

**KINSHIP SERVICES:
GRANDMA'S PINK FUZZY SLIPPERS**

Kinship Services: Grandma's Pink Fuzzy Slippers

By

Sheila Penney, B.A., B.S.W.

A Research Study

Submitted to the School of Social Work

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Masters of Social Work

McMaster University

2012

**MASTERS OF SOCIAL WORK:
(2012)**

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Kinship Services: Grandma's Pink Fuzzy Slippers

AUTHOR: Sheila Penney
B.A. (University of Prince Edward Island)
B.S.W. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Sheila Sammon

NUMBER OF PAGES: 94

ABSTRACT

The landscape of Child Welfare in Ontario has changed over the past several years. One area of significant change is that increasingly children are placed with relatives (kin) when it has been determined that they cannot be safely cared for by a parent or guardian. This change was brought about by new legislation and with it came a number of standards and processes to guide front line workers work with kin.

The purpose of this research study was to gain a better understanding of how this change impacted front line workers. The research focused on what influenced the work and considered individual, institutional and systemic factors. It was undertaken in order to gain a clearer appreciation of the successes and challenges in working with kinship caregivers.

Five child welfare workers who work directly with kinship services caregivers were interviewed. Qualitative research methods were utilized so that participants could share the direct experience of their work. This research used a Critical and Interpretive social science framework to gain a better understanding of the systemic and societal influences that guide the work.

The findings suggest that while this work is highly regarded and valued by the participants, they struggle with their role in supporting and advocating for kin. On one hand, they support kin but on the other, they present as worried about such care. They question what is behind the Ministry Of Children and Youth Services movement to greater consideration of kin. They bring forward very important concerns about inequities in the distribution of resources to support children who are not able to live with their parents or guardians.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My journey through my studies and thesis completion was not a solo event. There were many important people along the way who deserve acknowledgement in a much more eloquent way than I am sure I will deliver.

Let me begin by thanking my research advisor, Sheila Sammon for her unwavering encouragement, she never gave up on me and was there always to support, guide and give advice. She helped me keep things in perspective and at times probably learned more about me than she bargained for.

Thank you to the grandma in her pink fuzzy slippers. This grandma is the reason for my passion and desire to better understand the work that gets carried out with kinship caregivers. The strength, love and commitment of this grandma is something I will never forget.

A special thanks to the participants of this study, without their dedication and desire to see great work, I would not have gained the valuable knowledge of their experiences. They went above and beyond and are true agents of social change.

I would like to thank my parents for instilling in me that all is achievable if you put your mind to it and feel it is worth doing. You have been there for me from day one and have always in your own way, with your simple words, encouraged me to be the best I could be.

To my mother in law, who has been there on so many occasions to make sure the house did not fall apart, that we had food to eat and that my dear son Elijah was cared for during the times that I was not always fully available. You are an angel.

A special thanks to my loving husband Troy, who has stood by me through it all. He has never given up on me even when I had given up on myself. He was the voice of reason, the one who kept gently pushing me forward. The one who was in tune with my feelings and always knew the right words to say. Thank you for the many neck rubs as I sat at the computer. Thank you for being such a loving father to Elijah, it was so much easier knowing he had you during the moments I could not spend with him.

My dear Elijah. I started this journey before being blessed with your presence in our family. You were a big part of why it has taken me so long to finish this work but I would not have had it any other way. Just watching you grow has given me such joy and energy. You are my inspiration, I have learned more in the four short years we have had you than I ever could have imagined. I am sorry that there were times I could not be there in the way I would have wanted but remember you are my priority, I love you. Thank you for being such a great boy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Abstract..... | iv |
| Acknowledgements..... | v |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Literature Review..... | 4 |
| History of Kinship Care in Ontario Child Welfare..... | 4 |
| Kinship Care versus Kinship Service..... | 8 |
| Strengths and Challenges of Kinship Service..... | 13 |
| Methodology..... | 17 |
| Design..... | 17 |
| Recruitment and Sample..... | 19 |
| Ethical Considerations..... | 21 |
| Data Collection..... | 23 |
| Data Analysis..... | 24 |
| Study Limitations..... | 25 |
| Findings..... | 27 |
| The Value of Kin..... | 29 |
| Ambivalence..... | 43 |
| Unjust Treatment..... | 50 |
| Discussion..... | 60 |
| The Value of Kin..... | 63 |
| Ambivalence..... | 68 |
| Unjust Treatment..... | 73 |
| Implications for Practice..... | 76 |
| Directions for Future Research..... | 80 |
| Conclusion..... | 81 |
| References..... | 83 |
| Appendix | |
| Request for Assistance and Support..... | 89 |
| Invitation to Participate..... | 90 |
| Letter of Information and Consent..... | 91 |
| Interview Guide..... | 94 |

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of Child Welfare in Ontario has been changing over the past several years. One area of significant change is that increasingly children are placed with community or relatives (kin) when it has been determined that they cannot be safely cared for by their parent or guardian. In order to highlight just how significant the changes in this regard have been, I feel compelled to share a personal experience.

Let's go back to 1995, when I began my social work career as a front line protection worker with the Children's Aid Society of Hamilton. I was sent out on what was thought to be a pretty straightforward investigation. Upon arriving at the home, I quickly discovered that this was no routine investigation but rather a situation that would warrant removal of the children from the home. While awaiting backup from a colleague to assist with transporting the six children to a foster home, the grandmother arrived in her fuzzy pink slippers to make claim on her grandchildren, by offering them a safe place until such time the parents were able to address the concerns of the agency.

Being a new worker, I felt a sense of relief. Relief that I would not have to place all of these children into care, relief that the parents would be less angry with me, relief that the parents and children did in fact have some supports who could help out, relief that I may not have to attend court, relief that the grandmother would be the person who would be responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the children, relief that the children would not be upset by having to

leave their family to go live with strangers and relief that the children would be with a family member who loved and cared for them. With such relief also came a worry. What if the grandmother allowed the children to return to an unsafe situation; what if the grandmother’s home was no safer than the home the children were leaving, what if grandmother could not manage all six children, what if she allowed the parent who might harm or abuse the children contact with the children and what if further harm came to these children while in the grandmother’s care?

Regardless of my feelings, after calling back to the agency to request a record check on the grandmother, (not a ministry requirement at the time, rather an agency practice) grandma left that evening, walking three blocks to her home with her six grandchildren in tow. The work from that point on was not focused around the grandmother and her care of the children but rather with the parents to address the areas of concern in order to have the children returned to their care. The care and responsibility of the children was now left in the hands of the grandmother with little to no direct child welfare involvement and certainly no standards or direction for what the work with the grandmother should look like.

Today, the same situation, with the same children, the same grandmother would be met with a different approach, different standards, different expectations, and different follow up. Before allowing the grandmother to leave with the children, the front line worker would have to complete an initial assessment, which would include child welfare and police checks, home safety

checks and interviews with the kin and the children who may be placed in their care. Depending on the agency conducting the assessment, a number of other expectations may also be required as each agency can have slightly different practices. A file would also be opened under the grandmothers’ name in order to allow for ongoing work to occur with the grandmother, the children and any other adult residing in the home.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore front line protection workers’ perspectives about their work with “kinship service families”. Kinship service caregivers provide care for children who are involved with child welfare and unable to remain in their own homes. I was curious about what individual, institutional and systemic values and ideas influenced front line work with kin. In order to do so let me begin by explaining what “kinship” in child welfare in Ontario is and how it evolved to where it is today. I will also address who these caregivers are and what the research tells us about the strengths and challenges of such placements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Kinship Care in Ontario Child Welfare

In 2002, a formal review of the child welfare system in Ontario was undertaken. The results of which highlighted a number of areas for consideration with specific recommendations in the area of outcomes, integration, accountability, efficiency and sustainability. The evaluation concluded that the system, as it stood, was not sustainable without making changes to the funding framework, government policy and the Children’s Aid Societies’ approaches to service delivery (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2005). As a result, in April 2004 the Child Welfare Secretariat was established, in consultation with members from the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies, Child Welfare Agencies and the Association of Native Child and Family Service Agencies of Ontario. The Secretariat was assigned the responsibility of addressing key aspects of the evaluation (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2005). It was from this work that the current Child Welfare Transformation agenda was developed.

Prior to Child Welfare Transformation, Child Welfare Reform, a system focused on risk and the need to rescue children, lead to a policing approach in child welfare. Political and economic conditions were noted as contributing to an emphasis on and management of risk in child welfare (Beck, 1992; Schwabe, 2004; Knoke & Trochme, 2005). One of the consequences of a risk focused approach was a significant increase in the number of children placed in foster care. During Child Welfare Reform, kin were not a primary focus when children

required a safe alternative to family; traditional foster care was the preferred and most often used safety plan for vulnerable children. Another consequence of Reform was the high cost of sustaining the child welfare system, with a significant percentage of the spending resulting from children requiring traditional foster placement.

The goal of the Transformation agenda was to ensure an effective, sustainable system that protects children at risk of maltreatment and improves their quality of life (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2005). The Transformation agenda has seven key elements, two of which have particular relevance to the area of kinship care. The two elements are (1) a broader range of placement options for children to support permanency planning and (2) a sustainable funding model (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2005, pg.6). Although kinship care is only identified in the former, I suggest that although not identified by the Ministry, it is also an important contributing aspect of the later. Dumbrill notes that in order to manage the high cost of child welfare spending as well to promote inclusion of families, “Transformation” was at the forefront of child welfare (2006).

Kin have been documented as caring for children for centuries as far back as medieval Europe (Hegar & Scannapieco, 1995). It is a system of caring that has always existed, however with the attention it is currently receiving in child welfare, one might assume that it is a new idea. It is not a new concept in Ontario or in child welfare for that matter, but has only received attention in the protection

arena in Ontario over the past several years, making its debut in Ontario legislation with Child Welfare Transformation in 2005. Prior to Transformation, child welfare agencies placed very few children with kin. If children were placed with kin it was either through an informal process with little government interference or guidance around what was expected, or through a licensing process where kin had to meet all of the same expectations as a licensed foster home. Since Transformation there has been a significant movement towards placing children in kin homes. Along with this movement came new standards, regulations and funding policies, thus increasing the role and responsibility of child welfare in assessing and managing such care.

Given the infancy of kinship care in Ontario, the Child Welfare Secretariat drew on research from North America for its development (Ontario Child Welfare Secretariat, 2006). Kinship has been recognized and written about in US Child Welfare since the early 1980's. In the mid to late 1980's there was a significant increase in the number of children placed in kinship homes in the United States, estimating that by 2002 there were well over 300,000 children residing with kin (Geen & Berkely, 2002). This increase is attributed to the number of children requiring out of home care and the decline in non-relative foster parents (Swan & Sylvester, 2005, Glesson, 1995, Leschied et al., 2007). This is certainly a trend witnessed in Ontario over the past several years with a steady increase of children coming into the care of Children's Aid Societies (CASs), with a 19% increase from March 2001- March 2005 (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies,

pg. 5). Such an increase was also noted across Canada, for example, there was a noted 67% increase in children admitted to care in Alberta from 1994-1999, during the same period in British Columbia the children in care population increased by 50% (Fallon, et al, 2003, pg.1).

The 2003 Ontario Incident Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect highlights that, of the children having to be placed in alternative settings as a result of substantiated abuse or neglect, 6% were placed in child welfare placements whereas 4% were placed with kin under an informal arrangement (2003). These numbers are staggering as the number of children being cared for by informal kin arrangements (meaning the child is involved with child welfare but is not legally in the care of child welfare) almost equals the number of children who are being cared for by the child welfare system. The Ontario Permanency Survey conducted by the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies, obtained responses from 50 Ontario child welfare agencies and found that between April 1, 2009 and March 31, 2010, there were 2, 528 children placed in kinship service homes (2009-2010). It is quite glaring that without the support of kinship service caregivers the government would have to spend millions (approximately \$28,604,320.00) to support these children in a formal foster care setting; this would have huge implications for the desired sustainable budget. As well, there could be increased numbers of children drifting through the foster care system with no sense of family connection. That being said, the movement towards kin has shifted children from the foster care system (a system with built

in supports) to the kinship service system (a system with very few formalized supports). Kin service families have numerous struggles and, given the limited resources available, front line child protection workers struggle in supporting them. One might wonder what it would mean if these kin were not available to care for these children? These children would likely be placed in traditional foster care setting or much more expensive specialized treatment homes. This would no doubt have an impact on the sustainability of the budget.

Kinship Care versus Kinship Service

Children placed in kinship care homes have “in care” status and are legally placed in the care of child welfare through the courts or on consent of the parent. These homes are similar to traditional foster homes, in that they must meet the same licensing requirements and receive all the same supports. Kinship service homes care for children who are not officially in the care of the province and whose parents have agreed to allow kin to care for their children, or a supervision order has been made through the courts placing the child with kin. This is usually done to avoid placement in a traditional foster home, either way the family and children still have child welfare involvement but the children do not have “in care” status.

In February 2006, the Ministry implemented specific guidelines for kinship service placements. There was a clear delineation between kinship care homes and kinship service homes. As noted above, in order for kin

to be considered a kinship care home, they have to meet the same licensing regulations as a traditional foster home, (for example; no smoking in the home, able to communicate with the licensing agency, certain space requirements in terms of sleeping environment and no prior verified child protection concerns relating to their own children etc.) If they meet the licensing requirements, they would be considered a kinship care home and afforded the same resources as a foster home. On the other hand, kinship service caregivers either fail to meet the fostering licensing requirements or, for other reasons, are not assessed as a kinship care home. This may be because they were not made aware of this option by their worker or they may have decided against becoming a kinship care /foster home to avoid the child having “in care” status. As well kin may not want to deal with the perceived invasiveness of having child welfare involved in their lives. Families often have a sense of filial responsibility and therefore may find it difficult to admit or accept that they would require financial support to care for a child. There may also be pressure from the child’s parent(s) to avoid a kinship care placement in order to remain out of court and “voluntarily” involved with child welfare.

