

Enhancing the practice of immigrant child welfare social workers in the United States

International Social Work
2019, Vol. 62(2) 595–611
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DOI: 10.1177/0020872817742697
journals.sagepub.com/home/isw



Ching-Hsuan Lin

National Taiwan University, Taiwan

Angela R Wiley

Auburn University, USA

Abstract

Responding to the needs of growing immigrant populations, many US social service sectors have recruited bilingual and bicultural practitioners, including immigrants. However, little is known about the immigrant social workers. This article explores the practice context of immigrant child welfare social workers in the United States. First, acculturation theory is applied to frame the experiences of US immigrants. Second, we explore professional development of practitioners working with immigrant families. Third, we discuss the intersectionality connecting immigration and social work professionalization. We conclude that the immigration and acculturation experiences of immigrant social workers are unique strengths for working with immigrant populations.

Keywords

Acculturation, biculturalism/multiculturalism, child welfare, immigrant, social work education, social work professional development

Introduction

The contemporary United States is founded on a history of immigration. More than 10 percent of the US population is foreign-born, a figure doubling since 1970 (Fix et al., 2001; Zong and Batalova, 2016). The number of children of immigrants is also increasing, so about 25 percent of the US child population is either an immigrant or has an immigrant parent (Shields and Behrman, 2004; Zong and Batalova, 2016). These children are vulnerable because immigrant families often experience challenges (e.g. language barriers, legal status, and financial burden) while trying to adjust to American society (Pine and Drachman, 2005). Being unfamiliar with norms, values, and child welfare policies, some immigrant families become involved in the child protective service

Corresponding author:

Ching-Hsuan Lin, Department of Social Work, National Taiwan University, No. 1, Roosevelt Rd., Sec. 4, Taipei City 10617, Taiwan.

Email: hsuanlin@ntu.edu.tw

(CPS) system when their parenting practices are not acceptable in the United States. Examples of this include using discipline practices that are deemed problematic (Reisig and Miller, 2009) or female genital mutilation (Goldberg et al., 2016).

While child welfare agencies have found it necessary to serve increasing numbers of immigrant families, few studies have focused on workers' professional preparation for and practice with immigrant families. Some agencies have responded to immigrants' cultural and linguistic needs by developing culturally sensitive interventions and recruiting bilingual and bicultural (and sometimes immigrant) service providers (Johnson, 2007). Little is known about the experiences and perceptions of these immigrant practitioners. There are likely interactions between (1) personal immigration experiences and (2) professional experiences and development, with implications for the immigrant children and families involved with the child welfare system.

Research is needed on the experiences, perceptions, and practices of immigrant social workers. The current review lays the groundwork for this by focusing on the general context for immigrant social workers working with immigrant and non-immigrant families involved in CPS, with an eye toward implications for policy, practice, and social work education. This review first explores acculturation theories and experiences of immigrants by race/ethnicity, gender, generation, region, and education. Second, theories of social work professionalization and socialization are used to examine the working context of child welfare professionals serving immigrant families. Third, we identify the intersections of immigration and social work profession by discussing specific issues, struggles, and strategies potentially faced by immigrant social workers. Theories of biculturalism and multiculturalism are also discussed. Finally, the implications of this review for policy, practice, education, and future research are indicated.

Immigration and acculturation

Acculturation theory

Immigration is a change in place but also includes complicated process of adaptation and acculturation. Understanding the context of immigrant social workers requires a brief introduction to the construct of acculturation as a process of cultural and psychological change (Berry, 1992, 2006), including in place, relationships, behaviors, and cultural practices, and often in psychological, social, and physical health. There are four acculturation statuses in Berry's (1997) conceptual framework (integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization) based on two major dimensions: (1) relationship to one's heritage culture and identity and (2) relationship to the new dominant culture and identity. Integrated individuals are oriented to both dominant and heritage cultures (bicultural) and generally have better outcomes across a number of domains (including professional success) than less integrated individuals (Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2013; Tadmor et al., 2012).

