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The Contribution of Mindfulness Practice to Supporting Children and Their Families'
Challenges Among School Social Workers: A Qualitative Multicase Study of
School Social Workers in California

A Dissertation by
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A Private Nonprofit Affiliate of the University of Massachusetts

Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

January 2024

Committee in charge:

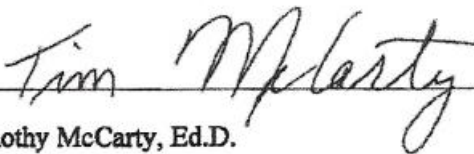
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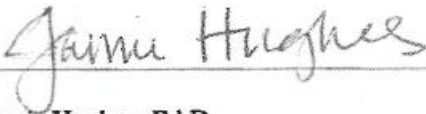
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January 2024

The Contribution of Mindfulness Practice to Supporting Children and Their Families'

Challenges Among School Social Workers: A Qualitative Multicase Study of

School Social Workers in California

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I have waited so long to become a doctor, probably lifetimes. My immediate gratitude goes to all women and men who have advocated to make education available for women and minorities because, thanks to their actions, I have the privilege to make one of my dreams a reality.

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With a grateful heart, I say thank you to every single one of you.

ABSTRACT

The Contribution of Mindfulness Practice to Supporting Children and Their Families'
Challenges Among School Social Workers: A Qualitative Multicase Study of
School Social Workers in California

by Catalina Andrade

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the challenges school social workers experience when supporting students and their families in their schools. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to understand how school social workers use mindfulness practices to help them respond to the challenges of working with the students and their families in their school based on Lesser's mindfulness model (2019): love the work, do the work, don't be an expert, connect to your pain, connect to the pain of others, depend on others, and keep making it simpler.

Methodology: In this multicase study, the researcher conducted five interviews with school social workers in California. The researcher employed qualitative methods to explain the challenges that school social workers face while supporting students and their families and to identify the most useful mindfulness practices for school social workers to use when responding to these challenges.

Findings: The findings from the study indicate that school social workers experience multiple challenges when supporting students and their families. Furthermore, the study's findings identify the most useful Lesser's (2019) mindfulness practices for school social workers while dealing with these challenges. Twelve identified themes, four major findings, and one unexpected finding emerged from the semistructured interviews and artifacts.

Conclusions: The study found that the more needs students and families have, the more challenges school social workers experience. Additionally, the study supported the usefulness of school social workers using mindfulness practices while experiencing these challenges. Practicing mindfulness helped school social workers feel more compassionate, present, empathetic, self-aware, and calm while supporting students and their families during challenging times.

Recommendations: It is recommended that more research be conducted to replicate this qualitative multicase study concentrating on school social workers who assist a specific group of ethnically diverse students. Another recommendation is that this qualitative multicase study can be replicated with school social workers who only work with children in elementary, middle, and high schools. Finally, it is recommended to use a mixed method to interview and survey school social workers to build on the findings of this study.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Students in today's complex world are increasingly stressed (Armstrong, 2019). Maya and Jesus (fictitious names used to protect the students' privacy) are two students having difficulty in school. Maya is described as a shy girl who fails her classes because she is too shy to ask for help and does not complete her homework on time. Meanwhile, Jesus is portrayed as a troublemaker who is constantly involved in school fights and does not attend classes. At home, Maya and Jesus are dealing with their alcoholic father's 3-month absence and a single mother raising five children while struggling to meet basic needs. Maya is insecure and unmotivated whereas Jesus is angry and feels responsible for his family as the only son.

Students dealing with stressful life circumstances perform poorly in school (Blundo & Savage, 2020). Unacceptable behaviors and learning arise from coping with difficulties such as housing insecurity, food insecurity, and a lack of healthcare, including mental healthcare (Blundo & Savage, 2020; T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022). Children who face poverty, mental health issues, grief or loss, domestic violence, a lack of access to technology, a lack of parental supervision, and other life hardships are more likely to commit suicide, become addicted to drugs, and remain in poverty (Allen-Meares, 1994; Blundo & Savage, 2020; T. M. Jones et al., 2021). Schools are becoming more cognizant of the significance of how social problems affect students' academic performance (Allen-Meares, 1994). As a result, school districts are taking immediate action to provide resources to students both in and out of school, and to begin investing in the community's economic, social-emotional, and general health of families (T. M. Jones et al., 2021).

Schools are becoming providers of social services for students and their families because federal and state laws require schools to accommodate the needs of students and their families (Openshaw, 2008; Watson et al., 2022). Schools increasingly offer mental health and other healthcare needs, nutritional assistance, and case management (Watson et al., 2022). To accomplish this, some school districts are hiring social workers to guide and connect students and families to services inside and outside the school (Openshaw, 2008). These school districts rely on school social workers to assist students and their families through various crises and challenging times (Alvarez et al., 2013; Watson et al., 2022). School social workers play a crucial role in assisting students as trained professionals who identify academic, social, and emotional health issues (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Openshaw, 2008). School social workers also have the knowledge and expertise to support and empower children with the skills necessary to improve their academic performance (Alvarez et al., 2013).

Based on their job responsibilities, social workers are constantly looking for new professional solutions to promote the well-being of their clients (Turner, 2019). One of the recent solutions for student well-being is mindfulness; thus, mindfulness is becoming increasingly popular in K-12 education. According to ETTY-Leal (2021), mindfulness had little meaning 2 decades ago, but now mindfulness is integrated into public school curricula (Knoblock, 2017). Social workers use mindfulness to help clients suffering from mental disorders such as anxiety and depression (Turner, 2019). One of the goals of social workers and a justification for employing mindfulness practices is to teach children to respond rather than react in emotionally charged situations (Brandsma, 2017; Turner, 2019).

