whether or not this practice is beneficial. This particular practice method is explored in the current literature in which it is a similarly highly contested practice method. While some studies have found that service users do prefer same-race social workers, other have discovered the opposite also to be true (Fletcher, 1997; Woods and Kurtz-Costes, 2007 ). The participants had their own theories: some believed South Asian service users preferred ethno-specific agencies while other believed

the converse. Ultimately, the participants stated it depended on what the service user wanted and had to be taken case by case.

One participant, also working at a mainstream agency, reported a much more diverse representation among staff that hosted yearly meetings specifically centered on cultural diversity. Although half of the staff was South Asian, it was a very diverse representation of South Asians and the participant was actually surprised by the diversity. This is also addressed in the current literature: workers from a specific culture will stereotype service users from the same culture (Fletcher, 1997). This can mean assumptions in terms of: a service user's family background, economic experience, and political ideologies (Fletcher, 1997). This is not exclusive to workers from a specific background as the respondents indicated that mainstream agencies had a tendency to develop frameworks and beliefs around the same assumptions. There is an irony to be found in social workers having been so highly critical of sweeping classifications in psychiatry; however, they appear to be willing to accept grand generalizations of ethnic and racial groups (Johnson & Munch, 2009). Likewise, descriptions of cultural differences are by definition stereotypical and can overlook the uniqueness of an individual (Johnson & Munch, 2009). Therefore, it comes down to finding a middle ground wherein descriptions of cultural differences do not merely become caricatures of the cultures they represent.

Thirdly, many of the participants felt that alliances within the workplace, especially in mainstream agencies where there is less diversity among the staff, were crucial in resisting the negative effects of restructuring. Research by McPhatter (1997) showed that acknowledgement of racism and discrimination; thereby, the willingness to identify and confront racism by White workers sends a strong message of support to workers and service users of colour. Paulo Freire (as cited in Rountree and Pomeroy, 2010) developed a term he called “critical consciousness” that has a tripartite focus. The three parts include: challenging individual assumptions, aiding the client, and advocating for and creating change within society (Rountree and Pomeroy, 2010). For an individual to build their critical consciousness skills, they must analyze current structural institutions to identify power imbalances and actions that could be taken to dismantle oppressive structures (Rountree and Pomeroy, 2010). Similarly, anti-oppressive research strives to highlight systematic oppression and develop knowledge that supports action to achieve freedom from oppression (Kreuger and Neuman, 2006; Rountree and Pomeroy, 2010).

The participants were very engaged in challenging individual assumptions and finding inventive ways to aid clients when the situation required. Yet, they felt little power in how to execute creating broader change within society. They found it within their ability to practice resistance on a micro individual level, but were less sure how they could personally make change on a structural macro level. Baines’s (2006) study on restructuring found similar results due to workers’ increased workloads. They have less time to devote to practicing resistance in the workplace and even less time to challenge

larger structural issues. Many of the participants were passionate about exercising resistance, yet were also aware of the many challenges and barriers they face and must overcome. While not enough time and little funding were common issues that participants felt were hindering them from exercising resistance successfully, they were also aware of the repercussions it could have on their jobs. One of the participants noted she lost her placement position directly because of practicing resistance; for others, the fear and possibility of losing their jobs was enough to deter them. Social workers are encouraged to exercise resistance and utilize critical thinking in their practice. However, the findings show that the challenges facing workers are given nearly as much attention and, are somewhat romanticized.

Furthermore, research on front line social work has revealed that restructuring has led to: de-skilling, intensification in practice, and low morale among many front line workers (Aronson and Smith, 2010). As one of the respondents noted, everyone is simply overworked. Between trying to meet the demands being placed on them before impending deadlines, there is just not enough time to devote to anything else. In addition, he gave context to the situation: managers and supervisors weather the front line worker's dissatisfaction; yet those same managers and supervisors also answer to someone else's authority and are not necessarily making all the executive changes.

In the end, many of the participants stated that if given the choice, they would choose to work in an ethno-specific agency over a mainstream agency. As one respondent

noted, she would like to work in mainstream agencies for a while to gather some financial stability. Ultimately, she would like to work with people from her own culture. Another participant stated she would like to work in an ethno-specific agency because she felt more comfortable in that environment and could not see that replicated in a mainstream agency. This sense of not feeling like they belong or are not fully accepted in a mainstream agency is a common occurrence for many workers from visible minority groups. Discrimination is a daily experience for many ethnic minority workers. Quite often, despite their professional role, ethnic minority workers are challenged by their White clientele who have a subtle social power over them (Yan, 2008). Therefore, working strictly with service users from the same ethnic background would minimize that type of discrimination and partially explains why the participants would prefer working in an ethno-specific context.