This seminal bidimensional model has been challenged and expanded in the last two decades. It has become apparent that acculturation is embedded in complex interactions, for example, of individual differences and sociopolitical context (Padilla and Perez, 2003). The acculturation choices and strategies available to immigrants are likely determined by contextual factors, such as social/cultural/environmental conditions and constraints. Factors prior to emigration also impact acculturation, such as social/educational/occupational background and reasons to emigrate (Gibson, 2001). Schwartz et al. (2010) proposed an expanded multidimensional model in which the acculturation process and concomitant psychosocial outcomes are shaped by practices, values, and identifications of both the heritage and receiving cultures as well as the context of reception, such as cultural similarity and discrimination. Systematic power imbalances tied to cultural differences can create social stigmas and other challenges to the acculturation process (Padilla and Perez, 2003).

Other adaptations have gained resonance as the global landscape of cultural contact and immigration has continued to evolve. One fundamental example has been to include the possibility of tridimensional acculturation when the sending or receiving communities themselves are multicultural (Ferguson et al., 2012). More recent research also has documented that acculturation can occur remotely in the increasingly common circumstance where there is indirect or intermittent contact between cultures, for example via media and global travel (Ferguson, 2013).

Immigration and acculturation experiences

Cultural change for immigrants can be assessed in the domains of socioeconomic status, spatial concentration, language assimilation, and intermarriage (Waters and Jiménez, 2005) and is often accompanied by high levels of stress. This has been linked directly to the process of cultural change via acculturative stress (Suh et al., 2016), defined as ‘a reduction in the health status of individuals, and may include physical, psychological and social aspects’ (Berry et al., 1987: 493). Acculturative stress varies, with bicultural individuals who use integrative strategies often evidencing more positive adjustment and lower acculturative stress (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 1987). However, other studies have found a ‘healthy immigrant effect’ in some receiving countries, such as Canada (Kennedy et al., 2015; Newbold, 2009; Newbold and Danforth, 2003; Vang et al., 2016), Australia (Biddle et al., 2007; Kennedy et al., 2015), the United Kingdom (Kennedy et al., 2015), and the United States (Kennedy et al., 2015; Stephen et al., 1994). These studies indicate that the most recent immigrants are healthier than native-born populations of the same ethnicity, begging the question of whether lower acculturation is related to better health outcomes (Newbold, 2009; Vang et al., 2016). Evidence has shown that this healthy immigrant effect may be due to (1) immigrant self-selection where healthier and wealthier immigrants are more likely to be able to migrate, (2) immigrants’ healthy behaviors prior to migration, (3) health screening by immigrating countries, or (4) underreporting of health conditions among recent immigrants (Kennedy et al., 2015; McDonald and Kennedy, 2004). These determinants have not been found to be associated with later acculturation experiences.

Acculturation experiences may differ by gender, education, race/ethnicity, generation, and spatial context. As examples, female immigrants may experience greater acculturative stress than males (Berry et al., 1987), and female Asian immigrants evidence worse psychological adjustment than male counterparts (Furnham and Shiekh, 1993). In one exception, female Vietnamese immigrants acculturated more rapidly than males (Chung et al., 2000). Educated immigrants may have access to more resources and thus acculturation changes and challenges may be experienced as new opportunities (Berry et al., 1987), although recent studies have indicated that one-fifth of highly educated and skilled immigrants in the United States are unemployed or working in unskilled jobs (Batalova et al., 2008).

Most acculturation studies examining immigration experiences in the United States have focused on Hispanic and Asian immigrants. Hispanics with high acculturative stress are more likely to have depression and low self-efficacy; in contrast, those with lower acculturative stress tend to have better vocational skills and mental health (Rogler et al., 1991). Among Asian immigrants, positive acculturation experiences are associated with improved adjustment and decreased depression and suicidal behavior, and this association is mediated by acculturative stress. It is worth noting that both Hispanic and Asian immigrants who are bicultural or who have adopted an integration strategy tend to have better mental health outcomes and lower acculturative stress (Berry et al., 1987).

The acculturation experiences of today’s newcomers also differ from earlier patterns when immigrants came with few job skills and little education (Gibson, 2001). In today’s economy, unskilled immigrants have difficulty finding jobs. There are generational differences in settlement

communities. In the past, many immigrants settled in urban homogenous ethnic enclaves, while more recent immigrants often settle in nonmetropolitan communities with greater interaction with non-immigrant citizens (Waters and Jiménez, 2005). Thus, compared to early generation immigrants, biculturalism is becoming a more typical acculturation outcome.