The percentage of Americans who practice mindfulness has increased by more than 2% in the last 5 years. (C. G. Brown, 2019). Mindfulness has grown in popularity because of its positive effects on physical, mental, and emotional well-being according to Armstrong (2019), Jackson (2020), Knoblock (2017), and Stahl and Goldstein (2010). Because schools are a microcosm of society, the rise of mindfulness in education is not surprising. Although the expansion of mindfulness in education matches the national trend, there is a significant gap in understanding the impact of mindfulness on school social work by identifying the most useful mindfulness practices that assist school social workers in doing their work when working with students and their families at their schools. This study will further knowledge about school mindfulness as perceived by school social workers.

Background

Federal and state regulations compel school systems to accommodate children's needs to provide an environment where all children are educated (Openshaw, 2008). Schools are concerned with what happens in the classroom and societal issues affecting children's education (Blundo & Savage, 2020; T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022). According to Blundo and Savage (2020), students who live in poverty and violence are more likely to be truant and have behavior problems. Therefore, school districts are working to help children with their social, emotional, and mental health as well as unmet basic needs (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022). For example, districts are hiring social workers to help improve the school climate, providing access to services for students, involving and engaging parents, and connecting students to community resources.

Issues Affecting Students and Families

Family Conditions Affecting Students

Homelessness, housing instability, food insecurity, health care services, mental health care, and unemployment are the most common family difficulties identified by schools (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022). School districts understand the impact of the outside environment and dynamics in a student's life in and outside the school. Many students lack basic survival needs and are expected to excel in school. T. M. Jones et al. (2021), Openshaw (2008), and Watson et al. (2022) discussed how schools are concerned with providing a more stable environment for their students both within and outside of school. Because of this, school districts employ school social workers to connect students and families with community resources that can help with a variety of family issues (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Openshaw, 2008).

Poverty

In the United States, over 20% of children under the age of 18 are classified as technically poor, and another 20% are near poor, meaning they live in households with incomes below the federal poverty line, based on the poverty criteria provided by the U.S. Census Bureau (Center for Poverty and Inequality Research, n.d.; Yoshikawa et al., 2012). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a household's income of 100% or less is considered poor, and 50% is extreme poverty (Center for Poverty and Inequality Research, n.d.). According to the U.S. Welfare System, the poverty rate in California is 12.3% (Welfare Info, n.d.). The Public Policy Institute of California reported that one-quarter of California children are poor (Danielson & Bohn, 201). According to Blundo

and Savage (2020), “poverty is an all-encompassing threat to many children’s present and future lives” (p. 236).

Poverty generates difficult life circumstances that result in poor academic performance, absenteeism, and behavioral issues (Allen-Meares, 1994; Blundo & Savage, 2020; Boatwright & Midcalf, 2019; Watson et al., 2022). Poverty-stricken children are less proficient in reading and math, increasing academic failure (Boatwright & Midcalf, 2019). School dropouts or increased absenteeism are typically the results of a lack of motivation and determination to learn (Boatwright & Midcalf, 2019; Lee & Zhang, 2022). According to Boatwright and Midcalf (2019), “The longer children are exposed to poverty, the more they will be academically deficient” (p. 53).

Mental Health of Students

According to the World Health Organization, up to 20% of teenagers worldwide suffer from mental health disorders (Jalón et al., 2022). Mental health stigmatizes schoolchildren, leading to preconceptions among school employees and other children and social exclusion (Kranke & Floersch, 2009). Concurrently, many schoolchildren of all grade levels suffer from mental illnesses (Armstrong, 2019; Cook-Cottone, 2017; Maurer, 2019). Mental health is one of the most common issues that students face, and it has become more prevalent since the COVID-19 pandemic (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Leyba, 2010). As children returned to school, mental well-being became a high focus because of an increase in the number of children suffering from anxiety and other mental health issues (T. M. Jones et al., 2021). According to research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 2014 to 2018, one in every five children in grades K-12 has a mental health problem (Sedillo-Hamann, 2022). Anxiety and depression disorders,

attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder are the prevalent mental difficulties that children face today (Maurer, 2019; Sedillo-Hamann, 2022). As a result, schools are witnessing an increase in emotional dysregulation in students, which lead to expulsions and suspensions and a lack of academic performance (Alvarez et al., 2013; Sedillo-Hamann, 2022).

Historically, school social workers are the frontline mental health providers in the U.S. public school system (Alvarez et al., 2013; Lige, 2021). As part of their role, school social workers must educate school staff, parents, and students on “the value of early assessment, intervention, and treatment by qualified mental health professionals” (Openshaw, 2008, p. 6). As school social workers support students with mental health issues, they become mediators and advocates for the importance of students’ mental and emotional well-being (Kranke & Floersch, 2009; Lige, 2021).

The COVID-19 Pandemic’s Effects on Children and Families

The closing and reopening of schools provided school social workers with a better understanding of the current and future needs of children and families during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Watson et al., 2022). T. M. Jones et al. (2021) illustrated how the pandemic harmed families. Families face housing insecurity, food insecurity, an increase in mental health, grief and loss, and, in many cases, medical debt because of the pandemic (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022). In addition, students reported parental neglect, child and adult abuse, a lack of internet access, school disengagement, poor academic performance, and increased substance use (T. M. Jones et al., 2021). Simultaneously, the epidemic provided an opportunity for schools to assess their child and community serving systems (Watson et al., 2022).

Social Work History

The term social work was first used in 1843 by The Improvement of the Conditioning of the Poor and the Children's Aid Society conceived social work focused on child welfare and housing (Simmons University, n.d.). In 1900, social work began to take shape and achieved professional status for the first time until 1930 (Sedlak, 1981; Stuart, 2019). During and after World War II, social work services for poverty and mental health issues were in high demand (Stuart, 2019). Stuart (2019) described how in 1960, social work refocused on poverty issues. History has shown that as a community's needs change, so do social work services.