Baines (2008) has already stated that many workers of colour are largely employed in ethnically specific programs or agencies. However, instead of further segregating workers, and considering the growing number of visible minority social workers in the profession, workers must question the underlying Eurocentric assumptions of our culturally and racially appropriate curricula (Yan, 2008). In addition, there is a need to critically analyze who is defining and influencing the assimilation and restructuring of culturally and racially appropriate curricula. As Baines (2008) posits, workers need not only to question why oppression exists and for whose benefit, but also how it is enacted within everyday life. The participants did display a strong grasp on the

critical consciousness of these issues; however, they were less certain as to how they could make real calculable change.

Lastly, resistance to the effects of restructuring and how they impact South Asian social workers cannot be placed solely on South Asian social workers. Practicing resistance is very challenging. Unless the people who are being discriminated against and oppressed accept the responsibility, there is little hope that true change will ever be achieved (Spencer, 2008). A participant working at a mainstream agency discussed the importance of allying with White workers. By inviting others to join the cause and confiding in one another, a sense of unity and group morale can be achieved to help when seeking to make change in the workplace.

### **Directions for Future Research**

These findings are built on questions that I have long been pondering due to my own experiences, as well as introducing some new ones. Future research should consider with greater emphasis how South Asian social workers are impacted in agency restructuring as well as other minority workers. Who are the people influencing and directing these changes and what kind of cultural and ethnic representation exists among those people? Who is the restructuring intended to benefit: the agency, funders, workers, and/or service users? How can the trend of workers of colour settling in ethno-specific agencies be critically addressed? How does intergenerational identity impact South Asian

social workers' perceptions of agency restructuring? Also, it would be interesting to explore how traditional South Asian gender roles permeate social workers perspectives.

In terms of the diversity of the South Asian population, it would be interesting to explore, compare, and contrast how different South Asian communities view the impacts of restructuring. Furthermore, how does an ethno-specific agency's relationship with the community it serves change as the agency becomes increasingly bureaucratized? Does it change? Lastly, there were also issues that arose surrounding language. How do South Asian social workers adapt to: new approaches, intake/assessment forms, terminology and effectively translate them for service users to still be culturally sensitive? Future research studies could focus on these types of questions to gather a better understanding of the possible effects of restructuring on South Asian social workers.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The findings are based on a small sample that includes some variability with respect to gender, culture, and religion. The participants were quite homogenous regarding their educational level and western-based social work training. This could present a limitation on the study because it overlooked an entire population of South Asian social workers who did not meet the academic requirements. The research would have benefitted from taking greater consideration of the intergenerational identity of the participants. In terms of the intergenerational aspect, three of the participants were born outside of Canada; the other two, in Canada. Although the findings of this study are based

on a small sample size, the responses are assumed to give a preliminary glimpse into the experiences of restructuring on South Asian social workers in the current context of welfare state restructuring.

The strength of the research was the use of a grounded theory approach because of its emerging nature. It allowed for discovery and description, but also provided the opportunity to explain the actual social process (Yan, 2008). This was accomplished by going beyond discovering patterns by also highlighting their interrelationships (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). To illustrate, during the interviews undertones of racism was a topic that was discussed by all of the participants. For some of the participants, this topic was closely linked with increasing bureaucracy which they felt disregarded cultural differences. Others linked racist undertones with cultural sensitivity as equally applicable to the whole group in terms of naively stereotyping and generalizing a population's beliefs and values. Moreover, because of the exploratory nature of the study, the emotional impact that racism had on the participants emerged. As a result, there were many intersecting factors regarding undertones of racism. Therefore, a grounded theory approach allowed for a further exploration of how these topics interacted and related to one another.

An additional strength of the study was the fact that frontline social workers were interviewed. These practitioners are critical resources in data collection, specifically because they are on the frontlines of service and have a strong and rich relationship with

the service users and communities that they serve (Rountree and Pomeroy, 2010). As well while the focus may have been on a micro local level of practice, an examination of this data can offer insight into the wider structures that influence and impact them, thus suggesting possible sites for change (Aronson and Smith, 2010).