Closer contact has not eliminated difficulties. Recent studies have documented the negative impact of US anti-immigration policies on new immigrants (Ayón and Becerra, 2013; Becerra, 2012; Martínez et al., 2015; Salas et al., 2013). For example, Arizona has passed legislation that expands state power to investigate the immigration status of those arrested or detained for other reasons. A recent systematic review examined the impact of anti-immigration policies and discrimination on undocumented immigrants' health compared to immigrants with legal status and citizens (Martínez et al., 2015). In communities with anti-immigration policies, undocumented immigrants suffered poorer mental health outcomes (e.g. depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder). Findings from another two focus group studies indicated that new Mexican immigrants encounter increased discrimination and experience fear, isolation, and powerlessness (Ayón and Becerra, 2013; Salas et al., 2013). While more recent immigrants may demonstrate greater biculturalism, many are significantly impacted by the larger context, especially the enforcement of anti-immigrant policies in their new home communities.

Social work professionalization

Professional socialization of social workers

Professional socialization is the process of engagement with a profession through knowledge acquisition and professional values internalization; it is central to a social work field committed to improving well-being, meeting basic needs, and empowering people with vulnerabilities (Miller, 2013; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 1996). It requires specialized education and training to deliver knowledge, skills, and values (Weiss et al., 2004). Professional schools of social work must be accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), whose *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS) specifies a tripartite curricular structure, which includes explicit curriculum, implicit curriculum, and field practicum (CSWE, 2015). Thus, professional socialization happens in classrooms and in the field where it is implicit in the culture of social work schools and explicit in the content of social work field education (Miller, 2013). The emphasis of professional socialization is on internalization of a professional identity, establishment of commitment to the profession, and the development of value-based skills (Merdinger, 1982; Weiss et al., 2004).

The NASW Code of Ethics specifies practice standards and is a symbol of how and why social work is a profession (Brill, 2001). One section emphasizes cultural/ethnic sensitivity and knowledge of diversity. This is echoed in EPAS requirements of explicit curricula for engaging diversity in practice and implicit curricula with a diverse learning environment (CSWE, 2015).

Professional development for working with immigrants (children and families)

Social workers must understand a number of concerns and issues that impact immigrants. Both immigrant children and parents experience the acculturation process and associated stress. Sam (2006) argued that general developmental theories do not consider the acculturation experiences of immigrant children, and he suggested that this acculturation process is an arena for development. While immigrant children generally acculturate more quickly than their parents (Sam, 2006), their involvement with the prevailing society may be in conflict with family membership (Kwak, 2003). Immigrant parents may attempt to retain their original culture rigidly, feel insecure

in the new setting, and implement strict parenting control (Chiu et al., 1992; Falicov, 2007). Thus, acculturation gaps may contribute to generational misunderstandings. Compared to native families, immigrants experience more negotiations, which may result in positive family functioning or lead to intergenerational conflicts (Falicov, 2007; Kwak, 2003).

In order to serve immigrant families and address intergenerational conflicts, social workers must have professional knowledge and skills including understandings of ethnic groups, environmental influences, culture-based and evidence-based practice, and self-awareness. This includes being professionally socialized about ethnocultural values and background at the individual level, family roles and structure at the group level, and larger social networks at the society level (Kim et al., 2006). The cultural competence that is crucial for working with diverse groups involves considering the cultures of worker and client as well as organizational and societal culture (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002). Thus, social workers should be aware of their own racial/ethnic/cultural background before exploring personal negative beliefs and attitudes toward other groups. This prepares them to shift these thoughts toward respecting cultural difference.

Preparation and professional development for working in the child welfare field

Researchers have examined preparation for service in the field of child welfare. One study documented that disciplinary backgrounds do not predict effective practice of child welfare workers (Perry, 2006). That is, the performance and skills of child welfare workers with a social work degree are not significantly different from their counterparts with other educational backgrounds, such as psychology, sociology, and criminology. Scannapieco et al. (2012) conducted surveys with CPS workers in Texas and found that child welfare workplace outcomes for workers with social work degrees and those with degrees in other fields differed in some important ways. For example, social workers reported knowing more about community resources, having a better understanding of the child welfare system, and feeling more capable of conducting assessments than non-social work counterparts. Once on the job for 18 months, those with social work education reported more alienation from their jobs and greater likelihood of exiting the field of public child welfare. These mixed findings might suggest increasing the disciplinary backgrounds of child welfare workers given that competence-based in-service trainings may normalize or minimize variance in knowledge and skill competence. The findings of both studies imply that field practice with both implicit and explicit trainings are important for professional socialization and support of child welfare professionals.