Social Workers

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023), social workers “help people prevent and cope with problems in their everyday lives” (para. 1). In an era of increasing need, social workers face the challenges of an already demanding and stressful profession (Sutlief, 2013). Historically, social workers have played a critical role in crisis response (Watson et al., 2022). According to T. M. Jones et al. (2021), social workers play “a critical role in rethinking the systems in which they work” (p. 104). From basic living needs to mental health services, social workers assist families and communities while demonstrating empathy, attention, and presence to their clients to build trusting relationships (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Openshaw, 2008; Pyles et al., 2021). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported more than 700,000 social workers serving children and families, including at schools in 2020 (Watson et al., 2022).

School Social Workers

School social workers are “trained mental health specialists who can help with mental health issues, behavioral issues, positive behavioral assistance, academic, and classroom support, consultation with teachers, parents, and administrators, and individual and group counseling/therapy” (School Social Work Association of America, n.d., para. 1). In schools, families, and communities, school social workers serve as clinicians, mediators, and advocates (Lige, 2021). Some of the tasks of school social workers include connection building within the school and the community, evaluation, working with multidisciplinary concerns, and assisting children and families with emotional and mental health (Alvarez et al., 2013; T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Lige, 2021; Openshaw, 2008). Although the role and responsibilities of a school social worker differ by district, they play a crucial role in assisting k-12 students and their families during times of crisis (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Openshaw, 2008; Watson et al., 2022).

Mindfulness Background

Eastern Roots of Mindfulness

Mindfulness originated from Asian religions like Hinduism and Buddhism (C. G. Brown, 2019; Knoblock, 2017). Eastern mindfulness has a psycho-historical perspective of Indian traditions, which is fundamental for Indian psychology because it integrates the body, mind, and soul (Singla, 2011). Eastern mindfulness considers religions and traditions that promote serenity, clarity, calm, steadiness, open-mindedness, and compassion (Weare & Huppert, 2019). Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (as cited in Jackson, 2020), a key figure in Eastern and Western mindfulness, defined mindfulness as

“inclusive and compassionate attention to the present moment that accepts everything without judging or responding” (p. 120).

Mindfulness in Western Society

Western mindfulness is a secular practice that aims to promote body and mind wellness (Singla, 2011). Mindfulness, as defined by Kabat-Zinn, the creator of the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program, is “paying attention in a certain way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Caulfield, 2014, p. 27).

Western mindfulness, as opposed to Eastern mindfulness, focuses on a scientific approach to stress reduction, improved focus, and emotional control (Caulfield, 2014; Jackson, 2020; Knoblock, 2017). Five pioneers of Western mindfulness are (a) Ramakrishna K. Rao, an international authority in Indian psychology; (b) Jon Kabat-Zinn, the creator of the MBSR program; (c) Ole Jacob Madsen, the creator of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy; (d) Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk with an approach to modern secular mindfulness; and (e) Christina Feldman, a highly respected Western meditation teacher (Singla, 2011; Webber, 2018).

Mindfulness in Education

According to new research and empirical evidence, mindfulness is flourishing and evolving in schools, influencing ways for overcoming of educational difficulties and challenges (Albrecht, 2019). In 2019, there were over 30 mindfulness programs in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia alone (Armstrong, 2019), including Mission Be training. Over 600 educators and 29,000 children have learned mindfulness through this nonprofit organization (Albrecht, 2019). Yoga and meditation integrated mindfulness into public classrooms between 1970 and 2010 (C. G. Brown, 2019).

Mindfulness began as a spiritual practice, but in the West, a more secular version has gained popularity in schools (Albrecht, 2019; Armstrong, 2019; ETTY-Leal, 2021; Knoblock, 2017).

Theoretical Foundations

Individual Mindfulness Theory

Individual mindfulness is a theory created by Harvard social psychologist Ellen Langer, the “mother of mindfulness” (University of Minnesota, n.d., para. 1; Lichtner, n.d.). Langer (as cited in Lichtner, n.d.) described mindfulness as “an active state of mind characterized by novel distinction-drawing that results in being: (1) situated in the present; (2) sensitive to context and perspective; and (3) guided (but not governed) by rules and routines” (para. 4). Langerian mindfulness is about cognition and interpretation of information.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory, developed by psychologists Deci and Ryan, is a motivational theory that explains how “people can become self-determined when their demands for competence, connection, and autonomy are fulfilled” (Cherry, 2022, para. 5). Self-determination theory is described as individuals who are functioning autonomously and are responsive to reality rather than directed by ego-invested preconceived notions (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). Being self-determined suggests that a person feels more in control of their life as opposed to being nonself-determined, which may cause a person to feel as if their life is controlled by others (Cherry, 2022).

Objective Self-Awareness Theory

According to Miller (2020), “The American Psychological Association defines objective self-awareness as a reflecting condition of self-focused attention” (para. 4). The self-awareness theory represented in the work of Buss (1980), Carver and Scheier (1981; 1998), and Duval and Wicklund (1972) described multiple forms of reflexive consciousness, which “connotes taking oneself or one’s experiences as an object of attention” (K. W. Brown et al., 2007, p. 216). Duval and Wicklund established the notion of objective self-awareness in 1972 to describe how a person develops personal standards based on their external environment and how it might modify their behavior following internalization (Miller, 2020).

