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Language, Cultural Competence, and Workload: Experiences of Bilingual and Multilingual Social Workers

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Language, Cultural Competence, and Workload: Experiences of Bilingual and Multilingual Social Workers

Principal Researcher: Kelly Schussler, MSW student, USM School of Social Work

Faculty Advisor: Professor Vincent Faherty, DSW, MBA, USM School of Social Work

Qualitative study that explores the experiences of bilingual social workers. Research activities were submitted to and reviewed by the IRB.

Background:

- Increasing number of individuals in the United States with limited to no English proficiency
- Clients in need of social services in languages other than English
- Bilingual and multilingual social workers take on additional tasks

Methodology:

- Three qualitative, intensive, open-ended interviews
- Participants: Bilingual social workers
 - English / Somali
 - English / Arabic
 - English / American Sign Language
- Transcribed, coded, and analyzed using Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA)



Workload

“If a client uses a different language than Standard American English...the amount of time it takes to do ‘simple tasks’ is doubled or quadrupled.”

Barriers

“We don’t have any funding to give services to asylum seekers...But when (they) have five kids, who need their shots, who need a doctor, I say ‘Okay, I cannot send this person back.’”

Cultural Competency

“There is a wealth of multi-culture around here...Learn who is here. Learn their situation, so that you can empower social workers in what they’re doing.”

Fluency

“One measure of cultural competency is language fluency...Because the more fluent I am, the more I am able to join with my clients.”

Community Membership

“Being a bilingual (social worker), you are part of that community outside...I go home, my neighbor is one of my clients. They come knocking at my door...Having someone from the community is easy access for them.”