Studies that focus on professional development for child welfare social workers are scarce. To prepare workers to meet changing child welfare needs, the federal government has allocated Title IV-E funding to encourage collaboration between social work schools and public child welfare agencies. These partnerships have produced better trained child welfare workers benefiting child welfare agencies, families, and children (Leung and Willis, 2012; Scannapieco and Connell-Corrick, 2003; Zlotnik and Pryce, 2013). For example, Zlotnik and Pryce (2013) conducted an online survey with 65 respondents representing 31 states and 94 social work education programs, and their findings support that Title IV-E funding promotes professionalization with the increase of Master's-level child welfare social workers. Additionally, Leung and Willis (2012) found positive impacts of Title IV-E training on child welfare outcomes, including reduction in length of time to achieve reunification and adoption.

Professional development for working with immigrants in the child welfare system

Immigrant families involved with CPS experience many barriers to accessing services. Child maltreatment is defined differently across cultures. Given cultural differences in parenting practices

and expectations, immigrant parents who have contacts with CPS may not understand the reasons for child welfare involvement nor the social understanding needed to prevent future occurrences (Earner, 2007; Zhai and Gao, 2009). Focus groups of immigrant parents revealed their perceptions that there are few child welfare workers who understand issues related to immigration status, acculturation, and culture (Earner, 2007). Often families involved with CPS are not able to access services in their preferred language (Earner, 2007; Velazquez and Dettlaff, 2011).

Few studies address the professional development of child welfare workers serving immigrant families. Studies exploring the burdens of immigrants have recommended advanced training in the child welfare field (Earner, 2007; Velazquez and Dettlaff, 2011). Because family functioning is intimately linked to child maltreatment, child welfare workers must understand individuals' acculturation and immigration experiences and how these affect family functioning. Multicultural and diversity training that focuses on immigrants is needed to improve cultural competency and sensitivity to stressors associated with the ethnic/racial and immigration experience of families (Earner, 2007; Maiter et al., 2009; Velazquez and Dettlaff, 2011). Such training should also familiarize social workers with the impact of federal and state policies on immigrant families and services delivery (Velazquez and Dettlaff, 2011).

An example of how child welfare social workers can adapt their practice to better serve immigrant families is found in an application of the Person-in-Family-in-Community assessment practice model with Chinese immigrant families (Fong, 1997). The Person-in-Family-in-Community Model starts at the macro level with cultural values that affect immigrants' understanding of social services, then considers family as the primary client at the mezzo level, then focuses at the micro level on individuals. Fong (1997) suggested that social workers should be more effective working with immigrant families with child welfare involvement by focusing on the larger cultural environment rather than only on individual children and parents.

Another consideration is how the professional development of social work with immigrants in child welfare can be influenced by larger contexts, including potential theoretical and conceptual factors. Neoliberalism, defined as 'a theory of political economic practices with free markets and privatization', has influenced many countries' social welfare policies and social work practices, leading to the risk of preventing vulnerable clients (e.g. children of immigrants and undocumented immigrant families) from participating in public services (Spolander et al., 2014). Additionally, critical theory argues that such political and economic practices can reproduce the oppressive social structure, and social workers may suffer oppression via the neoliberal and managerial practices within an institutional framework (Dlamini and Sewpaul, 2015; Strier and Binyamin, 2014). There has been a call for anti-oppressive social work practices to protect clients' rights and challenge organizational and political forces (Strier and Binyamin, 2014), especially when most child welfare and immigrant services are provided by public social sectors. Individual social workers must engage in critical self-reflections in order to be aware of how their positions and identity may be influenced by the larger context and in turn influence their practices with children and family.