MBSR

Taking a modern and scientific-based approach, Kabat-Zinn became the father of mindfulness-stress-based reduction in the 1970s (Ackerman, 2017). In 1979, Kabat-Zinn introduced MBSR to the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts, which created interest in mindfulness in the medical and psychological fields (Ackerman, 2017; K. W. Brown et al., 2007). MBSR focuses on “making each moment count by consciously bringing it into awareness” (Ackerman, 2017, para. 17).

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) focuses on increasing metacognitive awareness for present-moment, nonjudgmental awareness of negative thoughts and feelings (K. W. Brown et al., 2007). To manage thoughts and emotions, MBCT integrates cognitive behavior with mindfulness practices (Good Therapy, 2018). Segal, Williams, and Teasdale created MBCT to help depressed patients become aware of

depressive thought patterns to prevent relapse (K. W. Brown et al., 2007; Good Therapy, 2018). Currently, mental health professionals use MBCT to help patients with anxiety, eating disorders, psychosis, and bipolar disorder as well as to reduce overall stress (Good Therapy, 2018).

Systems Theory

A theory that goes back to 1976 used in social work, systems theory is based on human behavior as the result of a complex system and is well-known in social work (Social Work Guide, 2020; Walker, 2019). Systems theory enables social workers to understand the components and dynamics of client systems to interpret problems and develop balanced intervention strategies (Friedman & Allen, 2014). As the world changes in society, economy, population trends, and legal and educational developments, social workers must evolve their services to respond to new challenges in constant change (Walker, 2019).

Transpersonal Theory

The transpersonal theory, pioneered by Carl Jung, is based on the relationship between the body and mind consciousness, making it a spiritual and psychological theory (Campbellsville University, 2017; Social Work Guide, 2020). This theory, based in human development theory, helps people overcome adversity and build healthy habits (Campbellsville University, 2017). Although this theory is not scientific, many mental health professionals include meditation, hypnotherapy, and other mindfulness practices in their interventions (Social Work Guide, 2020).

Theoretical Framework: Lesser's Seven Mindfulness Practices

More mindfulness programs and training are developing as more research on the benefits of mindfulness is conducted (Armstrong, 2019; C. G. Brown, 2019). Lesser (2019) suggested a new framework with seven mindfulness practices that can “meet society’s most critical and pressing concerns” (p. 7). The essence of mindfulness practices, according to Lesser, is awareness. Mindfulness, according to Lesser, goes beyond simply relaxing the body and mind. According to Lesser, mindfulness is “a way of being and seeing that shifts our perspective” (p. 10), allowing people to appreciate life, including their work. Lesser’s seven mindfulness practices served as the theoretical framework for this study. It is a theory that describes seven practices that are often components of secular-based mindfulness programs in schools.

Practice 1: Love the Work

Love for one’s work is a practice that begins with inspiration. According to Lesser (2019), this practice is a “devotion of a life’s work, a way of being in the world” (p. 56). Loving one’s work fosters trust in oneself and others because one brings the best intentions and love viewpoint to all one does.

Practice 2: Do the Work

Doing the work entails practicing mindfulness regularly to better respond to problems at work or in life (Lesser, 2019). Lesser (2019) defined doing the work as listening honestly, valuing self-compassion, building emotional awareness, and finding alignment. Following this practice helps in becoming less self-critical and self-judgmental.

Practice 3: Don't be an Expert

Don't be an expert is about expressing vulnerability without fear and letting go of the urge to be correct (Lesser, 2019). Lesser (2019) defined this practice as “adopting an attitude of inquiry that neither confirms nor rejects what we find (p. 87). This practice also helps to reduce life's biases by realizing that “all pictures, tales, and mental models of the world are incomplete” (Lesser, 2019, p. 84) and can lead to misguided behavior.

Practice 4: Connect to Your Pain

When people connect with their suffering, they are motivated to transform their pain into learning and new opportunities. According to Lesser (2019), this approach is a method of noticing and accepting what hurts and selecting the most effective action to follow. Lesser recommended using this practice if people are suffering emotional distress. Lesser suggested that people transform their discomfort by becoming more familiar with it, not by avoiding it.

Practice 5: Connect to the Pain of Others

Connecting with others' suffering is a reminder to connect with all of humanity and life. Lesser (2019) outlined how this method fosters a sense of connection and purpose in people who collaborate while focusing on their strengths. Lesser defined this strategy as fostering compassion for others.

Practice 6: Depend on Others

Dependence on others is a behavior that promotes a positive group dynamic by empowering people while working together. Lesser (2019) defined this approach as “letting go of a false feeling of independence” (p. 25) to succeed while building trust and connection.

Practice 7: Keep Making it Simpler

Keeping it simple is cultivating amazement in one's work and life (Lesser, 2019). Lesser (2019) defined this practice as "making life less complicated so we may be more focused, spacious, and present" (p. 176). This practice also leads people to see challenges in new ways. Lesser stated, "Your problems are the complexity and texture of human existence" (p. 178).

Research Problem

There has been a rise in interest in mindfulness in education during the last decade (Etty-Leal, 2021). Mindfulness activities such as yoga and guided meditation first appeared in public schools in the 1970s, and the most expansion has occurred in the twenty-first century (C. G. Brown, 2019). According to Albrecht (2019), more than 225,000 mental health practitioners in the United States use mindfulness activities to help their clients. Based on research on the benefits of mindfulness, such as stress reduction, improved attention, memory development, executive functioning, and cognitive improvement, mental health providers are incorporating mindfulness techniques into their treatment plans (Albrecht, 2019; Armstrong, 2019; Knoblock, 2017). The studies on mindfulness's good impacts on physical and mental health have encouraged the incorporation of mindfulness into hospitals, business settings, and education (Knoblock, 2017).