When recruiting participants, it quickly became clear that there was a notable hesitancy among currently working participants who were worried about speaking out on record about their agency/agencies of employment. This was especially true in cases in which possible participants were informed of the study by their supervisors or senior staff members. Furthermore, I grappled with the concern that anonymity and confidentiality would be compromised. In the case of participants who were interviewed about their current places of work, a challenge was in facilitating their openness to critiquing their own place of work. Only one of the participant's work peers knew he was participating in the study; the other four participants were not contacted through agency channels. Rather, they were recruited through mutually known third party associates.

To better minimize the risk or fear that participants felt, a possible alternative to recruiting participants would have been to contact South Asian social service organizations that are not strictly affiliated to any particular agency. This could mean contacting schools and approaching South Asian students and workers through that method. Another possible method would be to speak at South Asian social work events to

directly contact the workers without having to involve senior staff; in this way, anonymity is easily maintained.

Baines (2006) managed to ease and minimize the hesitancy of the participants to critique their place of employment by proposing an imaginary scenario. In terms of the outcome that it produced, which was its intended design, Baines's (2006) use of an imaginative question so that the workers would feel less defensive and guarded about their answers is intriguing and very interesting. Her study showed how theoretical questions, when given the opportunity to ask them, can be very effective in achieving the direct answers for which the researcher is looking.

I did not use many imaginative questions in my study, but simply stressed the anonymity of the study and the confidentiality of the information that participants disclosed. The one question that was imaginative asked the participants about which type of agency they would ideally like to work in, if financial factors or other limiting factors were not considered. Regardless, it was a limitation because some of the participants were still hesitant and cautious as to how much information they revealed. Therefore, accounting for this hesitancy, I considered and viewed the situation from the perspective of the participant. I consciously suppressed questions that would expose hypocrisy or pose embarrassing questions as fervently as I had initially hoped to do.

Another limitation of this study involved myself as an insider of the South Asian community. As was previously noted, many times during the interviews the participants

would follow up a statement with “...’you know how it is’”. As a South Asian, I have constantly experienced discrimination throughout my life and did know what they meant when they would say such statements. However, as a researcher, I should have asked them for further clarification because there could have been more to their statement of which I was not aware, or had not considered. As I did not further investigate their statements, I felt a sense of depth and richness was lost from the data.

Although there was great receptivity about a South Asian worker conducting research with other South Asian workers, some displayed hesitancy in taking part. The ones who agreed to participate were passionate and open in the interview process. They understood the need for their experiences to be documented, expressed enthusiasm in the research study and were excited to have the opportunity to contribute. Regardless, at times, some of the participants were still guarded or hesitant to openly critique their current places of work. Possible explanations could be that the risk of ever being identified by co-workers could cause the loss of their employment. Moreover, depending on the amount of time the participant had been employed at their current place of work, an individual can develop a sense of loyalty and protection about their workplace. In that case, the participant would be less receptive to openly critiquing their place of work. Possibly in future work, to allay participant’s apprehension in joining a study of this persuasion, it would be beneficial to take a route similar to the study by Baines (2006) and contextualize the questions in an imaginative background.

Appendix

**Appendix A: Letter of Information/Consent Form**



DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT**

**A Study of/about :** The effects of agency restructuring on South Asian social workers.

**Investigators:**

**Principal Investigator:**

Amanjit Kaur Takk, BSW  
Department of Social Work  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
**(905) 299-0830**  
E-mail: amanjit\_takk@Hotmail.com

**Faculty Supervisor:**

Mirna E. Carranza  
Department of Social Work  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
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**Purpose of the Study**

You are invited to take part in this study on the experiences of South Asian social workers in practice, both in a mainstream agency context and ethno-specific community agency context. I am hoping to learn about and explore the experiences of South Asian workers working within different practice contexts. I also hope to explore how agency policy that directs practice, specifically impacts the practice of South Asian workers. Lastly, I am doing this study as part of my master thesis in social work.

**Procedures involved in the Research**

If you should agree to participate in the voluntary study, I will be interviewing you one on one for about 60 minutes to 90 minutes at a place that works for you and is convenient for you. You will only be requested to meet with me for one interviewing session. With

your permission the interview will be audio recorded and I will also be taking handwritten notes. The interviews will be conducted in English.