Being an immigrant and a social worker

Although the need for immigrant social workers has drawn attention, there are no data about the number of licensed social workers who are immigrants in the United States, nor are there data about international students in social work education programs in the United States. According to a NASW frontline preliminary report on licensed social workers (NASW Center for Workforce Studies, 2005), the predominant racial/ethnic group in the frontline workforce is non-Hispanic Whites (86%). Hispanic/Latino, African American, and Asian social workers are underrepresented (5%, 6%, and 2%, respectively), compared to the child population they serve (13%, 11%, and 4%,

respectively). In particular, social workers serving children and adolescents (the most racially diverse age group) are significantly less diverse than their clients (NASW Center for Workforce Studies, 2006). Although increasing in number (CSWE, 2012), social workers of racial and ethnic minority are not attracted and/or retained in sufficient numbers and the need for culturally and racially diverse social workers remains urgent.

Migration of professionals

Migration of skilled professionals such as social workers is part of a larger trend of increasing globalization of skilled human resources and the internationalization of higher education (Iredale, 2001). Nonetheless, limited research has studied the transnational movement of internationally educated social workers. Also, few studies have discussed the reasons for migration, the professional adaptation to new cultural and organizational contexts, or the impact of these processes on social work service delivery (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2014; Welbourne et al., 2007). There are studies conducted in immigrating countries like Canada and the United Kingdom (Hussein et al., 2010; Welbourne et al., 2007), but few studies have focused on the context in the United States. Social work culture may vary across nations in terms of education, training, supervision, and professionalization (Fouché et al., 2014; Welbourne et al., 2007). While some studies have focused on the migration experiences of professionals in other fields, such as nursing and education, such experiences may not be transferable to the social work profession. In part, this is because social work as a profession aspires to be value-based, contextually relevant, and culturally sensitive (Hussein et al., 2010; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012, 2014). Additionally, there is literature outside the United States, such as in European countries, focusing on the difficulties in the labor market faced by refugee and economic migrants (Clayton, 2005; Dumper, 2002). This limited literature has indicated that skilled migrants with refugee background may particularly become marginalized due to lack of support, and education and training in the new country can be critical to assisting these refugee migrants to promote their skills and qualifications (Clayton, 2005; Dumper, 2002).

Professional adaptation

Immigrant social workers must balance dual identities, being both immigrants and social workers. The acculturation experiences of immigrant social workers occurs in multiple domains, including the sociocultural and professional environments, and these experiences combine in an interactional process to form a professional identity (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012). The symbolic interactionism theoretical model (Blumer, 1969) is useful for understanding how the interactions between multiple identities influence the acculturation experiences of migrant social workers.

The emergence of a dynamic professional identity for immigrant social workers involves a continuing integration of personal values and professional values (Carpenter and Platt, 1997; Fouché et al., 2014). This process of professional adaptation involves the intersection of personal, professional, social, and cultural identities (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012, 2014). Professional identity development theory (Sims, 2011) is useful for understanding acculturation experiences as a developmental trajectory before, during, and after immigration. This model also helps identify how life adjustment and work adjustment mutually influence each other in the development of a professional identity (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012).

Several strategies may be used by immigrant social workers in the process of professional adaptation (Fouché et al., 2014; Hussein et al., 2011; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012, 2014). Although the social work profession is value- and context-based, some global similarities in education, training, and practice facilitate professional acculturation in host cultures (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012,

2014). In addition, professional and personal adaptations often merge in the context of social work practice. It is important for these practitioners to settle into the organizational context by receiving training in the host country and developing positive relationships with other colleagues (Fouché et al., 2014; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2014).

Immigrant social workers can experience a number of challenges. Given the intertwining of personal and professional identities, internationally educated social workers can struggle to identify boundaries between professional and personal values (Fouché et al., 2014). They may experience difficulties working in the countries to which they immigrate. Migrant social workers in Canada have had difficulty integrating international credentials with the Canadian social work delivery system (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2014), while migrant social workers in the United Kingdom have encountered discrimination and mistreatment from other staff and clients (Hussein et al., 2011). While there may be some commonalities in social work across cultures, nuances in the match between training and culture of practice also seem to matter.

Biculturalism/multiculturalism

Immigrant social workers are binational, bilingual, and bicultural. Bicultural not only means being involved in two cultures, but also refers to the development of a bicultural identity comprising local and global identities (Chen et al., 2008). Social workers with bicultural identities are more likely to integrate their personal and professional identities in order to adapt. Beyond bicultural identities, globalization trends have been increasingly mandating global acculturation, wherein people are exposed to and become versed in multiple cultural worldviews (Chen et al., 2008). This is related to the multicultural model wherein multiculturalism promotes a socio-political context where positive intergroup attitudes can be developed and mutual influences occur (Berry, 1991). Social workers can play an important role as change agents between different cultures.