Students also struggle with excessive stress (Albrecht, 2019). According to the American Psychological Association, one-third of teenagers are sad or overwhelmed because of stress (Armstrong, 2019). Chen and Kuo (2020) and Stewart et al. (2019) described how children who experience high stress levels are more likely to commit

suicide. Suicide is more likely among children and adults who are dealing with the grievance of a loved one, encountering dangerous live events, shifting obligations, and facing life hardships (Stewart et al., 2019). Unfortunately, youth suicide is the world's second-highest cause of mortality (Chen & Kuo, 2020), and children's mental health issues are increasing (Cook-Cottone, 2017). In response, some school districts use school social workers as key mental health providers, assisting children and their families struggling with mental health issues and other life obstacles (Alvarez et al., 2013).

Sutlief (2013) reported that social workers experience high levels of work-related stress and burnout despite their positive attitudes toward their profession. According to Rose and Palattiyil (2020), social workers have an 8-year average tenure compared to nurses and doctors who have an average tenure of 15 to 25 years. It is not unexpected that social workers suffer from fatigue, psychological issues, and sleep disorders resulting from their stressful job (Sutlief, 2013). People's personal and professional lives suffer from the numerous responsibilities and challenges of a demanding job (Kim, 2022). When there is an economic, social, or cultural crisis, a reduction in the number of social workers is very significant. The number of people in need is increasing as is the quantity of cases for social workers (Pyles et al., 2021; Sutlief, 2013).

Currently, research has shown the many benefits of practicing mindfulness, which supports physical, mental, and emotional wellness (Albrecht, 2019; Armstrong, 2019; Cook-Cottone, 2017; Knoblock, 2017); however, most of the mindfulness research in education focuses on students or teachers using mindfulness practices (Armstrong, 2019; ETTY-Leal, 2021). Furthermore, literature on school social workers speaks about the effects of the many responsibilities when supporting students and their families

(Openshaw, 2008; Sutlief, 2013; Watson et al., 2022). As a result, the problem is that little is known about the numerous challenges that social workers face when assisting students and their families to cope with life's challenges. Second, although mindfulness techniques get implemented in some settings in the field of social work, further investigation into how mindfulness practices are used by school social workers to effectively support children in successfully overcoming socio-emotional issues is needed.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the challenges school social workers experience when supporting students and their families in their schools. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to understand how school social workers use mindfulness practices to help them respond to the challenges of working with the students and their families in their school based on Lesser's (2019) mindfulness model. The seven practices in the model include (a) love the work, (b) do the work, (c) don't be an expert, (d) connect to your pain, (e) connect to the pain of others, (f) depend on others, and (g) keep making it simpler.

Research Questions

1. What are the challenges that school social workers experience when supporting students and their families?
2. What are the mindful practices based on Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices that school social workers find most useful when responding to the students and their families' challenges of the school that they experience?

Significance of the Study

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) described social workers as social justice and change agents. School social workers play a crucial role in supporting students and their families in facing life challenges (Kranke & Floersch, 2009; Watson et al., 2022). With a multifaceted role, school social workers work with individual students, groups of students, parents, school staff, and community agencies to support students to thrive in school (Openshaw, 2008). As advocates for the most vulnerable, school social workers are crucial in creating a school environment for students to succeed (Alvarez et al., 2013; Openshaw, 2008).

While supporting students, school social workers also assist families with necessities, mental health, poverty, and other life difficulties (Watson et al., 2022). They also establish home–school partnerships to support students who have discipline problems, truancy issues, teen pregnancy, special education, or disabilities in and out of school (Allen-Meares, 1994). Openshaw (2008) described how school social workers “build relationships, make assessments, work with multidisciplinary teams, and help students address the difficulties that keep them from performing well in school” (p. 1) while demonstrating empathy (Pyles et al., 2021). A demanding career as a social worker can lead to compassion fatigue, negative feelings, collateral trauma, and exhaustion (Pyles et al., 2021; Rose & Palattiyil, 2020). Many social workers enjoy their jobs and the ability to help others (Rose & Palattiyil, 2020; Sutlief, 2013). According to Lesser (2019), “by loving our work, we build trust in ourselves,” (p. 41) which can boost productivity, leadership skills, well-being, and overall job satisfaction.

By displaying empathy, attention, and presence, social workers can establish connections that support beneficial client outcomes (Pyles et al., 2021). Lesser (2019) stated, “If we don’t see the pain of others or we refuse to acknowledge it, we won’t act to help them” (p. 138). Gonzalez (2012) defined a mindful person as someone present, attentive, calm, equanimous, optimistic, clear, and compassionate. According to Lesser, “mindfulness is a way of being” (p. 10) because it is a skill to be practiced constantly to become a way of life. Albrecht (2019) proposed that mindfulness, with its positive effects on the body and mind (Knoblock, 2017), can play an essential part in overcoming current educational difficulties.

Currently, there is literature stating the positive effects of mindfulness practices in supporting physical, mental, and emotional well-being and literature related to the stress caused by the social work profession but little information on how mindfulness can support school social workers in their daily work. This study fills a research gap by addressing the challenges that school social workers face while supporting students and families and suggesting mindfulness practices that can assist them in dealing with these challenges. As new information on mindfulness and school social workers becomes available, organizations such as the California Association of School Social Workers, the American Council for School Social Work, the School Social Work Association of America, and even institutions offering social work education can use it to create new pieces of training, workshops, and other educational materials to better support social workers. At the same time, new research on mindfulness and its benefits on school social work can stimulate future research.

Definitions

The researcher used the following theoretical and operational definitions throughout the study. The following theoretical and operational definitions were used throughout the study.

Operational Definitions

Love the work. Love the work entails applying a loving perspective to whatever one does (Bunting, 2016; Lesser, 2019).

Do the work. Doing the work involves regularly practicing mindfulness to embody one's values and objectives and fostering awareness while helping others (Lesser, 2019).