For the purpose of this research the focus will be specific to Child Protection Workers who work directly with kinship service families. These workers are connected to families who care for children who cannot remain in the care of their primary caregiver but are placed in an “out-of-care” arrangement with kin. They are not afforded the status of, or the resources available to “kin

care / foster families”. Depending on the structure of kinship service within the agency these workers might work solely with kin or provide service to both kin and the parents of the child.

The Ministry presented specific regulations regarding the approval of kinship service homes and noted that support to kinship service homes would be included in the “block two funding”, funding that was intended to support non-protection child welfare related activity. In the late summer of 2006, the ministry requested agencies to provide a statistical report capturing the number of kinship service homes in order for block two funding to be adjusted accordingly.

On October 24, 2006 after receiving kinship service numbers from Ontario child welfare agencies, the ministry called a meeting with child welfare executive directors. It was at this meeting that news came of a substantial decrease in block two funding, the funding that among other things was meant to support kinship services (November 6, 2006). This came as a significant disappointment to those working in the field and would significantly impact child welfare workers, child welfare agencies and more importantly the kinship service families and children for whom they care.

Following the implementation of the kinship services, as a member of the provincial kinship service group, I was witness to many conversations about how child welfare agencies and workers struggled to meet the increasing needs of kinship service families. Given the lack of financial supports workers were advocating for kin with Ontario Works in order to secure Temporary Care

Allowance, the only formalized, financial support available. As well workers were the only formalized emotional support for kin who were often getting caught in the dynamics of relationships between kin and parents. Another challenge highlighted through this kinship group was the high needs of the children placed in kin homes and supporting kin to access necessary resources to meet their needs. There was concern across the field over how to support these families and children and where that support would come from. Goodman (2010) conducted a provincial survey regarding the type of services provided to kinship service caregivers. This study identified that the main support child welfare provided was front-line worker support (96%), there was also mention of some monetary support such as the occasional food voucher or one-time necessary purchases. The report also concluded that the most needed but not available support for kin was with respect to money for food, gas and daily living. As noted by Gladstone et al. grandparents indicated that a source of tension for them was the lack of money available to support them in caring for their grandchildren, they felt frustrated that child welfare could be more helpful in providing financial support (Gladstone, Brown & Fitzgerald (2009). Since the implementation of “formal” kinship service, there has been no change in the support available and agencies and front line workers continue to struggle in supporting these families.

On November 24, 2006 the ministry forwarded a list of standards regarding kinship service homes. One section of the standards addressed the issue

of resources. The opening statement of the document states that the “Ministry of Children and Youth Services anticipates that most if not all of a kinship service family’s ongoing needs will ultimately be met through existing community services and programs” (Ontario Child Welfare Secretariat, 2006, pg. 1). There appeared to be little regard for the increased financial burden placed on kin and the reality that it would be a challenge if not impossible for kin to meet the needs of these children without the offering of formal supports. The statement also assumes that “existing community services and programs” do in reality exist, and have the resources to deliver services to kin-service families. Brodie notes that at the heart of public management is a shift from collective values towards a notion of family and individual responsibility (Brodie, 1999). In this way it becomes not a choice for many kin but rather a responsibility that has been thrust upon them in the most subtle but powerful way. It is what has been socially constructed as “family responsibility” and to fail to follow through with caring for a family member, would be seen as an individual weakness. Many feel no matter what their situation, it is the responsibility of family to care for children within that family unit. Many who are approached by a child welfare agency feel a sense of responsibility even if it means jeopardizing their own existence. To say no or to ask for supports is beyond what many would feel is acceptable. Shifting responsibility for well-being to individuals, families and communities ignores the inherent inequalities among social structures (Moffatt, 1999).

To expect that kin will receive the needed support from the community is irresponsible given the lengthy waiting lists and lack of resources experienced by the majority of community services and partners. By implementing the standards, the ministry increased the expectations on child welfare workers to become more involved in assessing the suitability of kinship service caregivers as well working with such caregivers once approved, yet failed to provide the supports necessary to effectively support them. The shift from government responsibility to family obligation has had a direct impact on kinship service families, the children for whom they care and the front line child welfare workers who are charged with providing service to these individuals.

Strengths and Challenges of Kinship Service

Kinship care is presented in child welfare Transformation as one possibility for permanency of children who are not able to remain in the care of their primary caregiver. Child Welfare Transformation highlights a need to focus on a range of placement options to support more effective permanency for children (Child Welfare Transformation). There is debate about the use of kin for placement of children when they are unable to remain in the care of their parent(s), there are those who argue it is the best option and those who are cautious.

There is a significant body of research which highlights the importance of kinship placements in maintaining family connection, creating a sense of

belonging and decreasing the risk of psychological trauma (Cuddeback, 2004; Gough, 2002; Schwartz, 2002). Children residing with kin tend to experience longer placement stability compared to children in traditional foster care who tend to experience several moves (Berrick et al., 1994). Peters suggest that advantages of kinship placements are seen as

1. Supporting closer relationship- as children placed with kin are more likely to continue having relationship with their family members that may otherwise be interrupted.
2. Children have fewer feelings of abandonment and rejection, given they are still connected with their family and often have ongoing access to the parent.
3. When supported in the family unit children have an increased ability to mourn losses, as they have the support of their family in doing so.
4. When children remain in kin situations they experience fewer stigmas and have an increased sense of family connection. They are not living with strangers and others do not treat them differently. Children who are placed with kin continue significant family relationships (Peters).

As mentioned above the importance of family connections has been researched and noted in terms of why this is a viable option for children who cannot safely remain with their primary caregiver. That being said, there is also a significant body of research that brings forward a number of challenges or cautions with such care arrangements. “Dysfunctional” family dynamics is one such challenge for all those involved, including the parent(s), kin, children and

child welfare workers. This ties into the notion that parents who are neglectful or abusive have often experienced difficult childhood situations (Crouch et al., 2001, Bower-Russa et al. 2001 & Cort et al. 2011). As well that the relation between the protection parent and family may be strained and difficult to manage. Peters (2005) completed a study with child welfare workers and found that one of the most difficult issues they faced is triangulation, being caught between parents and kin. They also described feelings of mistrust as a result of numerous allegations going back and forth.

Another area of challenge is the demographics of those who end up in care giving situations. Much of the research regarding kinship caregivers, highlight the fact that these caregivers are typically female (grandmothers) and are often more disadvantaged than non-relative caregivers. They are poorer, older, single, from marginalized groups, less educated, and on social assistance (Swann & Sylvester, 2005; Ingram, 1996; Schwartz, 2002; Gleeson 1995; Burke & Schmidt, 2009; Ehrle & Geen 2002). Kinship service caregivers are also limited in the supports they receive in comparison to traditional foster caregivers. Testa and Shook (2002) argue that in order to enhance placement stability kinship caregivers need to receive the necessary supports (Geen & Berrick, 2002). Kinship caregivers often care for difficult-to-place children, enabling governments to avoid incurring the high costs of institutional care (Schwartz, 2002, pg. 16).

Many kin who end up caring for these children will not meet the standards to become a kinship care home and as a result have significantly fewer resources

available to them. The kinship service provider is left with limited resources to manage the often complicated dynamics in the family, as well the challenging needs of the child. Gourdine (cited in Crewe and Wilson, 2007, p. 4) suggests that children are often placed in kin households that are already burdened with financial hardships and that such added financial and emotional strain can negatively impair the physical and mental health of individuals and families.

There is also worry by child welfare workers, that kin caregivers contributed in some way to the “dysfunction of the parent” and that they may not be trusted to care for children. Front line workers want to ensure they are not moving a child from one harmful situation to another. Jay Peters (2004) examined the attitudes and thoughts of 63 child welfare workers during a kinship foster care training. Peters found that the frequent allegations made by family members towards the kin provider impacted the child welfare workers’ ability to trust and increased worry that kin could not adequately protect the child. Chapman, Wells and Johnson (cited in Peters, 2005) also note the idea of mistrust, in that front line workers stated directly their concerns around children in kinship settings being at increased risk of being re-abused due to the likelihood of being in contact with their abuser. In a 1999 survey of 533 child welfare workers, Berrick, Needell and Barth (cited in Peters, 2004) found that child welfare workers noted working with kin to be more challenging than traditional foster caregivers as well that they worried about the kin’s ability to set boundaries with the abusive family member, were unable to meet the child’s needs and were angry or resentful of the child. A

study conducted by Lorkovich et al. on child welfare professionals’ attitude towards kinship caregivers found that many of the child welfare professionals posited the question that if grandparents were responsible for creating or participating in the problematic behavior of the abusive parent, why should they be afforded the opportunity to raise another generation of children (Lorkovich et al, 2004).

METHODOLOGY

Design

This is a qualitative study which explored front line child protection workers experience in working with kinship service families. The focus of the research was on what informs their work from an individual, institutional and systemic perspective. Qualitative research allows one the opportunity to see things through the lens of those directly involved, in hopes of understanding the participants’ individual experience. This type of research recognizes that in order to fully understand a particular phenomenon or process you must understand it from those who experience it directly (O’Connor and O’Neil, 2000). Through this approach, themes and meaning can be pulled from information gathered during an open ended interview (Kreuger and Neuman, 2006). The front line protection workers’ descriptions of their experiences formed the basis of the data for this study and assisted with an understanding of what it is like to work with kinship service families. It is my hope that the results will be a building block for future

work of front line protection workers. Interpretive and critical social science framework will be utilized in this qualitative study to examine the individual experiences and to further explore or uncover broader themes or meaning that have been attributed to such experiences including from a systemic level. Interpretive Social Science tends to focus on the value of the individual and does not consider societal value (Neysmith, 1995). This study is guided by data collected from the personal experience of front line child protection workers, it was necessary to hear their experience in order to gain knowledge about their work with kin families. Critical Social Science on the other hand, goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structure in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves (Neuman, 1997). The direct, honest, self-reflective experience of front line child protection workers has provided a base for exploring and uncovering what is going well and what needs some attention in the world of child welfare kinship services, not simply by understanding the perception of the worker, but also understanding how their views and experiences are formed and impacted by other systems around them, Front line workers' experiences are shaped by and reflects what is currently happening socially, politically and economically The intent of the research was not only to bring to light the real life work of front-line protection workers in working with kinship service families but also to increase clarity about what impacts such work. The study was designed to explore how their work is influenced by the workers own values and experiences, the agency in which they

work, the ministry and the societal context in which they practice. Workers thoughts and opinions are not formed in a bubble; they are influenced by the society around them, by their professional training, agency culture, social and political environment. It is necessary to understand what impacts the work that gets carried out in child welfare. It was my hope that through such discourse we would gain a better understanding, as presented by the participants, of the needs of kinship service families and the children they care for. With clarity and awareness there is greater likelihood that change can occur for the betterment of all involved in this work.

Recruitment/Sample

My recruitment process began by determining which child welfare agencies in Ontario I would approach to seek participants for such a study. The criteria for the participants was specific in that they had to have worked in child welfare prior to the implementation of kinship service standards and they had to currently work in some capacity with kinship service families either completing assessments and/or providing ongoing supports. In some agencies with specialized kinship service teams, only a small number of individuals would meet the criteria. As a result, in order to maintain confidentiality as well, find willing participants, I decided to approach a large number of child welfare agencies. That being said, I was also aware of my own limitations with travel, a full time work schedule and a husband and small child at home. Based on the above issues I

narrowed my search to several agencies within an hour to an hour and a half of my residence. Twelve agencies in total were contacted.

I emailed service directors requesting their assistance and support in reaching out to workers in their agencies (Appendix A); the email included an electronic copy of my Invitation to participate (Appendix B). I asked them to forward on to all workers within their agency who fit the participant criteria as outlined. The invitation requested that any potential interested participants contact me directly either by telephone or email. The selection process implemented for this study is known as “purposive sampling” (Kreuger and Neuman, 2006, p.209) in that, recruitment continues until you reach your desired number of participants. These individuals were purposely selected based on their knowledge of working with kinship service caregivers and the knowledge they could provide in shedding light on this subject area. The intent of purposeful sampling is selecting individuals that maximize what you are hoping to understand (Strauss & Corbin, in Simpson and Lawrence-Webb (2009) 1998). Participants were chosen based on their knowledge of or experience with the subject matter being studied and the belief that they had something meaningful to contribute. As participants voiced an interest they were provided with an electronic Letter of Information/Consent (Appendix C), as well an interview guide (Appendix D).

Five participants in total were secured and engaged in this study, one male and four females. They each had over 10 years of child welfare experience, with a

range of experience in various service areas and having worked in the field pre and post the implementation of the kinship service standards.

Ethical Considerations

Protecting the confidentiality of the participants was of utmost importance. This was especially concerning with this particular study, because many agencies have a small number of individuals working with kinship service families. As a result I approached a large number of agencies and elected to avoid naming the agencies to increase the likelihood of maintaining anonymity of the participants. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed, the tapes and transcripts were maintained in a secure way, and as well I was the only person aware of who participated in the study.

My position as a manager in a child welfare agency is also an ethical issue to consider. Exploring the insider/outsider role is something that required a great deal of thought especially considering the potential impact on the participants and the study itself. Naraygan noted in Lasala, that to some degree, all researchers are both insiders and outsiders, (Lasala, 2003), as well that the researcher must acknowledge the ways in which one is the same and different (Lasala, 2003). Throughout this research I engaged in a self-reflection process engaging in conversations with my thesis advisor, colleagues and other meaningful people in my life. I also kept notes of any areas where I felt I may be making a judgment at which point I would go back and explore other possibilities to try to ensure my

own formed biases, values and ideas were not imposed on the participants or not coming through in the data analysis. Given my role as a Manager in Family Services as well member of the Provincial Kinship Service Committee I have had a great deal of exposure to conversations regarding kinship service work, how it impacts front-line workers, families, children and agencies. I also have a nephew who was raised by my parents and realize such professional and personal experiences inform how I view this subject matter. It was important for me to be up front with the participants to advise them of my position within a child welfare agency, I ensured them that there was much to learn about the world of kinship services and although I am a manager, I have never worked directly with kinship service families under the new legislation with the new standards and that they in fact were the experts in this area. I advised them that the purpose was to understand from their perspective what the work looks like and how they manage it on a day to day basis. Participants may have felt due to my position that I would judge them, their agency or in some way impact their career. It was my hope that through this type of conversation the participants would feel comfortable in sharing in an honest way and would elevate some of their potential worries. The participants appeared to be comfortable in sharing even in light of my inherent position of power given my role as manager in another child welfare agency. It is difficult to say if they were completely honest however knowing that they had the knowledge specific to kinship service work may have contributed to them feeling that they really did have something to share that would be of value.