Having at least bicultural or even better multicultural competence is important for immigrant professionals whether they work with culturally same or culturally different clients. We use the widely adopted term ‘cultural competence’ in the careful and comprehensive way recommended by Garran and Werkmeister Rozas (2013), acknowledging the complex contributions of power, privilege, and social intersections to our social and cultural identities. With this in mind, multicultural competence is the ability to integrate multiple cultural identities rooted in professionals’ (1) awareness of own culture, (2) knowledge about clients’ culturally different worldviews, and (3) use of culturally sensitive practices (Bean et al., 2001). Specific areas for development include (LaFromboise et al., 1993) (1) knowledge of both own and other cultural beliefs and values, (2) positive attitudes toward both majority and minority groups, (3) bicultural efficacy to avoid compromising either original or new cultural identity, (4) communication skills, (5) role repertoire to develop culturally appropriate behaviors, and (6) a well-developed social support system to provide a sense of being grounded. Through the process of professional adaptation, immigrant professionals have a duty to perceive their own valued position and their relationships in an external context.

It should not be presumed that any individual can or should represent their ethnic/racial group. Likewise, bilingual service providers often are assumed to be culturally sensitive and familiar with diverse cultures. However, they should not be assumed to have an understanding about immigration processes and acculturative stress, especially if they are not immigrants (Finno et al., 2006). Immigrant social workers potentially have unique strengths to work with immigrant populations because of shared experiences of acculturation and immigration processes. However, they should not be expected to understand important variations in the cultural groups within their pan-ethnic/racial category.

Furthermore, developing an international perspective does not mean exclusion of local values. Understanding the subtleties of both international and local practice contexts and the interaction between the two is critical for an immigrant social worker to integrate their experiences and practices. As Jones and Truell (2012) suggested for the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, international is local. In addition to the intersectionality of acculturation and immigration experiences, it is necessary to consider other concepts that interact with race, ethnicity, culture, and nationality, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and region as well as the impacts of recent policies.

Implications

Implications for policy

Current child welfare policy has been established and implemented separately by each state in order to protect children and assure their best interest. However, each state has developed its own child welfare legislation, and thus definitions of child abuse and neglect vary and are vague (Coleman, 2007). Although there are advantages in having flexibility in defining parental conduct as maltreatment, this flexibility does put serious responsibility on child abuse mandated reporters and frontline investigators (Coleman, 2007). Without a clear child maltreatment definition, social workers have a great deal of responsibility in evaluating the validity of substantiation, determining the evidence of child maltreatment, and making decisions about outcomes. Putting such concern in the context of the immigrant (and other minority) communities, the definition of child maltreatment is not only a legal term but is saturated with cultural values. Although this raises a broader issue in the child welfare system, the issue regarding the child maltreatment definition can be specifically relevant to cultural practice in the field. Professionals must interpret parental behavior and potential misconduct in the context of cultural practices:

Child welfare policy proposal 1. The child welfare field should work to develop a clear and standard definition of child maltreatment with an amendment of reporting and investigating procedures that include culturally relevant queries.

There are precedents for policy playing a critical role in improving people's attitudes toward immigrants. For example, the Canadian government announced a policy of multiculturalism in 1971 (Berry, 1984, 2013). This policy encouraged mutual interaction between different ethnic groups in order to improve intergroup harmony. The policy was successful in promoting positive attitudes toward diversity and incorporating immigrants in the Canadian multicultural society (Berry, 1984, 2013; Bloemraad, 2011). Nonetheless, concerns about multiculturalism in Canada and other European countries include whether it may undermine social cohesion and local values; and French-Canadian communities, for example, are less supportive of a multicultural public policy (Bakhov, 2013; Berry, 2013; Bloemraad, 2011). Although the practice and application of multicultural policy in Canada is different across provinces and remains a debated issue, Canada has certainly become one of the leading countries in practicing and achieving the multicultural vision (Bakhov, 2013; Bloemraad, 2011). Under the implementation of such policy, social workers, especially immigrants, who work with multiple cultural groups and are bicultural/multicultural could act as important change agents and mediators to achieve the goals of mutual sharing and harmony between ethnic groups:

Child welfare policy proposal 2. To meet growing needs of multicultural societies, governments must develop immigration policies that include recruitment and retention of skilled international child welfare professionals.