Don't be an expert. Don't be an expert is the ability to let go of the conviction that one is correct and instead demonstrate vulnerability (Lesser, 2019).

Connect to your pain. Connecting to your pain means being aware of and accepting physical and emotional distress rather than avoiding it (Bunting, 2016; Lesser, 2019).

Connect to the pain of others. Connecting to the pain of others is the ability to empathize with others while encouraging personal development and inner strength in others (Lesser, 2019).

Depend on others. Depending on others entails giving up a false sense of independence to enable others and create a self-supportive community while working toward the same objective (Lesser, 2019).

Keep making it simpler. Making it simpler is simplifying life by remaining present and focusing on the essential task at hand (Lesser, 2019).

Mindfulness. Mindfulness is the ability to remain in the present moment and accept the present without judgment (Bunting, 2016; Jackson, 2020; Lesser, 2019).

School social worker. A school social worker is a social worker who works as a mental health clinician at a K-12 school site (Alvarez et al., 2013; Openshaw, 2008).

Theoretical Definition

Mindfulness. Mindfulness is the ability and skill to retain an open-hearted awareness of personal thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, and the environment in the present moment while being nonjudgmental (Bunting, 2016; Caulfield, 2014; Gonzalez, 2012; Lesser, 2019).

Delimitations

Because this study focused on five school social workers in California, the study was limited to this population and these purposeful sampling criteria:

1. School social worker is a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW).
2. School social workers worked at a school district in California.
3. School social workers were current in their position and were at their school site for at least 2 years.
4. School social workers have trained in the use of mindfulness.
5. School social workers have used mindfulness at work for at least 1 year.
6. School social workers belong to a social work association.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Current research articles, a problem statement, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, a conceptual framework, two research questions, the research design, delimitations, definitions of

essential terminology, and an explanation of the study's organization were all covered in Chapter I. Chapter II is a literature review that covers the research and literature on mindfulness theory along with issues facing students and families. The chapter concludes by highlighting the gaps in the literature and the need for more research on the relationship between mindfulness and the challenges that school social workers encounter when serving students and their families at their schools. The methodology of this study is discussed in Chapter III, which includes the research objectives, the instrument used for the study, the validity and reliability of the instrument, data collection, and subsequent data analysis. Chapter IV examines and reviews the study's findings for each research topic. Finally, Chapter V addresses the study's findings, implications, and research recommendations. This chapter concludes with references and appendices.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter contains an in-depth review of the underlying history and theoretical existing literature on social workers and mindfulness in education to assist school social workers in their work with students and their families at their schools. Students confront multiple difficulties, including mental health, social challenges, and economic hardships (Leyba, 2010). Appendix A contains the study's synthesis matrix, which organizes and compares the numerous literature sources and arguments on family challenges, mental health, mindfulness in education, and school social workers. School districts are more aware than ever of the daily stress that students face because of school and life pressures (Armstrong, 2019). Students are coping with not only academic challenges but also mental health issues, poverty, family challenges, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has aggravated all of these issues for students and families (T. M. Jones et al., 2021). As school districts become more aware of the issues children and their families face, they strive to develop better methods to support their students and families within and outside the classroom. School districts are working to support children with their social, mental, emotional, and general well-being because federal and state laws mandate them to assist children with their needs in and out of school (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Openshaw, 2008).

Social work services are historically known for supporting people in need during times of crisis. In 1843, the majority of social work services concentrated on concerns about child welfare and housing (Simmons University, n.d.). By 1920, social workers had attained professional status and focused on assisting poor children and families (Stuart, 2019). During and after WWII, mental health demands increased, prompting social

workers to support children and adults dealing with poverty and mental health concerns (Sedlak, 1981; Stuart, 2019). Since World War II, social workers have played an important role in crisis response (Stuart, 2019; Watson et al., 2022). During World War II and the Great Depression, social workers assisted those suffering from poverty and mental disorders (Stuart, 2019).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023), a social worker is a professional who assists individuals to prevent and deal with difficulties that arise in their daily life. Social workers rethink the systems in which they work to better aid families and communities to provide the best possible support (T. M. Jones et al., 2021). As role responsibilities defined by the NASW, social workers, while being empathetic and present, support families and communities with basic needs, mental health, and any other support families need to thrive in their community (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Openshaw, 2008). In 2020, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported more than 700,000 social workers were serving children and their families (Watson et al., 2022). As needs increase in society, social work services are in high demand. As students, their families, and schools experience multiple challenges, social workers working at school sites are a way schools offer extra support for students in need.

Mindfulness in education is gaining popularity (Ettly-Leal, 2021). Numerous studies have found that mindfulness positively impacts the body, mind, and emotions (Armstrong, 2019; Jackson, 2020; Knoblock, 2017). Because schools are a microcosm of society, mindfulness in education is gaining momentum because of favorable research outcomes and as a solution for 21st-century school difficulties (Albrecht, 2019). According to Lesser (2019), mindfulness has evolved to fulfill the needs of society.

Lesser outlined seven mindfulness practices that can assist people to shift toward deeper understanding and respond more effectively during times of conflict and pain (Albrecht, 2019; Armstrong, 2019). As mindfulness becomes more popular based on its positive well-being effects, school staff wonder about how to integrate mindfulness into their schools to support students to thrive in school.

School districts attempt to provide the most assistance to students and families to alleviate pressing concerns such as poverty, family troubles, mental health, healthcare access, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, some school districts support students and their families by hiring social workers who work directly with their student population and community resources at the school site (Openshaw, 2008).

Because social workers interact directly with students and their families, they are always looking for new skills to assist them to better serve them. Although mindfulness in education is becoming more popular, more research is needed to determine how mindfulness practices can help school social workers in school systems better support students and their families.