Data Collection:

Data for this study were collected by conducting private interviews, through a semi- structured interview process. The interview guide (Appendix D) was forwarded to the participants prior to the interview in order to allow them some time to start thinking about the type of information I was hoping to gather. The participants were informed that this set of questions was just a guide and our discussion could go in many possible directions. The guide was used to provide some structure to the interview and not intended to be used in the strictest sense.

The interviews occurred at a location selected by the participants. All of the participants but one decided to have the interview occur at their place of work. The other interview occurred at my place of work. The interviews ranged from 1 ½ to 2 hours in duration. Prior to starting the interviews, the consent process was reviewed and signed consent was obtained from all participants, to interview them as well audio tape the conversation and later have the audio tapes transcribed.

All of the interviews began with an overview of the research study as well an introduction of me and why the study was of interest to me. It was important and necessary to use a semi structured, open ended approach to the questioning in an attempt to avoid imposing what I wanted or expected to hear. Such an approach allowed the participants to speak openly about their experience and move the interview in a variety of places. I was also in tune with what was being said to avoid making inferences based on my own assumptions, when something

was not clear I did not assume I knew the answer but rather asked for clarification.

Data Analysis:

The data were analyzed by using a process known as ‘constant comparative method’, a process where data is repeatedly reviewed and themes or categories are identified by key words, ideas or phrases, the process continues throughout the review of the data until no new themes or categories emerge (Charmaz, 2003). The data analysis process began at the initial interview in that ideas and key words were noted; this process continued with the following interview which occurred only a few days later, similar themes began to emerge. These themes were documented and the process continued with the following interviews. Following all five interviews, the audio tapes were transcribed. The transcriptions were then reviewed several times at which point other themes began to surface; these themes or categories were noted. This process later followed with a line by line coding, in that the major themes were written on separate pieces of paper and statements, words or ideas were captured and placed on the individual piece of paper under the major theme. This resulted in three major themes that were common to the majority of the participants.

Study Limitations:

Several limitations were present in this study. Several child welfare agencies were approached however the five participants were representative of only two agencies. Agencies that specifically provide services to the native population or have native specific programs were not represented in this study. This is a concerning limitation, given there are specific guidelines for working with native families/communities as it relates to kinship otherwise known as customary care. Understanding what this work looks like from first nations cultural perspectives is important work and something that deserves and requires close attention.

The power position I hold over the participants was also a limitation. As much as I tried to ensure their information would be held in confidence, that they would not be identified and would not be judged, I worry that the potential to say what they believed I wanted them to say may have been present. Additionally, their ability to be completely honest may have been impacted, and may have contributed to the theme of ambivalence that emerged.

I was both an insider and an outsider in this research. As discussed earlier due to my role within a child welfare agency, as well involvement with the provincial kinship service committee, I have a great deal of knowledge about kinship service yet I have never directly worked with a kinship family (at least not under the current formalized system with the ministry standards and expectations). Given my knowledge, I was able to formulate questions and guide

the interview in a way that was meaningful to the research, something I may not have been able to do without such knowledge/exposure. Even with significant reflection and self- insight, particular information may have been missed or biases brought forward. A member checking process may have been beneficial to ensure what was interpreted was in fact what the participant meant.

My role as a manager within a child welfare organization has also created some tensions, in terms of feeling vulnerable about what questions I explored and my wording of this thesis. I play a key role within my organization directing and supporting the work of front line workers with kin. The study brought to light ethical considerations and evoked significant emotion not only in the participants but also myself. It was essential that I maintained a balanced approach to this research and not allow my own views to impact on the integrity of the research.

The research findings are focused around kin however the data were collected from front line child protection workers and their experience of working with kin. It would have been ideal to have had the opportunity to include the voice of kin in this study. Their direct experience and work with child welfare is a vital part that must be understood in order to do good work in this area.

This study explored the experience of a small group of kinship service workers from a qualitative perspective; as such it is not intended to be reflective of the experience of other kinship service workers or to be the definite truth but rather to provide a greater understanding of their experience in working with kinship service caregivers

Any study comes with limitations this is not to say that the study is any less meaningful or accurate. This study will contribute to Canadian research as it relates to formalized child welfare kinship care giving, as well provides a clear picture of the participants’ experiences and will hopefully lead to some discourse around how to better work with and support kinship service families and the front line workers.

FINDINGS

The interviews of the five participants revealed three main themes that may assist in understanding their experience of working with kinship service families.

The first theme is “value”, how participants themselves value kin, and how they felt kin were valued from an agency and a ministry level. The participants highlighted how they felt placement with kin was the best option for children who could not remain living with their parent or guardian. Generally they thought that the agencies in which they work held the same beliefs. They did question the Government’s motive in encouraging placements with relatives, suggesting that the ministry is more worried about saving money than they are with actually supporting kin and the children they care for.

The second theme is ambivalence toward kin caregivers. The participants saw both advantages and worries when, placing children with kin. This theme

reflects the struggles workers face when determining placement and their ongoing work with kin. The participants bring to light their desire to work with kin but also take us on a journey of self-reflection in terms of what their day to day struggles are in working through some rather complicated dynamics. They are caught in a web of social meaning and what has been constructed as ‘good enough’ parenting.

The third theme that emerged was the differential or unjust treatment of kinship service caregivers and the children for whom they care. There was an emerging sense that even though kinship service caregivers carry out the same work (caring for the same children who have experienced the same harmful situation) as traditional foster and kinship care providers, they are not afforded the same supports and resources. The notion of classism is linked to this theme, in that an already disadvantaged group is being further pushed to the margins because they do not meet specific criteria. The service caregivers and the children they care for are excluded from receiving adequate resources.

In order to highlight or bring to life the above themes, the perspectives of the participants will be presented by using quotes from our conversation. In order to ensure the anonymity of the participants, I will use pseudonyms to represent the individual participants. As well, given there was one male participant, all participants will be referred to with the feminine pronoun.

The Value of Kin

Participants Valuing Kin

Through the course of the interviews it became clear that the participants had strong positive feelings about the importance of kinship services as a placement option for children. They spoke of how placement with kin was easier for them from a workload perspective as well an emotional level, in that the work they have always wanted to do is now sanctioned and recognized by the ministry. They also spoke of this from a child’s perspective, in that when they had to place children it was much easier knowing they were going to be with someone they knew and not a stranger, the reaction from the child was more settled and accepting. The notion that children want to remain in the care of family and that kin were committed to these children was highlighted and contributed to the feeling that such placements were the best alternative to parental care.

A) Best for the Children

Meg spoke specifically of a situation where the children were initially in a traditional foster care setting and kin came forward, were assessed and approved. Meg recounted her experience of moving the children from the foster home to the kin home and how the children were overwhelmingly happy to be with family. Meg identifies that it is less emotionally harmful to children to be placed with family than with strangers. When placed with kin, children have more contact

with family and their community (Geen, 2004) and experience a more positive sense of identity and self-esteem (Tarren -Sweeny and Hazell, 2006).

...When I went back to do the seven day visit one of the children gave me a picture and said I am so happy to be with my auntie and uncle, thank you Meg.

Meg showed me the picture in her office; it was a very brightly colored picture of the kin family’s home with the kinship family including the two children who Meg had placed in the kin home.

This comment suggests that Meg found great comfort in knowing that this child was happy living with family. Meg was clearly proud of her work and the picture in her office is reflective of how she felt valued in meeting the emotional needs of this child and “making a difference”.

All of the participants were of the opinion that kin were the best option for children; Jodi and Kate echo Meg’s thoughts:

... So at the end of the day, you know, no matter my skepticism... all that aside, I really do believe kin is the best place for kids. (Jodi)

I always think of what would be best for the child. In terms of working to ensure that um there is continuation of attachment and that if at all possible the child remains with family. (Kate)

Sue further noted that with kinship placement there are more permeable boundaries. There is generally more openness and, in turn, more opportunity for parents to be involved in their child’s life. There is a belief that increased contact between the parent and child is beneficial not only to the child but also the parent. Despite the fact that child welfare may believe that parent child contact is

important, when a child is placed in a traditional foster home the frequency of such contact is limited due to resource issues. On the other hand, when a child is residing with kin, there is an expectation that kin will facilitate access between the parent and child. Sue goes on to say that it is much better for children to be raised by kin than to endure the uncertainty of foster care. Sue notes that a big concern in foster care is the number of times children have to move placements and the negative impact this has on children. Research supports the notion that children placed in kinship foster care experience greater stability compared to children placed in traditional foster care placed in kinship foster care (Beeman et al., 2000, as cited in Koh, 2010).

...we created shame for children because no one wants to say I was brought up by 10 foster families, we should promote raising children within families, this is very important (Sue).

The participants also felt that family commitment was an important aspect of why such placements are best for children. All of the participants spoke about the motivation of kin to keep these children within the family that the child belonged to them and they were responsible. Sue says it best...

I like to ask about their motivation as it is an important part of my assessment. I often hear, this is my grandson; he needs to stay with the family...It's the bloodline, the relationship...there is just no way they want these kids in care (Sue).

B) Best for worker

Participants identified how kin service often makes workers jobs much easier, apprehending a child is the most stressful thing a front line worker has to do, knowing that the child can be placed with family makes the experience easier, the child is happier, the parents often have a voice in the process and often the worker avoids having to secure a foster placement as well avoiding hours working on court documents and attending court. The participants also spoke of how increasing expectations on kin meant they would be freed up from what otherwise would have been their responsibility to manage, for example if kin were able to manage access between the child and parent, the worker would not have to worry about arranging visits.

...instead of calling our resource worker and saying I need a placement right now because I apprehended, I knew the extended family...I asked the step-father, I said do you want to call your mom and her friends because we have a situation, you know I need to remove the child today...they arrived 15 minutes later and were willing to care for the child...the child was not traumatized or anything because he knew grandma and her friend...he went with no problem...there was no disruption for him.(Kate)

...access is difficult and takes a lot of time. When kin can take this on, it is more natural for the child and it also frees up the workers time to do other things (Sue)

A possible implication of passing along this responsibility to the kin caregiver is that there would be increased tension between the caregiver and the parent, in that the kin caregiver may not approve of the parents lifestyle and ways of parenting. One must also consider the demands already placed on the kinship

caregiver and how this may only add to these demands thus creating more stress and tension for them.

The participants felt this approach was a positive personal and philosophical fit. They all gave examples of how kinship service work was reflective of the type of practice they have always aspired to do. Jill spoke about pre kinship service standards and how even prior to the standards and focus on kin she often felt that placement with kin would have been the best plan for many children. There is a sense that it is easier now to do the work front line workers have always wanted to do. The formalization of kinship service has opened the door and given permission to consider kin when placement is needed.

... I sometimes look back to old cases that I had and decisions that were made and really wonder if it would be the same now...I think there were lots of times when kinship options should have been looked at and advocated for. (Jill)

When asked, so what would you say is the most inspiring about your work or what do you enjoy most. Sue notes feeling settled knowing the child is with kin and a sense that this is a good thing.

...”when the kids are placed, when there’s permanency...I can sleep at night, and know, you know what? These kids have a chance; they’re going to grow up with their grandmother.

There was a sense of relief from participants who felt that there was finally a structure in place to allow them to more formally do the work they have always wanted to do with kin and that the agency would receive funding for such work They felt recognized for their work with kin. Kate brings this issue to light, how

the work is currently recognized and from a workload perspective is now more realistic to achieve.

...I was working many, many years ago with kinship placements; we placed the child with extended family. At one point I had 5 to 7 kinship placements on my case load, which was not weighted as part of the workload at that time.

Agency Valuing Kin

Participants provided their perspectives on how they viewed their agency valuing kin. All five participants indicated that their respective agencies not only value kin from a philosophical perspective but also demonstrate this through their actions such as having dedicated workers who work specifically with kinship service families as well as providing supports such as financial, worker support, bus passes and food vouchers to name but a few. Participants noted that as the ministry has not provided any extra financial support for these families it is really up to each individual agency to decide how, or if, they are going to support kin. It is important to note that workers may also be part of the decision making, as all information about a family comes through the front line worker and depending what and how they share the information decisions around funding may be impacted.

All of the participants noted that their current or soon to be service delivery model for kinship services, leads them to believe that their respective agency is committed to providing good service to kin and the children they care

for. Provincially there are several current service delivery models for kinship service, ranging from dedicated teams (where the workers on these teams work only with kinship service families, completing the assessments and providing ongoing support.) to workers carrying both protection and kinship service files. The participants thought that having a dedicated worker or team was one way their agency demonstrated the value they placed on kin. The agencies demonstrated value by providing resources to service kin families. .

I think that the way our program is set up demonstrates that the agency values kin, some agencies don't have individual kinship workers and don't have specific supervisors for that. (Jill)

In the 2010 Ontario Child Welfare Survey on Kinship Services, 42 child welfare agencies across the province were asked to describe their current kinship service delivery model. Nineteen agencies responded and of those 19 agencies, 4 indicated they did not have designated kinship service workers and 15 responded that they had designated kinship service worker positions (Goodman, 2010).

To have continuity just within the team itself and the information and the services and resources it's like a one stop shop sort of thing... this will benefit the workers... and hopefully then you know through that the families...they're committed to making a specialized team. (Jodi)

Several of the participants had much to say about the needs of kin, the push from the ministry for kin to support placement of children and the lack of resources available to them. They commented on how the families often struggle financially and how their agencies and individual workers continue to do what they can to support such placements. The participants bring forward an important

point that agencies are struggling in their own way to manage the lack of formal supports to kinship service families and that kin will be afforded varying degrees of support depending on the agency to which they are connected. They were well aware that child welfare agencies are in different places in terms of their financial position.