Implications for child welfare practice

Since the social work profession is value-based and context-bound, it is important for immigrant social workers to understand the contexts of their professional practice. For the individual context, immigrant social workers must develop locally and internationally relevant knowledge and values. They are in a unique position to integrate personal and professional identities to influence local and international practice (Carpenter and Platt, 1997; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012, 2014). Additionally, immigrant social workers need to have knowledge about how problems are found, identified, and addressed differently in local and international contexts (Fouché et al., 2014). Immigrant social workers are in an ideal position to benefit both immigrant and non-immigrant populations in multiracial and multicultural societies:

Child welfare practice proposal 1. For immigrant social workers to perform optimally in their host country, they must be conscious of their own cultural background as well as knowledgeable about their profession and the cultural context of the host country.

In the organizational context, immigrant workers serve clients from diverse backgrounds and also work closely with local colleagues and supervisors. In order to develop a strong social work professional identity and optimal adaptation, they must enrich their knowledge about the new cultural and professional context, while local social workers must be prepared to collaborate with their immigrant colleagues. Local social workers should understand that these new colleagues might face oppression, discrimination, and social exclusion as immigrant clients do and be able to help facilitate the integration of their colleagues (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2014). Training is necessary for the entire workforce regarding awareness of diversity and equality and in the skills necessary to manage related conflicts, prevent the occurrence of mistreatment, and ensure positive professional experiences and acculturation of immigrant social workers (Hussein et al., 2011):

Child welfare practice proposal 2. In addition to providing routine diversity training within their agencies, public CPS and private contracted child welfare agencies need to develop an organizational culture where not only are frontline workers culturally sensitive in working with their immigrant colleagues, but all staff, including administrators, directors, and supervisors, participate in creating an inclusive culture.

Regarding child protective issues in the community context, the CPS should work with immigrant community leaders and local child welfare agencies. Immigrant social workers can act as a bridge to represent the CPS and work closely with the immigrant communities to ensure that culturally sensitive interventions are in place, cultural competency is practiced, and cultural conflicts are avoided (Coleman, 2007):

Child welfare practice proposal 3. Agencies should empower and support immigrant social workers to connect CPS with local immigrant communities, facilitating prevention and effective service provision.

Implication for social work education/training

This article leads to the conclusion that training and curriculum need to be improved in order to enhance practice in the field of social work. Beecher et al. (2010) identified three social work education models: imperialism, universalism, and indigenization. The *imperialism model* supports

westernized social work values and practices as superior to those sourced locally. The *universalism model* is predicated on globally shared social work values that are not specific to any context or culture. Indeed, internationally educated immigrant social workers have had training in their home countries in what are often considered ‘universal’ social work knowledge, skills, and values (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012, 2014). However, these values of social work profession are typically influenced by Western ideology (Beecher et al., 2010; Gray and Hetherington, 2016). Indigenous social work questions whether the Western social work model is relevant to universal application of professional practice (Gray and Hetherington, 2016). The *indigenization model* acknowledges that local social work practices are shaped by culturally and contextually based systems (political, social, and economic), and it requires sensitivity and fit to local contexts in order to develop culturally relevant or specific knowledge and practice (Gray and Hetherington, 2016; Gray et al., 2008). Social work education based on the indigenization model develops local social work practices in response to the local culture to serve the local population. Among these models, indigenization is most appropriate for educating new professionals because the nature of effective social work practice is responsive to cultural contexts (Beecher et al., 2010):

Social work education and training proposal 1. To provide culturally competent and culturally relevant services, social work educators should adapt an indigenization education and training framework drawing on the experience and expertise of immigrant social work students and colleagues in the field.