Background

School Social Workers

Social workers flourished in schools after World War II (Sedlak, 1981). School social workers have been a staple in the public school system because of their professional dedication to promoting social justice, preserving children's rights, and assisting families with everyday challenges (Lige, 2021). School social workers primarily work with students and the daily issues they face. The School Social Work Association of America (n.d.) defined school social workers as mental health professionals with a degree

in social work who provide services related to a person’s social, emotional, and life adjustment to school and society. One of the solutions some schools are exploring is school districts employing school social workers to connect students and their families with community resources that can help with various family challenges (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Openshaw, 2008). School social workers assist students and their families with disciplinary issues, truancy issues, substance abuse, mental health, financial problems, and other family challenges (Allen-Meares, 1994; Alvarez et al., 2013; Openshaw, 2008). The School Social Work Association of America described school social workers as “the link between the family, school, and community to promote and support student’s academic and social achievement” (para. 2). In times of increased need for children and their families, school districts hire school social workers to work at one or more school sites to assist students and their families (Openshaw, 2008).

Although the tasks and responsibilities of a school social worker may alter depending on the needs of the school district, the role of a school social worker is to help K-12 students thrive in school (Alvarez et al., 2013; Openshaw, 2008). Students have multiple challenges including academic and social impacts. Many students struggle with not having enough food or a safe place to sleep daily, yet schools expect students to do well in school. As students and their families face unemployment, housing insecurity, food insecurity, and a lack of healthcare and mental healthcare, school social workers become student advocates both inside and outside of the classroom, forming a home–school–community link that supports students and families (Watson et al., 2022). As schools strive to provide a learning environment that promotes academic and

behavioral success, the demand for more school social workers grows (C. Jones, 2020; Sosa et al., 2021).

According to Openshaw (2008), the four fundamental roles of all school social workers are (a) building relationships, (b) student and family evaluation, (c) working with interdisciplinary teams, (d) and assisting kids with school and life difficulties that prevent them from thriving in school. School social workers, according to Lige (2021), have four primary responsibilities: (a) conducting student and family assessments, (b) making home visits, (c) developing treatment plans, and (d) locating community resources. Although the functions and responsibilities of school social workers differ from author to author, most literature has recognized the importance of school social workers as the link that connects schools, families, and communities (Alvarez et al., 2013; T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Lige, 2021; Openshaw, 2008).

Although school districts primarily hire school social workers to provide mental health services (Alvarez et al., 2013; Lige, 2021; Webber, 2018), school social workers also provide several additional services to assist students in school and with life difficulties (Lige, 2021; Openshaw, 2008). According to NASW, “The major challenge of social work is that social workers have too many things on their plate.” (Sutlief, 2013, p. 7). According to Arrington (2008), a senior research associate at the NASW Center for Workforce Studies, the top work-related stressor for social workers was insufficient time to complete their jobs at 31%.

It is not unexpected that social workers suffer from fatigue, psychological troubles, and sleep disturbances as a result of their stressful job (Sutlief, 2013). However, there is a lack of data on how school social workers deal with work challenges while

supporting students and their families in their schools (Lige, 2021; Openshaw, 2008; Webber, 2018).

Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Although school social workers are not required to have a license in California, licensed clinical social workers who work at a school site must not only have a master's in social work but must also pass the California Law and Ethics Exam and the Association of Social Work Board, and complete 3,000 hours of supervised hours over 104 weeks (NASW, n.d.-a). LCSWs are the largest group of mental health providers, according to the American Board of Clinical Social Work (n.d.). A licensed social worker can do clinical social work and psychotherapy at various organizations, including private and public schools (NASW, n.d.-a). An LCSW uses personalized treatment plans and prevention strategies to assist clients in coping with difficulties related to or affecting their mental and emotional health while supervising social workers in training or holding a clinical administration position (American Board of Clinical Social Work n.d.; NASW, n.d.-a). The California Department of Consumer Affairs (n.d.) reported 38,282 social workers licensed in California in 2023.

Issues Affecting Students and Families

Family Conditions Affecting Students

Today, students, their families, and the schools where they are educated face multiple challenges. Unemployment, housing insecurity, food insecurity, and a lack of healthcare and mental health care are all challenges students deal with (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022). The impact of these factors is substantial for the vast majority of students in most schools. Personal or family members' drug and alcohol abuse,

violence, mental health issues, and social difficulties are just some of the effects of family challenges on students (Leyba, 2010). Children deal with family-related challenges such as homelessness, food insecurity, mental health challenges, and other effects of poverty, and it is not surprising that these children have a history of academic or disciplinary problems (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Leyba, 2010; Webber, 2018). Students are expected to thrive in school, but many struggle to meet their fundamental necessities. Stressful life events play a significant impact on student performance (Blundo & Savage, 2020). Overall, these conditions do not bode well for students' future academic and social success.

Unstable family resources put children in danger of experiencing multiple family issues such as food, housing, and mental health issues because of stress that creates an unsafe environment for development. According to research, there is a link between socioeconomic status and academic achievement (Boatwright & Midcalf, 2019). One in six children suffers from hunger in the United States, making up 6 million children in California alone (Tadayon, 2021). The California Department of Education's Data Reporting Office (2024) reported that 59.9%, of school enrollments in California were eligible for free and reduced meals in the 2022-2023 school year; this was 2.8% higher than the previous school year. Food insecurity is one of the many challenges students and their families face. Homelessness is another staggering factor harming students and their families. Federal statistics show California remains the state with the highest population of people experiencing homelessness. Just in San Diego County, more than 1,500 youth are homeless (San Diego Youth Services, n.d.). According to the Data Reporting Office, 224,191 enrolled students are homeless, and 6.3% stay in a temporary shelter and 5.8%

reside in a motel or hotel. Because of these problems, schools are trying to find innovative solutions to support students and their families.