What appears to be consistent across agencies is that there is no set funding for kin service caregivers and that the funding is more episodic and emergency driven. The need for ongoing support is still lacking, leaving agencies to come up with their own solutions to this issue and kinship service families to go without.

There is no funding for kinship services... we try to advocate to our managers and they will try their best to find somewhere in the budget: ‘you know this kinship family is needing this for this child’ then they will try to find a way to cover it. (Jill)

So the quality of the service and the financial supports for the kin family depend on the “good will” of the worker and agency. If the worker is a strong advocate, her supervisor is receptive and the agency has the money, a family might get help. But the support is not the family’s right, rather, it is dependent on a variety of arbitrary factors. There is not an explicit policy allotting money to kin families whereby kin families are officially/financially valued and supported for their work with the children.

My co-worker got a bill from a kin family for \$1000 dollars as they had to make some changes to their home in order to accommodate the child (the agency’s management) created a fund ...to say ‘look we are trying to

avoid having this child come into care, so what do we have to do to support this kin’... (Kate)

Jodi discussed money within the agency that is provided to kin, she spoke about how her agency is committed and values kin as they find ways to come up with financial support.

So we have this little fund, not sure where it comes from...Just a fund down there, a floating pot of money. If a grandparent has applied for subsidy for day care, while she’s waiting for that (a subsidy) to come through ...we’re providing the money for the day care. I think they (the agency), they are committed. I think they know also that it’s the best case scenario for kids,

Although all of the participants were animated and passionate about how they saw their agencies valuing kin, some participants expressed worries about their colleagues not valuing kin. It seemed that although senior administration valued kin, this appreciation was not shared throughout the agency. There was certainly a sense that not everyone within child welfare was in support of kin and in fact, there were varied opinions and judgments regarding the feasibility of kin placements. This highlights the entrenched belief that those who abuse or neglect their children are a product of their prior caregivers and environment, or that such “undesirable” traits run in the family.

Jill spoke about how some of her colleagues are of the opinion that if there are issues with the parents then we need to be worried about the grandparents as well:

With workers I think it’s still very varied and I find that particularly workers who have been doing this for a long time...15 or 20 years, I think they are a little more challenged in transitioning over. A lot of people have the opinion you know...’the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree’, if the parent is messed up then their parents must be very messed up...It’s just

so ingrained, that you know if the child can't be with the parent then we need to put them in foster care or we need to go for crown wardship.

Jodi also spoke about her experience with colleagues and how there are very entrenched attitudes, how her colleagues own values and morals impact how they view others. How for some, shifting their thinking is very difficult. It seems ironic that some social workers who believe in themselves as change agents don't appreciate that people can change.

Well colleagues...there's some people that think...'if your kid came from you there is no way you're getting another kid'. It's very black and white thinking...depends on your own values and morals...and if you are willing to look through a different lens. There is still a bit of bad attitude...I think there's always going to be.

In the next quote Jodi brings forward a societal opinion that families should not get paid for care of a family member but rather such care should be an expectation. The discourse around family responsibility is not new and much of the literature highlights the notion that caring for family is an obligation and that there should be no payment attached to such care (Leos-Urbel et al. 1999, pg. 4 as cited in Schwartz, 2002, pg. 13). There is the notion that “family will care for children out of love and strong family values without being concerned about compensation” (Crumbley and Little 1997, as cited in Schwartz, 2002, p.13). This argument is a rather difficult one, where even the most educated child welfare workers are struggling with two competing values and trying to find where they fit.

There are some people in our community that would say there's no way that our tax payers' dollars are going to go to that grandma...that's her

family...whereas we have paid the foster parent. You know, there are people in house with that same train of thought (Meg).

Such attitudes by individuals especially within child welfare organizations could be troublesome for kinship service families. As noted earlier, advocacy of workers was seen as a significant indicator of support received by kinship caregivers. How strongly will workers advocate for kin if they do not feel they should receive such supports? If they are of the opinion that family care does not warrant monetary support, it could mean that kin will go without even the little that might be available. Jill draws attention to a very important point around “good enough care” this is to say, that some of the kin who become approved kinship service families were not approved as kinship care, given that they did not meet the standards as set out by the ministry for a licensed foster home. This is important to consider as it means the child will be placed there but they will not receive the supports afforded to traditional foster and kinship care families.

As a kinship service worker I get really insulted, because so often the feeling around our agency seems to be well they’re kin service because they weren’t good enough to be kin care. (Jill)

What Jill is referring to is the licensing requirements that must be met in order for kin to be approved as kinship care. When approved as a kinship care home, the child would have “in-care” status, the kin and child would be provided the same supports, including financial support, as a traditional foster home. This is an example of classist thinking as many of these families are poor and do not have the means to meet some of the requirements for foster care/kinship care status. The requirements are quite detailed such as separate bedroom for the child, no

smoking in the home and specific financial resources. It would be interesting to ask oneself whose image of caregiving is represented in such requirements. In some cultures entire families share sleeping quarters and others live on very limited incomes, this does not make them any less of a caregiver.

The participants clearly believe that their agencies value kin but recognize that this value is not shared among all staff. They provide information to suggest that some individuals are greatly influenced by societal views of who kinship service caregivers are as well they suggest that lack of ministry funding may well reinforce this mixed reaction amongst staff.

Ministry Valuing Kin

The participants were passionate about the value they place on kin and, in general, were very happy to see that the Ministry has taken a position and has gone in this direction to support children in their families. That being said, there is much confusion and skepticism as to the Ministry’s motivation and commitment to kinship service families and the children for whom they care.

An overarching thought that many of the participants had with respect to the Ministry’s “real” reason for movement towards kin was that it was financially driven. Participants were skeptical of the ministry and felt kin were being used as a means to a sustainable budget. Meg nicely captured this idea

I think saving money more likely...I may be cynical but I think the government always has to look at things from a fiscal point of view...and what are the social benefits...financially they cannot afford the foster care system (per diem) as it is and they can’t meet the standards of keeping the

child safe with family or friends...so they said let's look at how we can do this to be fiscally responsible and benefit the child. (Meg)

The participants spoke about the financial realities for the majority of kinship families and how they struggle financially and have not been afforded the supports to do what they are being asked to do: Jill went on to indicate that if the Ministry valued kin they would provide them with the necessary supports.

I think if they truly (valued kin)... that there would be more supports, financial support...not just for the instrumental... In kinship services there is nothing, like there's no training programs, no education and so many of these families...say it's grandparent and their son or daughter is struggling with addictions or mental health issue, often they do not have a good understanding... they need to have an understanding in order to be able to (be a) safety net for the child as well their own child (Jill).

Sue talks about the responsibility of the government and how utilizing kinship service placement has meant the government is saving a great deal of money. Sue advocates that a portion of this money should go to support kinship service families.

Supporting these folks because they are not, I mean the money is not going to foster care. Why not direct it as much as possible to the kinship providers (Sue).

When speaking with Meg about her sense of the Ministry valuing kin and what she would need to feel as though they were being valued, she was a little hesitant at first but very quickly was able to articulate that the Ministry needs to develop formal funding for kinship service families and that often what kin need is much less than the per diem rate of a traditional foster placement:

That I don't know, it is always nice to have more funding for the kinship service families, so we wouldn't have to be wonder 'Oh can we help this family'. In the long term the per diem rate that's per diem for a month in a

foster home is greater than what the kin require to care for the child
(Meg).

When further explaining her view on why the Ministry moved towards kinship Kate discussed how the government saw a potential resource and decided this might be a good fiscal move: This was much in line with the neo-liberal agenda of downloading to the family.

... The Ministry needed to kind of put in shape things and said we have some resources like within the family... We need to use these resources. (Kate)

Many of the participants had very strong feelings of disillusionment with the Ministry. They saw the Ministry as “using” kin as a means to fiscal stability and sustainability of the budget. The language and process used to introduce this new way of work, came about with the transformation agenda, which had a focus on a strengths based, family preservation approach. In the 2005 child welfare transformation agenda, the Ministry artfully spoke about permanency for children and how admission of children into care can be avoided by placement with kin. Placement with kin was presented as one of the pillars of permanency. What was also presented was research that suggested such placements, when supported, are more stable and help the child with a sense of belonging (Child Welfare Transformation, 2005). The language was certainly encouraging to workers whose main priority is safety and wellbeing of children. Such an idea was an easy sell. The participants in this study who have now had the opportunity to experience what it is like to work with kin are concerned that the resources are not there to support these placements.

The participants had much to say about how they see kin being valued not only by themselves but also within their agency administration. The participants suggested what they felt should be happening to support kin families; there was a real sense that they and their respective agencies were struggling to work with and support kinship service families with little to no recognition or formal support from the Ministry. This theme will be explored in more detail in the discussion section.

Ambivalence

Participants Ambivalence

The previous theme clearly highlighted the value the participants attribute to the involvement of kin in caring for children who are unable to remain in their own homes and how they viewed their agency and the Ministry valuing kin. Yet, although the participants have very strong opinions about the value of kin, with that came what appeared to be uneasiness, a questioning or worry about the work that gets carried out with kin.

Literature regarding traditional foster care and kinship care, often suggests that kin are to be approached with caution as the client is part of this kinship family. There is a significant body of research that suggests there are guarded views around kin placement. There is the perception that anyone who has close ties to the parents may also pose a risk or danger to the child (Koh, 2010; Blair, Taylor and Rivera, 2009; Lorkovich, Piccola, Groza, Brindo and Marks, 2004). Meg brings this notion forward as she highlights the worry about kinship

placement and how there is a greater sense of safety and comfort in placing children in a traditional foster setting as there is a notion that the potential risk is lower than that of a kinship placement.

I think everyone loses sleep when they say this is going to be a good and safe place for the child to be and I would say that's a give and take because a child going to a foster home you know the assessment has been done, you know as much has been done to offer support to that family, so safety wise there is always some element of risk [with a kin family] but it's pretty much a given that that is a safe place for the child [foster home].

When identifying how placing children in kinship service homes impacts front line workers, there appears to be disparity between the initial placement and the work that follows (the ongoing support). When the participants were discussing the value of kin they seemed to be more satisfied when initially placing a child but to struggle with the work once the child has been placed. It is difficult to say how much of this is about self-preservation from the initial placement phase (i.e. Not having to do all the work of searching for a foster home and dealing with the emotion of apprehending a child) and how there appears to be increased work for the assigned worker once the child is placed in a kinship service setting, as she/he is responsible for ensuring safety, negotiating family relationships, ensuring the needs of the child and kin are met and completing all the required standards and paper work. Had the child been placed in a traditional foster home, there would likely be other workers carrying out some of this work, for example the child would likely have a children's service worker assigned to her/him and the foster home would have already gone through an approval process and have a resource worker assigned.

Meg further comments on her experience of making decisions around kinship service placements and how there is a ‘second-guessing’ process that occurs: There is a notion that workers are trusting of foster caregivers even though they do not necessarily know them. They place their trust in another worker’s assessment of the foster family, yet they are still worried about kinship service caregivers even though the worker may have a relationship with this person and have the first hand assessment of their caregiving abilities. Such attitudes held by child protection workers are certainly felt and understood by kinship caregivers, as highlighted in Gladstone, Brown and Fitzgerald’s (2009) study where caregivers indicated they did not feel like their social worker trusted them and that they are looking for something to go wrong (Gladstone, Brown and Fitzgerald, 2009).

...I do feel that kinship service is a good thing however you are always evaluating and wondering about the decision that you have made and is there something better.

When talking about her biggest worry, Meg indicated that while wanting to support the kinship service placement she worries that maybe there is something that has not been uncovered, especially if you are dealing with young children who cannot tell you. There is somewhat of a formed bias that kin families are dangerous, that characteristics they hold may present a danger to children.

Sue further expands on this notion when speaking about some kinship service families and how she questions their honesty, intelligence and level of trust and ideas are created about who they are.

No matter how much you talk and explain what your role is, it just doesn't seem to sink in...I don't know if it's their developmental level...if it's the grandparents age...I hate to say that but sometimes age is a factor...I don't know if it's they don't want to be associated with us...we are still trying to get them to be honest and open in the assessment...It highlights that no matter where you sit in a child welfare agency...you always have elements of protection.

While the participants clearly articulate that they support and value kin there is certainly ambivalence around placement and the worries that go with that. There is a worry that something will be missed and that their decision will impact on the safety of a child. This speaks to the vulnerability faced by front line workers and that if anything goes wrong, they will be the ones called into question, even if she/he followed all the ministry standards. The ministry has satisfied the public that they have put the checks and balances in place but yet it is the child welfare worker who does the work and is ultimately held responsible. As well as their genuine concern for the children they work to protect they also know that they will likely be held accountable should something go wrong. Sue's comment captures the internal struggle all of the participants spoke about...

It's great if there are grandparents who are on the up and up and you know I would feel safe and secure putting these children there, but sometimes the apple doesn't fall far the tree and you are wondering, am I taking this kid from the frying pan into the fire. You know this kid came from the same background into something that resembles their parents with the grandparents...we don't have a crystal ball...so we just hope that it's gonna be the best place for this kid (Sue)

When discussing the issue of making the call of placing a child in a kin home or a traditional foster home, Kate talks about the assessment process and how sometimes due to the time it will take, the child is first placed in foster care.

Kate is quick to say that this is not best from a clinical perspective but from an accountability and liability stand point it is sometimes a good decision.

...place the child with the foster home and then consider kinship placement. Clinically, I don't believe that this is the right thing to do...to be on the safe side...we cover our...probably a wise thing, clinically not so great (Kate).

What is interesting about this theme is how workers are influenced by societal and professional discourse as it relates to intergenerational abuse. Not only are workers affected in their day to day decision making, agencies and the Ministry are also keenly aware of and worried about the level of safety in kinship families who are often thought to hold the same characteristics of the abusive parents. This speaks to the whole notion that abuse and neglect are a result of character flaws, such thinking fails to take into consideration external factors affecting and impacting families. To do so would potentially take the focus off the individual and shed light to the very fiber of our society.