While sensitivity to diversity has been a concern of social work programs for decades (Bowie et al., 2011), immigration is still an underrepresented topic. Curriculum should include non-Western perspectives and relevant country- or culture-specific knowledge, integrating literature and evidence from international contexts and not just US samples. Students should be supported to compare policies and practices between Western and other countries as a way of understanding cultural differences and immigrant experiences. To improve the application of knowledge in the courses, schools can invite guest speakers who are experts in cultural and international issues to co-teach with faculty, and students should be encouraged to be involved in the social work organizations of different countries:

Social work education and training proposal 2. Social work curricula need to be increasingly globalized with a particular emphasis on immigration, drawing on the international social work literature as well as on the experience and expertise of immigrant social work students and colleagues in the field to globalize.

The field of social work needs diverse students, especially with immigrant backgrounds, to work in immigrant communities (Calderwood et al., 2009; Finno et al., 2006). Like immigrant social workers, international students need supportive and nonjudgmental environments while experiencing the acculturation process and developing their professional identity. Social work departments and educators must recognize the challenges of international social work students and examine policies on international student programs to make their departments more culturally competent (Beecher et al., 2010).

Field practicum is the central mechanism of social work professional socialization. Either international social work students in the US local field or students doing field practice internationally need culturally sensitive supervision. Although field social workers may be culturally sensitive to their clients, they may not be culturally competent when supervising or mentoring immigrant or international social work students. The mentoring and supervision structure in Western social work

programs may benefit from examination (Calderwood et al., 2009) and assistance in moving beyond cultural competence. Cultural friendliness involves evidencing sensitive knowledge, skills, and values and entails 'being always accepting, accommodating, sincere, open, respectful, comfortable, spontaneous, and warm' (Engelbrecht, 2006: 257). Field supervisors must be cultural friendly to mentor students who work with clients, colleagues, and supervisors who are from different cultural backgrounds (Engelbrecht, 2006):

Social work education and training proposal 3. Special attention must be given to recruiting and mentoring social work students with international backgrounds in child welfare.

Implications for future research

Meeting the needs of immigrant families depends on a well-trained professional workforce. Training and professional development should be based on solid research. This survey of the literature suggests the need for further empirical research on the experiences and perceptions of immigrant social workers and social work students:

Social work research proposal 1. Research should explore the professional development of immigrant social workers in their host country and focus on the differential practice outcomes when social work values, skills, and knowledge are taught from Western and non-Western paradigms.

Social work research proposal 2. Qualitative studies are needed to identify the interaction between professional development and the acculturation experiences of immigrant social workers, and how this interaction affect workers' field practice with immigrant and non-immigrant children and families.

Social work research proposal 3. Large-scale datasets should be established for the social work profession with information about immigration status, country of origin, and language spoken so that quasi-experimental research could be conducted to explore the impact of these demographic and immigration factors on effective direct practice.

These directions for future research will provide a fuller understanding of immigrant social workers, improve their engagement with the multicultural society, and enhance the quality of service to increasing vulnerable immigrant populations.

Conclusion

This article explores the general context, acculturation experiences, and professional development of immigrant child welfare social workers. The dual identities of immigrant and social worker create a unique leadership opportunity for these individuals to serve the growing immigrant population. A more nuanced understanding of immigrant social workers will contribute to knowledge about the experiences of immigrant professional helpers in other sister fields. The ultimate goal is to improve outcomes for the children of immigrants who, like generations before them, will develop into a new generation of citizens. Recommendations for policy, child welfare practice, social work education, and future research will contribute to both the field and literature. Social workers with immigrant or international backgrounds can benefit the cultural practice in the field. Training regarding diversity and cultural sensitivity should be routinely provided to all staff, including immigrant and native social workers, supervisors, and administrators.

Culturally relevant curricula should be developed in the field and schools of social work. Finally, this article has identified the needs of future research, especially qualitative studies, to explore the interaction between professional development and acculturation experiences among immigrant social workers.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Author biographies

Ching-Hsuan Lin, MSW, PhD, is a assistant professor at Department of Social Work at National Taiwan University in Taiwan. His research interests are child welfare, specifically focus on child and family well-being among vulnerable families, including kinship care, racial minority, and immigrant families.

Angela Wiley, PhD, is a Professor and Head of Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Auburn University. Her research interests focus on the needs of Spanish-speaking families in the U.S. who face health disparities, promotion wellness through outreach work, family strengths such as mealtimes and shared physical activity that can improve family functioning and health, and examining factors that promote resilience in individuals and families facing stress and challenge.