You will be asked questions about your social work practice experience. Particularly I will be asking about your experiences given your working context (Mainstream/Ethno-specific). Example questions would be; What does your current role at your agency entail? In what ways do you think that your agency consciously works to accommodate South Asian clients? I will also be asking questions about your age, education, culture, and work experience.

### **Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:**

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable in any way. You may feel uncomfortable with questions relating to your work experience and practice experience. If this is the case you can also withdraw (stop taking part) at any time. Or another option is that you can bring up your concerns with me and we can discuss your hesitations and unease further. There is also a risk associated in critically discussing one's current place of work however I assure you that the results will be presented in a manner that minimizes the connection between sensitive information and a particular participant. Maintaining your anonymity and privacy is a top priority I will have when presenting the findings and results. You will have my contact information and I will be available and understanding of whatever option you decide if this is ever an issue.

### **Potential Benefits**

This research may not benefit you directly. However I hope to learn more about South Asian social workers in the social work setting and gain understanding of their approach and perspective on social work practice. I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will help us to better understand the unique perspective of South Asian social workers. This could therefore potentially help both South Asian workers and service users. This will also help those in the field in getting a better understanding the issues relevant to South Asian social workers.

### **Confidentiality**

All personal information and subsequent information gathered during the research study will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and privacy. Gathered information will be coded in such a way that only I will know the identity of the participants. If by chance someone besides myself were to see the data they would not be able to discover the identity of the participants as they will be filed under pseudonyms. The physical evidence will be stored in locked cabinet and the electronic research findings will be stored on a password protected computer. Agencies will not be privy to any information

to indicate if any of their staff members have agreed to participate in the study, they will simply be requested to inform their staff of the opportunity to participate in the study. Once the study has been completed the information for the study will be stored for a maximum of two years. After which it will be disposed in a secure fashion.

You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. No one but me will know whether you participated unless you choose to tell them. However, since the South Asian community is small and tight knit, others may be able to identify you on the basis of references you make. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me.

### **Legally Required Disclosure**

Although I will protect your privacy as outlined above, if the law requires it, I will have to reveal certain personal information (e.g., child abuse, safety risk of individual etc.). If legal authorities request the information you have provided, I may be required to reveal it. This concern is largely in response to information that may be disclosed about interactions between service users and the participants.

### **Participation and Withdrawal**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, you can decide to stop (withdraw), at any time, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

### **Information about the Study Results**

I expect to have this study completed by approximately August, 2011. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

### **Questions about the Study**

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

amanji\_takk@hotmail.com, or phone me at 905-299-0830

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support

E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

### CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by AmanjitKaurTakk of McMaster University.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

**Please place a check mark by your answer:**

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.

... Yes.

... No.

2. .... Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to this email address

---

or to this mailing address:

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....No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B: Email Recruitment Script**

**E-mail Subject line:** A study of South Asian social worker’s experiences

I am inviting you to participate in a research project on South Asian social workers involving 1 in-depth one on one interview. The interview is expected to take 60 to 90 minutes. As part of the Master of Social Work program in Social work at McMaster University, I am conducting a study to explore the experiences of South Asian social workers in different practice contexts. I am interested in exploring the unique experiences of South Asian social workers in practice. Specifically, how restructuring and changing policies effects South Asian workers. I have contacted you either because your information was given to me by a mutual associate or your name appeared on a list of persons at a agency that serves a significant South Asian community. If you personally do not wish to participate in the study please pass along the information to anyone who fits the requirements (found in the attached letter of information document) and would be interested in participating.

It is expected that this study will not pose any risks to you and you can withdraw at any time. There is a risk associated in critically discussing one’s current place of work however I assure you that the results will be presented in a manner that minimizes the connection between sensitive information and a particular participant. Maintaining your anonymity and privacy is a top priority I will have when presenting the findings and results. I have attached a copy of a letter of information about the study that provides full details. This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

c/o Office of Research Services

E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

I would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration. After a week, I will send you a one-time follow-up reminder.