Agency Ambivalence

When exploring the notion of how decisions get made whether a kin home is assessed for kinship service or kinship care...The participants bring forward a very important concept of power: who gets to decide and why do they decide? As well, they consider how such decisions are often based on various criteria outside of what would be best for the child or kin. For example there are times that the kin

caregiver is struggling financially yet they are not even considered for a kinship care assessment, such a decision will have a direct impact on financial supports available to the family. On the other hand, if there are potential issues with the kinship family an agency may decide to do a kinship care assessment, thus allowing the agency to have more control and tighter reins on what happens. The expectations are clearer and if issues arise in a licensed kinship care home, the home can be closed more easily and the child moved to another home within the foster care system. In essence the idea that there are preconceived notions about kin, what is best for them, how they should behave and how to best manage them?

If we are already involved in court or if we have a potential family coming forward for a kin assessment and we have some initial impressions that they may pose some level of risk or would not be able to keep the boundaries in place for access or whatever, um, or if more easily managed when it is kin in care, if things did not go well it would be a lateral move from there to a foster home. (Meg)

Sue spoke about the process at her agency and how it is usually the management group who decide if the kin family will be considered for kinship service (out of care) or kinship care (in care). According to Sue several factors were considered, most of which had to do with the managers perception of what would work, depending on need of the kin caregiver and also if they were likely to meet the licensing requirements.

Sue highlighted an important concept around the managers reluctance to consider kin for an in care assessment unless they felt they were “suitable”. Sue was demonstrating how there is discretion around who gets to be considered for what. That if a manager made a determination that the kin applicant would not

likely fit the requirements it would be up to the manager to move them over to a kinship service assessment. The non approval appeared to be more about not “fitting” into the traditional image of a licensed child welfare care provider than the safety of the child. This may also be the only means in which the manager can ensure the child is placed with kin regardless of status.

Sue also brought to light the idea of two distinct levels of care. One group of caregivers fit the image and will be rewarded accordingly whereas the other group will provide the same service without the benefits.

Yeah, they'd be approved, like you know they don't have a history, you know they don't smoke, you know they'd be foster parent level status...if the family is not up to that level [kinship care/foster]...then it would be a kinship service assessment.(Sue)

While the participants spoke of their individual agencies value of kin, they also highlighted the fact that there are decisions that get made around kinship care or kinship services that may be more tied to agency practices or manager's impressions or guardedness rather than ministry standards.

Agency decision making with respect to kin appears to be more significantly tied to uncertainty of kin meeting the expectations than the actual need of the child and kin. It is clear that while agencies advocate for services and support the movement towards kinship placements, there remains reluctance, guardedness and ambivalence.

Unjust Treatment

Kinship service is a way of caring that has become formalized in the Child Welfare setting. Over the past several years more and more family members have been approached or have presented themselves to take on the role of caring for or raising a child who is unable to remain in her/his own home.

With the implementation of the new kinship service standards in 2006, there are increased expectations not only on child welfare but also the kin who child welfare so rely on. The interviews with the participants highlighted the day to day struggles of these kinship service families and the workers’ attempts to support them. Current policies, practices and societal values lead to tension and struggles for kinship service families and by association for the front line workers who work with them. The following will present the front line workers perception of how kinship service families are treated unjustly and in turn their struggles to support them.

As noted earlier the participants were clear in their notion that kin are undervalued, not provided with the necessary financial supports to provide the care that is being requested of them. The participants saw this as a direct link to the lack of value placed on kin families by the ministry. The participants went on to highlight several other key areas where they believed kin were being unjustly treated.

Financial

All of the participants spoke about the fact that there are no formalized financial supports for kinship service caregivers other than that of Temporary Care Allowance through Ontario Works. In 2010, a kinship service survey was conducted in Ontario and 94% of the agencies who replied supported the notion that funding through Temporary Care Allowance was too low and there were jurisdictional inconsistencies in how eligibility was determined (Goodman, 2010). It was the view of many of the participants that those providing kinship services are already struggling financially, with the majority of such caregivers being grandparents who are on a fixed income.

Meg spoke about how finance is the number one issue impacting kinship service families. She stated that kinship families often struggle with navigating systems such as Ontario Works, the school system, the medical system and the child welfare system that are intended to support them. She also put forward concerns around workers within those systems being misinformed or uneducated which in turn causes even greater frustration and barriers for kin. Meg makes a suggestion that changes to such systems would be helpful to kin.

I would say all of them would say finances. The length of time it takes to get the Child Tax Credit transferred over to them, and the Temporary Care Allowance , some families struggle because they are already on social assistance and they have to go in and meet with their Ontario Works worker and explain this is not an over payment, this is actually dedicated to the child. So maybe this is where the Ministry can be more effective by training Ontario Works or dedicate a kin worker to them. (Meg)

Kate notes that typically these caregivers are single, female grandmothers who are struggling themselves financially. A significant percentage of the kinship caregivers are in need of financial support to care for the children. They are expected to provide care with little concern for how they are to do this. The worry is that this already disadvantaged group will become more disadvantaged which will not only have an impact on them but also the children they are caring for.

I would say the big percentage of families where financial conditions are not very good...many are grandparents...some are on very fixed incomes...very limited.

Jill and Jodi articulate the struggles kin have to access financial support and their own sense of helplessness in that they were not able to make it better for kin.

They shouldn't have to fight with Ontario Works to get \$ 200 a month in dental benefits...they shouldn't have to jump through hoops...trying to force the parents to pay support in order to get that \$200...I feel like my hands are tied and I really regret that I can't give them information on services that can actually help. These families are saving children and um they're just put in such a difficult position. (Jill)

Two of the participants describe a financial means test as part of the assessment where it is determined if the kinship family has enough income to provide care for a child. While there is nothing noted in the kinship service standards, it appears that some agencies have adapted this from the foster or kinship care licensing standards and use this to determine the suitability of a kinship service placement. The rationale for the financial means test is not clear however it appears to be to ensure that the caregiver can meet the day to day needs of the child. According to these participants, kin could be denied solely

based on their economic situation. It seemed that the participants of this study were under the impression that this was a ministry imposed standard directly linked to kinship services when it is, in fact, a licensing requirement and given a kinship service home is not a licensed home is not required as part of the assessment. This is a clear demonstration of how economic situation could be the only thing standing between a child being able to be cared for by kin.

So it's a shame if someone is not able to provide care because they don't have the financial means. (Kate)

An even more concerning issue is the situation where kin who are unable to financially provide for a child and likely to meet the other licensing requirements for foster homes can become a kinship care home for the sole purpose of financial need. In contrast to the situations described in previous paragraphs, the children in some situations do not have significant emotional or physical needs and there is no other factor that would warrant the child to have “in-care” status, yet the kin families are deemed “kin-care” families because they require the financial support that goes with being a “kinship care” home. The concern is that with kinship-care status, the child has to have “in-care” status and a number of supports that go with it, that could be viewed as unnecessary and intrusive. This means that a child would be labeled as a child “in-care” and all decision making for that child will rest with the worker/agency. This not only takes away the power from the kin provider but also could potentially lead to years of child welfare being directly involved with the family, conducting home

visits, privacy interviews with the child, having to approve medical, dental and school requests, all as a result of the financial situation of the kin caregiver.

She’s single, 65, with very little income...she wouldn’t have passed our assessment based on financial...we decided to make her kinship care...she went through the safe home study, the whole nine yards...he will have a children’s service worker but he’s with his grandmother. (Jodi)

Jodie, goes on to talk about a very important issue that she witnessed at her own agency of workers feeling powerless in how to support these families and the only way they know is to explore kinship care:

...I’ve talked to other people and what I have seen is that there are people who are saying that as workers they are making referrals for kin in care, they’re bringing children into care for the sole purpose of resources.

Lack of training and education

In addition to lack of financial supports, kinship service providers are not afforded the same supports as traditional foster caregivers or kinship care providers. Any resources or supports that are offered to traditional foster care providers is also offered to kinship care providers, given the child(ren) in those homes have “in-care” status. The participants of this study identified that support is denied to kin service families related to training and education.

Jill spoke about training and how kin who are caring for children under the kinship care umbrella are able to attend the PRIDE training (a provincial training that is provided to all licensed foster caregivers, this now includes kinship care) however there is nothing for kinship service families. She spoke about the

importance of training and education for these families in order to assist with their understanding of the protection issues and their role in safety for the child.

In kinship services there is nothing, like there's no training programs, no education and so many of these families...say it's a grandparent and their son or daughter is struggling with a drug addiction or mental health issue, um they often don't have a good understanding...there's an awful lot of misinformation (Jill).

Kate goes on to talk about the struggles as a kinship service family but also a worker given the limited resources afforded to this particular group of caregivers:

...if there is a foster home, there is a resource worker, there is ah like sometimes volunteer services, ah there are evening and support groups for foster families, there is a children service worker...who focuses on the child...when they are outside care [kinship services]...I am the only one with 10 different hats.

Kate notes that kinship service families are impacted by lack of resources and as the kinship service worker she has to try and provide a range of supports that would be delivered by a number of different individuals if they were a kinship care home. This highlights an important aspect of the work, given children placed in kinship service homes have the same needs as those placed in kinship care homes, yet the child in a kinship care home would be assigned a worker to focus on ensuring her/his needs are met. Whereas a child in a kinship service home has the same worker who carries out all other functions and supports for a kinship service home.

Jodi spoke about a grandmother she was initially assessing for kinship services but due to

financial reasons had to move to a kinship care assessment; this grandmother was approved and spoke to Jodi on her views of the training provided. This is another example of how kinship care receives not only the financial benefits but also the training piece:“...I remember her coming back to me and saying you know like all the training foster parents get, she said wow I wish I had had that years ago.”

One might wonder how many other kin were experiencing the same struggles as this grandmother but were unable to hold on for a kinship care assessment or just did not fit the image and ended up being excluded. Where these kin are now, are those kinship service placements still thriving? Little is known about placement breakdowns in kin homes however there is much literature to support the benefits of resources to kinship caregivers. As noted earlier even the Ministry in the Transformation agenda, highlighted the link between supports and positive kin placements.

Ministry Standards

Ministry standards for kinship service are fairly new and many agencies provincially continue to struggle to understand and make sense of them. The participants of this study all indicated that they felt there was a role for child welfare involvement with kinship families where the placement is a result of child welfare issues however there were varied opinions around the usefulness of some of the standards and struggles to understand or articulate how the standards lead to increased child safety. The participants noted that meeting some of the

standards was not only difficult for the kin families but also a challenge for them as workers.

Jill spoke about a situation where the kinship service file sat at intake for four months at the time she received it (four months following the child’s placement) there were standards that were not met and obtaining particular documents became a challenge. Jill speaks about worker resistance in that if the child is doing well even without certain documents they are not going to remove the child:

It’s really hard working with a family when we have all these Ministry mandated things that have to be done. I have one where the child has been there for four months [kin home], I still don’t have the police checks...they are not a priority for the aunt...she’s busy...the bottom line is if the child is doing well, we’re not going to uproot that child because of a technicality. Meeting some of the standards is an infringement on their time, it’s an invasion of their privacy, we do ask a lot of them and they get nothing in return.

Even though Jill noted a discontent with some of the standards, there was confirmation on her part that child welfare does have a responsibility in working with these families and ensuring the safety of these children.

I think that in child protection, we do have an obligation to feel fairly confident that if we’re replacing a child...the arrangements are being supported in the family. I think we do have that responsibility.

Kate echoed Jill’s notion that there is a role for child welfare involvement in these situations however also felt that there should be flexibility. The participants, who were all experienced workers, were happy with particular standards however felt that not all standards worked for every family and that

there should be some discretion, especially in light of their experience and relationship with these families. There was a sense that they wanted there to be opportunities for discretionary decision making.

...you always have to have guidance...but in the same time the Ministry standards cannot be rigid...we front line workers and supervisors...we know...the Ministry can provide guidance but not rigid rules.

Sue went on further to talk about her understanding of the Ministry’s implementation of the standards as a way to ensure checks and balances are in place. Sue referred to the well-publicized case of Jeffrey Baldwin, a child in Toronto who died at the hands of his grandparents on November 3, 2002, while they were providing care to him and his siblings. She also notes however that there is a need for some level of assessment to ensure safety. Sue was highlighting the importance of government responsibility to the public, in that the ministry has to demonstrate that there are systems in place to ensure safety of children but in doing so may be making kinship caregivers jump through unnecessary hoops.

I know it’s invasive [kinship service assessment and standards], but I mean there have been children who have died in the care of grandparents, aunts, uncles and I think that nobody should be exempt from this kind of assessment (Sue).

When exploring the practice of kinship care and kinship service assessments, Meg brings to life the inequities inherent in the process. She talks about how if a kinship caregiver does not meet the grade to be opened as a kinship care home, it does not mean the child cannot be placed but rather the home would be opened as a kinship service (not entitled to supports). The notion that in order to be afforded certain supports or services; one must fit a

particular image and behave in a particular way. Campbell and Gregor note that assessments are sometimes used as a cost cutting tool (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, pg.22); meaning that they are set up in a way so that some individuals will be excluded, those excluded are often individuals who are already disadvantaged. With such barriers to resources, the Ministry has a pool of free resources available to meet the increasing demand of children requiring a safe place to reside.

We have families who are doing the in-care assessment and they were not going to pass it... it is still in the child's best interest to go to that family, so we step back and say well they did not meet the standards for kin care but they have for kin service so we work with what we are able to do...I think it is a good option for families who would not meet the basic threshold that a regular family would (Meg).

Meg's use of language is interesting in that she referred to kin not meeting the basic expectations of a "regular" family. Once again the societal discourse about what constitutes a "regular" family is obvious. It is not one who has limited resources to meet the physical and behavioural requirements to care for an "in-care" child.

The participants were not saying that the standards should be thrown out; in fact there was support for certain standards and a sense that they served a purpose in ensuring a level of safety. Participants questioned standards that did not appear to be tied to safety but rather in place as barriers to service and supports. The standards are reflective of middle-class values which many kinship service caregivers would have difficulty meeting. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000).

Jodi presented further concerns about the Ministry’s unjust treatment. She suggests that the implementation of standards has to do with liability and accountability and not necessarily good work or keeping children safe. She presented the notion that putting more checks in place is not going to increase safety and in fact there should be more time given to being in the homes supporting these families.

...it might be better if they put more resources...more front line staff and time to do the work... I think this would be more beneficial in protecting children. The Ministry is a bureaucratic machine; it’s all about liability and accountability issues, concerned about lawsuits.

She also noted that the process of assessment is often difficult for individuals to understand and that the standards are impossible to meet.

I think less with the check boxes...lower the bar a bit for the respect of the kin member and kin who are coming forward...I mean even for people who work in the system, it’s such a colossal system.

In summary, the participants bring to light the fact that kin have always been important. However, they are suspicious of the Ministry and wonder about the current standards, how relevant they are and if some of the standards are more related to financial sustainability than to child wellbeing. They comment on how so much is being downloaded on kin with very little support being provided. They note that kinship service families are doing the same job as foster and kin-care families but are not afforded the same resources or treated in the same manner.

DISCUSSION

Formalized kinship arrangements in the Ontario child welfare system are a relatively new placement option. New legislation introduced in 2005 directs child

welfare agencies to actively seek out kin for children who can no longer remain in their own homes. There are specific standards for assessing the suitability of a kinship caregiver as well a number of expectations once a kinship service family has been approved for both the worker and kin. This change has resulted in front line protection workers having to adapt and work with kin in a different, more formalized way. The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of these workers to better understand what influence/impacts their work.

The participants were asked a number of questions to better understand how their personal views, values and beliefs influence their work, as well how their work is impacted by the agency in which they work and the ministry that oversees such work. Child Welfare has typically been seen as a complex system where there is much unrest, burnout and challenges. While kinship work, as presented by the participants, is clearly challenging, it appears to be an area of work that has created energy, enthusiasm and hope. The participants, while passionate about the value of their work, discussed their views that kin caring for children in a child welfare setting is still a concept that creates anxiety, uncertainty and feelings of social injustice. It is clear that they support such care plans yet struggle with the responsibility and sense of vulnerability that goes with it. They articulate how kin are differentially treated, but are unclear about what should occur to create a greater sense of justice and inclusion.

One of the strongest themes was the level of support the participants felt from their agencies. This is somewhat surprising in light of the general image of

child welfare and the notion that workers feel unsupported, carrying out work that feels unachievable. As a manager in child welfare, my sense is that workers often feel unsupported by management and feel that they don't understand their experience in the front lines

The participants in this study were all senior staff, which may have affected how they viewed and spoke about their agencies. Research suggests that agency environment and a supportive supervisor plays a key role in worker retention in child welfare (Dickinson and Perry, 2002 as cited in O'Donnell and Kirkner, 2009). It may be that these participants feel supported by their agency and management and thus this may be one of the reasons they have remained employed in child welfare for so many years. While participants spoke highly of their agencies, they articulated their frustration with and belief that the ministry is more concerned with budget than providing the services that these kin so desperately require. The participants struggle with juggling responsibility for ensuring placement safety, carrying out ministry imposed standards, and supporting kin, all the while feeling that kinship service families are being unjustly treated by not being afforded the same supports as a kinship care or traditional foster caregivers.

It became clear from these discussions that this work is complex and impacted by many variables. There was consensus that this was work worth doing but that to do it well further changes are required. The key findings were organized into the following themes; valuing kin, ambivalence towards the work,

unjust treatment. These key areas will be explored in greater detail in this section of the thesis.

Valuing Kin

The word value holds different meaning for different people. When speaking with the participants about their ideas of kin and if they felt placing children in kinship arrangements was something they supported, they clearly articulated that kin were an important placement option and when deemed appropriate, should be given priority. The first demonstration of their valuing kin was their coming forward to be part of this study. All of the participants were quick to say that their decision to participate was as a result of feeling this was important work and wanting to contribute in whatever way possible to the betterment of working with kin.

Some of the participants indicated that they valued kin and as a result moved from other work within their agency to work with kin. On the other hand workload, court demands, or dealing with unhappy parents may have also been a motivating factor for deciding to work with kin. As so honestly articulated by Jill, “it’s nice that I am not the one making the final decisions, so I don’t have to take the heat for it if the family is not happy about the decision”.

Jill’s comment highlighted an important fact that front line workers valuing kin may be somewhat connected to self-preservation and avoiding the difficult task of bringing a child into care. There is no doubt that removing a child from their family setting is one of the most, if not the most, difficult and

emotionally charged piece of the work in child welfare. Several of the participants spoke about how much easier it was initially placing with kin as it often meant less work, was less emotionally draining for them and was met with greater cooperation from the parent, child and family. Kate spoke of a situation where placement of a child was necessary and instead of calling the resource department, waiting for a foster placement and dealing with upset parents and child, she was able to call the grandma, thus resolving the whole situation in fifteen minutes. While there is clear indication that kinship caregivers are valued there is also the possibility that this value is driven by both the principals of kinship care and the need for child welfare workers to decrease the stress of their jobs.

The participants also spoke about how from a child’s perspective, placement with kin appears to be the best option. All of the participants advocated for the best interest of the child to be central to this discussion, they provided examples of why placement with kin is the best option for children. This is supported by Altshuler (1999) in her research on successful aspects of kinship placement from the child’s perspective. The authors’ findings suggest that children placed with kin have a sense of connection; they feel they have a permanent place in their caregivers’ home and heart. As well other studies have reported that children prefer kinship care to non-kinship, they feel more loved and happier, less subject to stigma (Messing, 2005; Peters, 2005; Wilson & Conroy, 1999) in Dolan et al. (2009). While participants of this study as well as research

supports placement with kin from a child’s perspective, it is interesting to examine why placement with kin has been embraced in recent years. The neo-liberal shift from government responsibility to family obligation is something to be considered. While many would likely agree that placing children with family is the best option, it is important to consider what informs such values and ideas. As well, would this still be considered the best plan if kinship families did not have the resources and supports with which to care for these children? It is important to consider what impacts kin’s decision to say yes when approached by child welfare. They too are impacted by the societal notion that it is family responsibility to care for their own. While kin may feel they are not in a position to care for or raise another child, how realistic is it to think that they actually have a choice.

It was interesting to see how placing children with kin also validated the front line workers’ work. The participants frequently spoke about how their work was made easier and more rewarding by placing children with kin. They were more settled in the fact that the child was not going to be upset, and in fact, would adjust fairly easily into the home of a kinship caregiver. They believed that where at all possible kinship arrangements are the best option. This is one area where personal reward for a job well done is reflective in child welfare practice.

When asked from their experience, what was the biggest challenge faced by kinship service families, all of the participants noted lack of financial support; this finding is supported in the literature. There was much discussion about the

only current formalized financial supports (Temporary Care Allowance through Ontario Works) and that depending on which jurisdiction you reside, your experience of accessing these funds will be different. The participants felt that the amount was not enough to provide care for a child and noted that attempting to navigate the system is difficult. They were disheartened with the ministry’s lack of commitment to kinship service families. In their view the ministry could demonstrate their commitment to care by kin by providing them with the financial means to care for these at risk children. At the very least, the participants suggest that the ministry make some of the other systems ie. Ontario Work, more user friendly and consistent. There was certainly the notion that the ministry’s decision to increase the involvement of kin was more about a means to rescuing the financial strained child welfare system than the value of preserving kinship relationships for these children. There is much research that is in line with such thinking but notes the move to kin was fueled by several factors: declining foster homes, move to family preservation, financial pressures to seek the lowest cost of care, and a change in legislation that supports kin over traditional foster care, (Anderson 2006.; Ehrle, Green, & Clark, 2001; & Lorkovich et al., 2004). This is reflective of the neo-liberal downloading of responsibilities, a political move to shift public responsibility back to families, as seen in many social service venues. Expecting that families will be successful in meeting challenges that the government could not is unrealistic at best. Many of these families are struggling to survive as it is and with little to no government support, they are going to be

challenged to meet the needs of the children. Many of these female caregivers will continue to meet this demand regardless of its impact on them. This is reflective of societal views on caregiving which is very sexist in nature. Daniels, Smith and Smith as cited in Teghtsoonian (2009, Pg.79), notes there is significant resistance to conceptualize caring for children as “work”, especially work that should be compensated financially.

When it came to a discussion around how their respective agencies value kin, there was a strong appreciation for what their agency was attempting to do to support kin, which, in the eyes of the participants was an indication of their value. The participants spoke of the structure within their agency and how consideration has been given to the best service delivery model. The participants felt that having dedicated workers or team was the best approach and allowed for more focused work to happen with kin. The results of the 2010 Ontario Child Welfare Survey on Kinship Service support that specialized kinship service workers is the most effective service delivery model. Seventy nine percent of the agencies who participated in the study had just such a model (Goodman 2010). Another interesting discussion around agency valuing kin was what participants viewed as management/agency “coming up with money” to support some of the care, even though there was no money provided to agencies for this purpose. The participants had strong positive opinions of their agency’s administrators being on board philosophically as well as materially by providing necessary funds and training for workers.

Ambivalence

Front line protection workers have been faced with the task of working with kinship families differently than in the past. Although the participants spoke about their experiences in working with kin prior to the change in legislation and the implementation of the standards, there is certainly a sense that the work prior to transformation was much more infrequent and when it did occur was less informal, less intrusive and less complicated. Kate spoke of having always worked with kin but that prior to the standards, the work looked different. She indicated that they would be creative in what they did and often decisions to use kin were based on the worker already having an established trust and relationship with that individual. On the other hand some of the participants indicated, having standards in place allows them to be more comfortable to do what they have wanted to do all along. One participant reflected back on her work pre kinship service standards and how there were many situations where kin placements should have been advocated for and weren't. One participant noted that assessment of kin pre kinship service standards did not look much different (the participant was referring to a formal process approving kin to be a foster placement), yet it was clear from all participants that kinship placements were a rare occurrence in comparison to today. It seems that the standards have given workers and agencies a sense of security, a feeling that as long as you follow the

standards you are covered if something should unfortunately go wrong. There is little sense that the standards have actually increased safety for children, especially given the participant’s discussion regarding the placement of children prior to all the standards being completed. Many of the participants provided examples of children being placed in kinship service homes prior to receiving a criminal or provincial record check. The participants also spoke about the challenges of getting kinship caregivers to comply with the standards. This is an interesting concept given the child has already been placed and there are no grounds to move the child nor would it likely to be in the child’s best interest, especially after being in the kin home for months. It would be interesting to understand why kinship caregivers are not complying. Is it truly that they do not have time, couldn’t be bothered or forgot? Or are they demonstrating the only “safe” resistance available to them? It would be important to further explore how the current standards lead to child safety in the context of kin assessments; this could possibly mean a review of the standards to see if what has been put in place is actually making a difference. This would certainly be an area for further research.

Many of the participants struggled with the current standards, referring to them as intrusive and unnecessary at times, advocating for a more customized approach taking into consideration the needs of the child and the relationship between the child and kin. Even with such struggles front line workers continue to carry out what is expected of them in order to ensure they are in compliance, all

the while not necessarily feeling the work is useful and struggling with the fact that they are intruding into the lives of kin, when they could be spending their time more productively in direct client contact. The participants emphasized that the standards were necessary to keep children safe yet had great suspicions about the purpose for some of the standards. Some of the assessments, the intrusions, the financial requirements were aspects of the standards they were uncomfortable with. This may also tie into the policing verses supportive role as a social worker and how there is often struggles in sorting out the two. I wonder how much self-convincing happens in order to carry out work that at times feels unnecessary or unjust. Foucault would describe such power as disciplinary power, one which is subtle, the self-working upon the self (Foucault as cited in Foote and Frank, 1999). According to Foucault to have one govern oneself is the most effective power (Moffat, 1999). The participants were very honest and challenged the thinking around some of the work they are doing, this was exciting to see. I worry however that the longer the work continues to function in this way the more accepting and compliant workers will become. Will they begin to justify for themselves why they are doing what they are doing, as a way to continue to have the energy to do the work?

Several of the participants spoke of the standards and how they are in place as a way to satisfy the public that the appropriate checks and balances are in place. Meg felt the standards were about accountability, a way for the ministry to show the public that we were doing our job. But it is questionable whether

standards keep children safe or provide good service. Tilbury’s article notes that through regulations the government is able to demonstrate to the public that systems are in place and that proper procedures are followed, however they do not necessarily mean that children are optimally cared for (2006).

While the participants of this study have all clearly indicated that they see value in placing children with kin, they struggle with many facets of the work. The complex nature of this work was particularly highlighted when the participants’ discussion of specific challenges they face while trying to decide if this was a “safe enough” placement. Although not explicitly stated, there was still a note of caution that if the kinship caregiver was a parent to the parent of concern, there may be reason to believe they contributed to the dysfunction and thus are not trustworthy to care for another child. The “apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” analogy was used by participants on several occasions. Even with such passion and support of the kinship service movement the participants remained guarded. Although the idea that family violence occurs in cycles and repeats across generations has been discounted, many people still blame the whole family when abuse occurs (Jackson, 1999 as cited in Kolomer 2000). This sense of vulnerability may be explained by the fact that front line workers feel solely responsible and worry about making a mistake. They are torn in wanting to support children within their families yet worry if they have made the right decision. They want to trust and believe that children will be safe with family, yet continue to worry that something bad may happen. This is not necessarily a good

or bad thing, yet something to be mindful of and keep in check when working with children and families. For most of the past century, it was a prevalent belief that among child welfare professionals that abusive or neglectful parent had learned their dysfunction behaviours from their families of origin (Koh, 2010). Such entrenched beliefs, even, when not based in research, are difficult to unlearn. A study conducted by (Gladstone, Brown and Fitzgerald, 2009) points to the fact that kinship caregivers (the study was limited to caregiving grandparents) feel judged and watched and as a result, are not able to trust the worker. This is certainly a dynamic that could have grave consequences on the working relationship between kinship caregivers and child welfare workers.