**Amanjit Kaur Takk,**

Masters Candidate in Social Work

Department of Social Work

McMaster University,

Hamilton Ontario

Tel: 905-299-0830

amanjit\_takk@hotmail.com

**Appendix C: Recruitment Poster**



**Department of Social Work**

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON *The Experiences of South Asian social workers***

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of  
*The effects of agency restructuring on South Asian social workers*

You would be asked to: *Participate in a qualitative one on one interview*

Your participation would involve *1* session,  
each of which is approximately *45 - 60 minutes*.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,  
please contact:

*Amanjit Kaur Takk*

*Department of Social Work*

*905-299-0830 or*

*Email: amanjit\_takk@hotmail.com*

**This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance  
through, McMaster Research Ethics Board.**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Call 905-299-0830 or email:<br>amanjit_takk@hotmail.com |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**Appendix D: Email Recruitment Script (Follow Up)**

**E-mail Subject line:** A study of South Asian social worker's experiences

Hello Again,

I am just sending out a reminder about my study, as promised, about the experiences of South Asian social workers.

To reiterate I am inviting you to participate in a research project on South Asian social workers involving 1-2 in-depth individual interviews. The interviews are expected to take 60 to 90 minutes. As part of the Master of Social Work program in Social work at McMaster University, I am conducting a study to explore the experiences of South Asian social workers in different practice contexts. I am interested in exploring the unique experiences of South Asian social workers in practice. Specifically, how restructuring and changing policies effects South Asian workers. I have contacted you either because your information was given to me by a mutual associate or your name appeared on a list of persons at a agency that serves a significant South Asian community. If you personally do not wish to participate in the study please pass along the information to anyone who fits the requirements (found in the attached letter of information document) and would be interested in participating.

It is expected that this study will not pose any risks to you and you can withdraw at any time. I have attached a copy of a letter of information about the study that provides full details. This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

c/o Office of Research Services

E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

Thank you again for taking the time to read this and consider my research project.

**Amanjit Kaur Takk,**

Masters Candidate in Social Work

Department of Social Work

McMaster University,

Hamilton Ontario

Tel: 905-299-0830

amanjit\_takk@hotmail.com

## **Appendix E: Interview Guide**

### **A Study of the Effects of Agency Restructuring on South Asian Social Workers**

**Amanjit Kaur Takk, (Master of Social Work Candidate)**

**(Department of Social Work – McMaster University)**

**Information about these interview questions:** This gives you an idea about what I would like to learn about from the experiences of South Asian social workers. Interviews will be one-to-one and will be open-ended (not just “yes or no” answers). Because of this, the exact wording may change a little. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand what you told me or if I need more information when we are talking such as: “*So, you are saying that ...?*”), to get more information (“*Please tell me more?*”), or to learn what you think or feel about something (“*Why do you think that is...?*”).

#### **1) Information about you: Could you please tell me about yourself?**

- **Your age?**
- **Place of Birth?**
- **How do you self identify culturally? Religiously/Spiritually?**

#### **2) What are your academic social work qualifications?**

- **If done outside of Canada, what did that process entail (Length of program, mandate of program etc.) When did you immigrate to Canada? Reason(s) for coming to Canada?**

#### **3) Please tell me about your social work experience and, if applicable, other work experience.**

**Have you worked more at mainstream agencies, ethno-specific agencies, or an equal mix of both?**

#### **4) Please tell me a little about your current work and role as a social worker.**

#### **5) How significant of a South Asian population does your agency serve?**

#### **6) Is the diversity of the service user population reflected in the staff/volunteers?**

- 7) **Are there any issues that you feel are specific to working with South Asian service users? Yes [ ] No [ ]. Please tell me more about why you think that?**
- **If at a mainstream agency, are South Asian service users linked with South Asian workers? Yes [ ] No [ ] Please tell me more about you think that is.**
- 8) **In what ways have you observed restructuring and changes in your agency that have changed the way that you practice? Other changes that non-directly impacted practice?**
- 8a) **In what ways have these changes positively changed the way you practice? Have there been negative consequences of these changes?**
- 8b) **Do you think that these changes have specific effects on South Asian workers that are not as relevant to non-South Asian workers?**
- 9) **What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of an ethno-specific agency targeting South Asians (In terms of the social worker/service user relationship, agency/service user community relationship)?**
- 10) **What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of a mainstream agency working with South Asians (In terms of the social worker/service user relationship, agency/service user community relationship)?**
- 11) **Considering your current (mainstream or ethno-specific) place of work, what factors impacted your decision to work at this type of agency as opposed to a mainstream or ethno-specific agency?**
- 12) **Is there something important I forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know about your experience?**

**END**

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