Another layer of ambivalence was with respect to the complexity of the work after a child has been placed. While participants spoke of the positive aspects of having the option of placing children with kin and how this often means less work, better client relationships and greater worker satisfaction, on the flip side, they also spoke about the challenges of the work in more complex situations once the child has been placed. They spoke about the increased demands of supporting the kin, the child and, at times the parent. As well, they are often left dealing with kinship caregivers who, once the child has been placed, is no longer motivated to provide the necessary documentation thus leaving the worker failing to meet the ministry standards. The participants struggled with this issue but also felt strongly that it would not be in the best interest of the child to remove her or him simply based on non-compliance with ministry standards.

The other workload challenge they spoke about was working with unique family dynamics and sometimes feeling caught in the middle. The worker is often left to manage tensions between the kinship caregiver and parent. At times there may be competing opinions or plans which leaves the worker caught in the middle of trying to support both parties in very complex situations. Peters study which explored child welfare workers’ thoughts and beliefs about kinship foster care, found that while workers had strong positive feelings, they also noted greater time spent managing kinship placement situations and significant amounts of time dealing with triangulation (Peters, 2004). Peters goes on to suggest that this ambivalence extends from worker to policymakers (Peters, 2004). However, perhaps it is more fitting to say from policy maker to worker. The work that gets carried out is focused around rules and standards as developed and set out by those in a position of power. Front line protection workers then develop their work style accordingly and after doing the work eventually come to believe it is how it should happen. A sense of compliance and lack of questioning occurs, an acceptance that if those in a power position made these rules, they must be important and there for a reason. This too could be an area of future study.

Unjust Treatment of Kin

Regardless of ambivalence or pre conceived ideas of who kinship caregivers are one thing that was abundantly clear in this study was the passion with which the participants spoke of kinship service caregivers being unjustly

treated. The participants were clear in saying if anything has to change it is how this group, while doing the same job as licensed kinship care or foster home, are not afforded the same resources and supports.

As noted earlier the motivation of the ministry was called into question by all of the participants; they were clear in their opinion that the movement towards kin was significantly impacted by the ever increasing cost of managing children within the child welfare system. Their guardedness is not surprising given the history of the political agenda over the last couple of years. The neo-liberal agenda of shifting responsibility from the government to families and community has been seen in other service areas such as health care and developmental services. This shift in responsibility is not only politically driven but also an expected, constructed societal value. Community capacity obscures the larger agenda set by the neo-conservative ideologies and neo-liberal economic policies that have emerged over the last ten years (Moffatt, 1999).

The participants questioned why, if kin were deemed good enough to care for children, they were not afforded the same resources to support these children. This was a challenging question that all of the participants struggled with and only increased their suspicion and mistrust of the ministry. They could see no good reason why financial support should be connected to status rather than need. There is no doubt that kinship service caregivers are experiencing an injustice, they are struggling to support children who child welfare have entrusted to them, yet there is little to no support for them. Anti- Oppressive practice as defined by

Dumbrill, is practice that is concerned with eradicating social injustice perpetuated by societal inequalities, particularly along the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation and identity, ability, age, class, occupation and social service usage (Dumbrill, 2003, pg. 102). One might wonder if kinship service caregivers are experiencing oppression from a system that is intended to support children and families. Tied into this is the notion that in order to be deserving enough you must meet certain criteria; you must act in a certain desirable way (Garrett, 2003). Garrett's, concept of “conditional welfare” is fitting with kin, as in order to receive aid from the government you must first demonstrate behavioural compliance (Garrett, 2003, pg. 447). The funding and support may be provided to some by kin but only if they meet certain criteria as set out by the Ministry. They will only receive support if they are able to meet the licensing requirements to become kinship care which would tie them more closely to the agency as licensed care givers for a child who is legally in the care of child welfare but receiving care from kin. Campbell and Gregor argue that assessments are in fact sometimes used as a cost cutting tool (Campbell and Gregor, 2002, pg.22).

The participants also noted that many of the standards set in place are difficult for kin to meet. While the participants felt that some of the standards were important, there were also elements of suspicion. The notion that in some situations the standards prevented kin from becoming approved as kinship care homes but lead to approval as a kinship service home, which ultimately meant that kin would provide care but would not receive financial or other supports. If

the standards are not tied to child safety one might wonder if they are in place as a means to prevent the government from being responsible for providing adequate support to kin service families. By putting requirements in place the Ministry can say they have done their job and the responsibility for dealing with kin families rest with those in the field of child welfare, who have to carry out such assessments. The download of responsibility from the ministry may not only be towards kinship services caregiver but also the child protection workers who carry out the work.

The participants of this study while passionate about their work and the work carried out by kin, certainly felt the need to voice their opinions about how kinship service caregivers are a disadvantaged group. The participants strongly felt that something had to change but recognized that the answers are not easy especially given the climate of our current economy.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study bring to light the complicated work and ethical considerations for child welfare utilizing kinship caregivers as a placement option for children. Through their frank discussions, the participants provided insight into this work and what it looks like from their perspectives. They also painted a picture of what it may look like through the eyes of kinship service caregivers.

Taking on the responsibility of care for a child is not to be taken lightly, ask any caregiver and you will likely hear that is the most challenging work they

have ever done. Yet child welfare is now reaching out to kinship caregivers to do just that, many of whom are grandmothers who have raised their own children and were not planning to do this work again. Graciously they accept this as their responsibility: these are in fact their grandchildren, how could they possibly say no? Do they really have a choice? They may feel indebted to the society for approaching them or allowing them to provide this care. Kinship caregivers, because of the social construction of family and messages of personal responsibility may not feel entitled to services; they may also feel that given the child is in their care they are not entitled, that in fact they should be grateful that they are being given the opportunity to care for the child. . Newman notes that from a critical social science perspective, people can become trapped in a web of social meaning, obligation and relationship (Newman, 1997, pg. 76). The front line protection workers who work with these kin see their struggles; they are faced with supporting them and their care of these children on a daily basis. There has to be some recognition of the work the families are doing but to expect they can do it without adequate supports is irresponsible. Those in child welfare must continue to advocate for support both monetary and non-monetary. What this support should look like and where it should come from is something that requires close attention. There was a suggestion by one of the participants that one way to make a difference is to ensure easy access to the Temporary Care Allowance, this could be achieved fairly easily and could potentially make a significant difference. Such advocacy and change is essential if we are to avoid placement

breakdowns, family disruption or what will eventually be seen as protection issues in these kinship service placements. Kinship caregivers are typically more disadvantaged than non-relative caregivers, poorer, older, single, minority and less educated, on social assistance (Swann & Sylvester, 2005; Ingram, 1996; Schwartz, 2002). It is unfair and dangerous to expect that work that could not be sustained and carried out by the ministry could be accomplished by this often disadvantaged group.

Societal, personal and professional beliefs and values inform everyday interactions. There remain strong societal opinions around who the kin of “protection families” are and whether or not they could keep a child safe. In order to support front line workers in managing this, there needs to be an avenue to challenge societal opinions. It is essential for supervisors to engage in meaningful discussion in order to challenge some of this thinking and support the worker. Training would also be an effective way to further uncover some of what the participants spoke about related to feeling torn, confused and worried about their role in placement decisions. Universities need to continue to focus their efforts in critical thinking, to encourage social workers to challenging their beliefs, values and ideas in order to create an awareness around where and how ideas and realities get constructed.

The standards for assessing kinship service caregivers were implemented in 2006 and after almost five years, a close review is warranted. It is important for agencies to gain an understanding from front line workers about work within

these standards and if, in fact, they promote child safety. The ministry should also do a formal review with input from front line workers and kinship service caregivers. There are clearly some issues with the current standards that, according to the participants, are a challenge to achieve, overly intrusive, generic and not reflective of child safety.

Advocacy needs to be supported and encouraged within child welfare agencies. Kinship service caregivers are an important resource not only to the children they care for but also to child welfare agencies and the ministry. As such they need to be approached with respect and dignity. While policies and standards have a place in child welfare, we need to be more critically and reflective in our practice as it relates to child safety and well-being. Supervisors need to create space for safe, critical reflection and encourage workers to be the catalyst for change and to advocate when they are faced with a situation that seems unjust.

Another area for consideration is the type of kinship service delivery model within child welfare organizations. The participants felt that there should be dedicated workers and teams available to work with this population. The results of the provincial kinship service study support the notion that a significant number of child welfare agencies in Ontario are moving towards a specialized service delivery model. As a manager in a child welfare agency that has been working with a specialized kinship service team over the past year and a half, I can certainly say that there are benefits. Workers have reported that they are better able to focus on the needs of kin and do not feel the same level of competing

demands between kin and the parent. Kinship service caregivers have provided feedback indicating that they enjoy having a worker who is focused on them and interested in their needs.

Directions for future research

As noted earlier, the formalized process of working with kin in Ontario child welfare is fairly new, as a result there is much to learn in order to provide the best possible service to kinship service families and the child for whom they care. Many research ideas have already been noted while other research possibilities are as follows.

The type of service delivery model appeared to be something that was viewed to have an impact on outcomes. It would be interesting to do a comparative study to determine if in fact the type of service delivery model impacts outcomes for children and kin.

This study presented a picture of the needs and concerns of kinship service caregivers as seen through the eyes of front line child protection workers. While valuable information, it would be interesting to see if kinship caregivers would present the similar findings. The voice of kin is not present in this study and to hear what they have to say about the service they receive would be meaningful and could inform future work in terms of carrying out assessment and supporting them in the difficult job they are often times being approached to do.

Understanding the pressures they feel and how they viewed being seen would be meaningful research.

The participants of this study were all senior staff and had very positive things to say about the agency in which they worked. It would be interesting to understand if less senior staff felt the same sense of support. This is certainly an area that could be useful in building supervisor, agency and worker relationships. If we can better understand what this sense of support is about we may be able to build on this to create more fulfilled child welfare workers which would translate into better work with and outcomes for families.

CONCLUSION

Formalized work with kinship families is fairly new in the Ontario child welfare system. There have been many growing pains and it appears that there has been much success but also many challenges. Front line child protection workers are faced with this challenging work on a daily basis and while it is clear they want to support such care plans, they are faced with a sense of uncertainty in how to do so in a safe and supportive manner.

As a province, we have much to learn and examine when it comes to our future work with kin. We must look at our current structure, how it came to be and what needs to happen in order to ensure inclusion and social justice for this kin population and the children for whom they care.

This study is just a small window into the world of kin and the front line workers who carry out this work every day. It is the hope that this has provided some insight into this work and that we can learn and grow in order to provide the best possible service and outcomes for these kin and children.

REFERENCES

- Altshuler, S. J., (1999). Children in Kinship Foster Care Speak Out: “We Think we’re Doing Fine”. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 16 (3), 215-235.
- Anderson, S. (2006). The impact of stat TANF policy decisions on kinship care providers. *Child Welfare*, 85 (4), 715-736.
- Beeman, S.K, Kim, H., Bullerdick, S.K. (2000). Factors affecting placement of children in kinship and non-kinship foster care. *Child and youth Services Review*, 22, 37-54.
- Beck, U. (1992), *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage Publications
- Berrick, J.D., Barth, R.P., & Needell, B. (1994). A comparison of kinship foster homes and foster family homes: Implications for kinship foster care as family preservation. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 16(1-2), 33-64.
- Blair, D. K., Taylor, B.D., Rivera, J.C., (2009). Strengths and Stressors in a Population of Kinship Caregivers: Implications for Caseload Management and Administration. *The Journal of Contemporary Social Sciences*, 90 (4), 431-438.
- Bower-Russa, M.E., Knurson, J.F., & Winebarger, A., (2001). Disciplinary History, Adult Disciplinary Attitudes, and risk for Abusive Parenting. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 29 (3), 220-240.
- Brodie, J. (1999). The Politics of Social Policy in the Twenty-First century. In D. Broad and W. Antony (eds.) *Citizens of Consumers? Social Policy in a Market Society*. Halifax: Fernwood, 37-45.
- Burke, S. & Schmidt, G. (2009) Kinship Care in Northern British Columbia. *Child Welfare League of America*, 88 (6), 127-142.
- Campbell, Marie & Gregor, Frances (2002). *Mapping Social Relations A Primer in Doing Institutional Ethnography*. Aurora, Ontario: Garamond Press.

- Charmaz, K. (2003) Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. *Inside interviewing: New lenses, new concerns* Sage Publications Inc. 311.
- Cort, N.A., Toth, S.L., Cerulli, C., & Rogosch, F. (2011). Maternal Intergenerational Transmission of Childhood Multitype Maltreatment. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma*. 20, 19-38.
- Crewe, S. & Wilson, R. G. (2007). Kinship Care: From Family Tradition to Social Policy in the African American Community. Retrieved on November 17, 2009 at <http://jhsp.haworthpress.com>.
- Crouch, J.L., Milner, J.S., & Thomsen, C. (2000). Childhood physical abuse, early social support, and risk for maltreatment: current social support as a mediator of risk for child physical abuse. *Child Abuse and Neglect*. 25, 93-107.
- Cuddeback, G.S. (2004). Kinship family foster care: a methodological and substantive Synthesis of research. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 21(4), 311-338.
- Dolan, M., Casanueva, C., Smith, K., & Bradley, H. (2009). Parenting and the home environment provided by grandmothers of children in the child welfare system. *Child and Youth Services Review*. 31, 784-796.
- Dumbrill, G. (2003). Child Welfare: AOPs nemesis. In W. shera (ED.), *Emerging perspectives on anti-oppressive practice* (pp. 101-119). Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press
- Ehrle, J., Geen, R., & Clarke, R. (2001). Children care for by relatives: *Who are they and how are they faring?* *New Federalism: National Survey of America's Families*. (Series Number B-28). Washington, DC: the Urban Institute.
- Ehrle, J. & Geen, R. (2002). Kin and non-kin foster care- findings from a national survey. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 24 (1/2), 15-35.
- Fallon, B., Trocme, N., MacLaurin, B., Knoke, D., Black, T., Daciuk, J., Felstiner, C. (2003). Ontario Incident Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, Center of Excellence for Child Welfare.
- Foote, C. & Frank, A. (1999). Foucault and therapy: the disciplining of grief. In A. Chambon, A. Irving, & L. (eds.). *Reading Foucault for social work* (157 - 187). New York: Columbia University Press.

- Garrett, P.M. (2003). Swimming With Dolphins: The Assessment Framework, New Labour and New Tools for Social Work with Children and Families. *British Journal of Social Work* 33: 441-463.
- Geen, R. (2004). The evolution of kinship care policy and practice. *Further of Children*, 14, 131-149.
- Geen, R., & Berrick, J.D. (2002). Kinship Care. An evolving service delivery option. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 24, 1-15.
- George, g. (1990). The reunification process in substitute care. *Social Service Review*, 64, 422-457.
- Gladstone, J.W., Brown, R.A, & Fitzgerald, J. (2009). Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren: Tensions, Service Needs, and Involvement With Child Welfare Agencies. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 69 (1), 55-78.
- Glesson, J. (1995). Kinship Care and Public Child Welfare: Challenges and Opportunities For Social Work Education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 31 (2), 182-193.
- Goodman, D. (2010). Ontario Child Welfare Survey on Kinship Services: Response and Findings.
- Gough, P. (2006). Kinship care. Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare Information. Retrieved on May21, 2011 at <http://www.cecwcepb.ca/DocsEng/KinshipCare42E.pdf>
- Hegar, R., & Scannapieco, M. (1995). From family duty to family policy: The evolution of kinship care. *Child Welfare*, LXXIV(1), 200-216.
- Ingram, C. (1996). Kinship care: From last resort to first choice. *Child Welfare*, 75, 550-566.
- Ingtehart, A.P. (1994). Kinship foster care: Placement, Service and outcome issues. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 16 (1-2), 107-121.
- Knoke. D. & Trocme, N. (2005). Reviewing the evidence on assessing risk for child abuse and neglect, *Oxford Journals*, 5(3), 310-327.

- Koh, E. (2010). Permanency outcomes of children in kinship and non-kinship foster care: Testing the external validity of kinship effects. *Children and Youth Services Review*.32, 389-398.
- Kolomer, S.R., Kinship Foster Care and Its Impact on Grandmother Cargivers. (2000) *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 33(3), 85-102.
- Kreuger,L. W. & Neuman, W.L. (2006). Social worker research methods: qualitative and quantitative applications. *Oxford Journals*, 5(3), 310-327.
- Lasala, M.C. (2003). When Interviewing ‘Family’: Maximizing the Insider Advantage in the Qualitative Study of Lesbian and Gay Men. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* 15(1): 15-30.
- Leschied, A., MacKay, R., Raghunandan, S., Sharpe, N., & Sookoor, M. (2007). Empowering Families, Strengthening and Protecting Children: Introducing Kinship Program and Family Group Conferencing Program at the Children’s Aid Society of London and Middlesex. London, On: Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario.
- Lorkovich, T.W., Piccola, P., Groza, V., Brindo, M.E., Marks, J. (2004) Kinship Care and Permanence: Guiding Principles for Policy and Practice. *The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*. 85 (2), 159-164.
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services. (2005). Child Welfare Transformation 2005: A strategic plan for a flexible, sustainable and outcome oriented service delivery model.
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Ontario Child Welfare Secretariat. (2006). Ontario Kinship Service Standards.
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services. (2006). Implementation of Kinship Service Standards
- Moffat, K. (1999). Surveillance and government of the welfare recipient. In Adrienne Chambon, Allan Irving & Layra Epstein (eds). *Reading Foucault for social worker*. (p219-245). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Neuman, L. (1997). The Meaning of Methodology Pp.60-87 in *Social Research Methods:Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

- Neysmith, S.M. (1995). Feminist Methodology: A Consideration of Principals and Practices for Research in Gerontology. *Canadian Journal on Aging* 14 (1): 100-118.
- O'Connor, D.L., & O'Neil, B. J. (2004). Towards Social Justice: *Teaching Qualitative Research*. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 24(3/4), 19-33.
- O'Donnell, J. & Kirkner, S.L. (2009). A Longitudinal Study of Factors Influencing the Retention of Title IV-E Master's of Social Work Graduates in Public Child Welfare. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 3, 64-86.
- Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. (October 2010). Children in Care and Permanency Survey: Fact Sheets 2009-2010.
- Peters, J. (2004). True ambivalence: Child welfare workers' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about kinship foster care. *Child and Youth Services Review*. 27, 595-614
- Schwabe, C. (2004). Re-visioning risk assessment for human service decision making. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26, 561-576.
- Schwartz, A.E. (2002). Societal value and the funding of kinship care. *The Social Services Review*. 76 (3), 430-59.
- Simpson, G.M., & Lawrence-Webb, C. (2009). Responsibility Without Community Resources. *Informal Kinship Care Among Low-Income, African American Grandmother Caregivers*. *Journal of Black Studies*. 39(6), 825-847.
- Swann, C. A., & Sylvester, M. S. (2006). Does the child welfare system serve the neediest kinship care families? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28(10), 1213-1228.
- Tarren-Sweeney, M., & Hazell, P. (2006). Mental health of children in foster and kinship care in New South Wales, Australia. *Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health*, 42, 89-97.
- Teghtsoonian, K. (1997). The Work of Caring for children: Contradictory Themes in American Child Care Policy Debates. *Women & Politics*, Vol 17 (2), 77-99.

MSW Thesis- Sheila Penney” “McMaster- School of Social Work”

Testa, M.F. (2001). Kinship Care and Permanency. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 28 (1), 25-43.

Tilbury, C. (2006). The Regulation of Out-of-Home Care. *British Journal of Social Work* 37: 209-224.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2000. “Report to the Congress on Kinship Foster Care.” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at.

[http://aspe.hhc.gov/libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/hsp/kinr2c00/index.htm](http://aspe.hhc.gov/libaccess/lib.mcmaster.ca/hsp/kinr2c00/index.htm).

<http://www.thestar.com/news/article/962145--inquest-called-into-starvation-death-of-jeffrey-baldwin>

Appendix “A”

January 10, 2010

Request for Assistance and Support

Student Researcher: Sheila Penney
Graduate Student Master of Social Work
905-522-1121 Ext 6195
905-957-0762 (home)

Research Advisor: Sheila Sammon
School of Social Work
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
905-525-9140 ext. 23780

Attention: Supervisors/Managers of Kinship Services

I am a manager of Family Services with the Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton and currently enrolled in the Masters of Social Work program at McMaster University. Part of the requirements for the master’s program is the completion of a thesis, which I am currently in the process of engaging in under the supervision of Professor Sheila Sammon.

When thinking about what in the field of child welfare was interesting and requiring some attention, I was drawn to the work that front line workers are engaged in with kinship service families. This is a fairly new area of work and there is limited Canadian research that looks specifically at the experience of front line protection workers and how individuals, institutions and structural issues impact their work with kinship service families.

The study will examine through the eyes of front line protection workers; their experience in working with kinship service families, the challenges, success and opportunities for growth. It is the hope that such lived experience with enrich the knowledge base specific to kinship service.

The purpose for this correspondence is to request your assistance in forwarding the attached Appendix “B” to all workers in your agency who work directly with kinship service families and have worked in child welfare prior to implementation of the kinship service standards in December 2006.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this correspondence and for forwarding the information letter to workers in your agency who meet the above noted requirements. I understand that kinship service is an area of great interest and there may have been many requests to participate in similar studies. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to connect with kinship service workers in your agency to ascertain from them their interest in participating in this very important study.

Should you have questions or require further information please do not hesitate to contact me spinney@hamiltoncas.com or 905-522-1121 ext.6195.

Sincerely,
Sheila Penney
Student Investigator

Appendix “B”

DATE: June 1, 2010

Information Letter

Attention: Kinship Service Workers

Dear _____,

My name is Sheila Penney and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Social Work Program at McMaster University, under the supervision and support of Professor Sheila Sammon and part of the requirements is the completion of a thesis. When thinking about what in field of child welfare was interesting and requiring some attention I was drawn to the work that front line workers are engaged in with kinship service families. This is a fairly new area of work and there is limited Canadian research that looks specifically at the experience of front line protection workers and how individual, institutional and structural issues impact their work specifically with kinship service families.

The purpose of this study is to examine through your eyes the experience in working with kinship service families, the challenges, success and opportunities for growth.

I would like to invite you to be part of such a needed area of work, in order to shed light to such an interesting and important subject. I am hoping that you would be willing to share your experience and in doing so will increase knowledge and insight into the world of kinship service and what it is like for you as workers to carry out the work in the current child welfare system. The voice of the front line protection worker is essential in better understanding what supports such work but also what gets in the way. I hope that you also have an interest in this subject area and would be willing to help me in this journey of understanding. Your time commitment would be an hour and a half interview, which will take place at a location convenient to you.

If you are willing to participate or want to hear more before you make a decision please contact me at spenney@hamiltoncas.com or 905-522-1121 x6195 Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sheila Penney
Student Investigator

Appendix “C”

Date: March 12, 2010

LETTER OF INFORMAITON/CONSENT

Student Researcher: **Sheila Penney**
Graduate Student: Master of Social Work
905-522-1121 ext. 6195 (work)
905-957-0762 (home)
t.mercer@sympatico.ca

Research Advisor: **Sheila Sammon**
School of Social Work
McMaster Universtiy
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
905-525-9140 ext. 23780

Purpose of the Study and Invitation to Participate

I would first like to thank you for having interest in hearing more about this study and taking the time to learn more about the study and what would be required of you if you decide to participate.

I am currently enrolled in the Masters of Social Work program at McMaster University and part of the requirements is the completion of a thesis. When thinking about what in the field of child welfare was interesting and requiring some attention, I was drawn to the work that front line workers are engaged in with kinship service families. This is a fairly new area of work and there is limited Canadian research that looks specifically at the experience of front line protection workers and how individual, institutional and structural issues impact their work specifically with kinship service families.

The purpose of this study is to examine through the eyes of front line protection workers; their experience in working with kinship service families, the challenges success and opportunities for growth.

I would like to invite you to be part of such a need area of work, in order to shed light to such an interesting and important subject. I am hoping that you would be willing to share your experience and in doing so will increase knowledge and insight into the work of kinship service and what it is like for you as workers to carry out the work in the current child welfare system. The voice of the front line protection worker is essential in better understanding what supports such work but also what gets in the way. I hope that you also have an interest in this subject area and would be willing to help me in this journey of understanding.

Procedures involved in the Research: What will happen during this study?

The interview will be conducted at a location of your choosing. I will review a consent form with you and ask that you sign it prior to commencing the interview. The interview will be semi-structured with a set of questioning to guide our discussion. You will be provided with the interview guide prior to the interview to give you an opportunity to

prepare. Some of the questions would be as follows; please describe what your experience in child welfare has been, describe what your experience has been, describe your experience in working with kin pre and post kinship service legislation and standards, with is your personal opinion regarding kin coming forward to care for children.

With your permission, the interview will be audio tapped; as well I will be taking notes to assist me in the interview.

What are the Potential Benefits of the Study?

Although this research will not likely directly benefit you other than giving you an opportunity to talk about your experience in working with kinship service families, I hope that the information you provide will bring to light what it is like working with kinship service families in the current child welfare system.

Kinship is a growing area in child welfare, with a significant number of children residing in kinship service arrangements. There is limited research in this area and hopefully this study will inform future policy direction at an agency level but also possible at the ministry level.

What are the Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts of this study?

Although there are limited risks involved in participating in this study, there may be moments where you find it difficult to discuss an issue. You may experience discomfort, anxiety or stress talking about your person experiences. You may reflect on times when you felt dissatisfied with your work or may question your role as a social worker.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable or worried about the question being asked you do not have to answer or can ask to take a break. As well if at any point you do not wish to proceed with the interview and want to withdraw from the study you are more than free to do so. I will completely understand if you decide not to continue and there will be no ill feelings towards you.

Confidentiality

Who will know what I said or did in the study?

Your participation in this study is strictly confidential. No one will know that you agreed to participate in the study. I will not use your name or the name of the agency in which you work. You will be given a pseudonym name and the agency will be assigned letter identification.

Given the small group of individuals who work specifically with the identified population, I will be reaching out to a large number of child welfare agencies to decrease the likelihood that any person or agency can be identified. Although every effort will be made to maintain your confidentiality, there is always a chance that others may be able to identify you based on the information you provide or references you make. You may want to keep this in mind in deciding what information to share.

All information you provide will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home. This information will not leave my home and no one other than myself will have access to this information. Once analysis of the data have been completed, the tapes will be destroyed and documentation shredded.

Appendix “D”

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following questions are a guide to form the basis of the questions that I intend to ask. Some of the questions may vary based on the information you provide and the direction in which the interview is going.

1. What has been your experience in working in the field of child welfare? How long have you worked in this line of work? What is your current position in the agency?
2. How is kinship service structured within your agency? What is your service delivery model? What is your role in working with kinship service families? Who carries out the assessments? Who provides the ongoing support?
3. “Kin caring for children in the context of child welfare, is sometimes a controversial subject, what do you think about it? What is your understanding of your agencies philosophy in kin caring for children? What are your thoughts of why the ministry moved to include more kin in caring for children?
4. Do you consider your agency to value kinship service families? In what ways do you see them or not see them being valued? Do you consider that the Ministry values kinship service families? In what way do you see them valuing or not see them being valued?
5. What has been your experience in working with kinship service families? Can you talk about what some of your success have been? What challenges have you faced in your work with kinship families?
6. What do you think you would need to assist you in addressing the challenges you have identified?
7. What do you see as the biggest challenge in working with kinship service families? What are your thoughts on how these challenges may be addressed?
8. From your experience in working with kinship service families, what do you think they would identify as their biggest challenge? What do you think kin would say about what they would need to address such a challenge? Who do you feel is responsible for supporting kin in addressing their challenges in caring for a kin child? What role do you play as a worker? What role do you believe the agency and/or the Ministry have or should have in supporting kin through their challenges in caring for kin children?
9. What do you worry about most in the work you do with kinship service families? How do you manage this worry?
10. How do you think kinship service placements compare to traditional foster placements?
11. What is your understanding/belief in why there is an increased focus on kinship service? What are your thoughts on the role that child welfare should play when kin come forward to care for children who can not safely remain in their own homes? Do you think there is a role? Do you feel child welfares current role, standards and approach with kinship service families is appropriate? What do you think the role of child welfare in such situations should look like?