Poverty

Poverty and its consequences present new challenges for schools (Allen-Meares, 1994). Poverty is more than a deficit of income; it often affects all aspects of a person's life (Florida State University, 2019). According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, physiological needs such as food, clothes, shelter, and sleep are critical components of quality of life. School social workers continually assist children and their families to meet their basic needs (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022). When serving clients who are severely impacted by poverty, social workers are highly knowledgeable in resources in their communities and are aware of various assistance programs, eligibility requirements, and services to help students and their families (Florida State University, 2019).

Additionally, students who attend a small district school or live in a higher poverty level school district have an impact on the resources available to students and families because of a lower school budget (American University, 2020; Vincent, 2018). Schools with limited capital budgets are more likely to experience teacher and other school staff shortages, facility concerns, shortage of community resources, and curriculum issues while reducing overall student program services (American University, 2020). According to the Century Foundation (2020), low-income school districts are more than twice as likely as higher-income districts to have a funding gap because of neighborhood property tax rates. California's public schools are funded by the federal government (8%), the state government (47%), and the local government (45%;

American University, 2020; ED100, n.d.). Schools in wealthy neighborhoods with higher property taxes receive more financing than schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Although school districts with high-need students receive additional funding through the local control funding formula because the formula relies on average daily attendance, many of these school districts that support low-income students still receive less funding because of high rates of chronic absenteeism among low-income, English learner, and foster youth students (ED100, n.d.).

Poverty can lead to a decline in education, nutrition, and access to healthcare (Florida State University, 2019; T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022). Poverty reduces children's chances of success in early elementary school and of completing high school (Danielson & Bohn, 2014). Poverty is a critical issue that affects children's current and future lives. There is little potential to thrive when the emphasis is on survival (Maslow, 1943).

According to a 1994 study of 860 school social workers conducted by the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, New Jersey, and the NASW's Commission on Education, 40% of the population served by school social workers came from low-income households (Allen-Meares, 1994). Most disadvantaged families comprise single or immigrant parents with low academic attainment, low-paying occupations, or unemployment (Lee & Zhang, 2022; Sosa et al., 2021). Immigrant children are among the most vulnerable to poverty (Sosa et al., 2021). One in every five children in the United States is an immigrant or the child of an immigrant (Goodwin, 2017). It is not surprising to see a rise in minority students from 1970 to 2020, bringing diversity into

schools, as families immigrate to California in growing numbers (Center for Poverty and Inequality Research, n.d.; Goodwin, 2017).

In the 2019-2020 school year, California reported over 97,000 English learners enrolled in dual-language immersion programs (Williams & Zavala, 2023). In 2022, about 40% of California K-12 students spoke a language other than English at home. Public schools in California enrolled 1.113 million English learners in the 2022-2023 school year (California Department of Education, 2023). As the school's student body becomes increasingly diverse, schools must become more language-diverse to accommodate children and families. According to a statement from the NASW (n.d.-c), "In terms of language diversity, social workers should provide and advocate for effective communication with clients of all cultural groups, including people of limited English proficiency or low literacy skills (para 1).

According to Zippia (2023), licensed social workers in the United States are mostly White (58.5%), followed by African Americans (19.9%), and Hispanic or Latino (12.3%). According to the NASW (2020), as new social workers enter the industry, the proportion of African American (22%) and Hispanic or Latino (14%) is increasing. Nonetheless, statistics suggest that the ethnic variety of social workers is much lower than the increasing diversity of the California population.

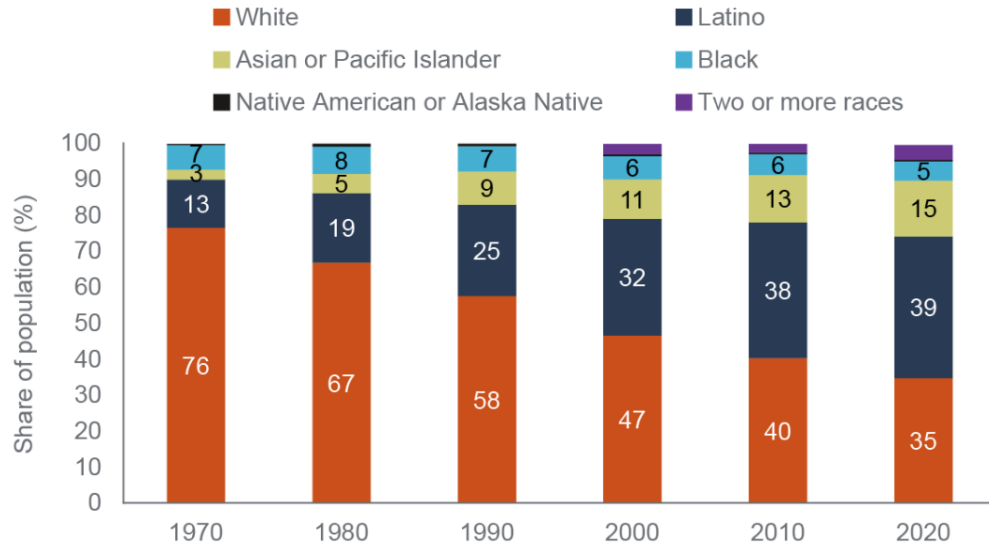
School social workers support immigrant students to navigate systems both within and outside the classroom while they increase equity for immigrant students (Alvarez et al., 2013; Sosa et al., 2021). School social workers, as trained mental health providers, not only support immigrant students and their families with basic needs but also help them deal with the trauma of border crossing or fear of deportation, both of which are

associated with mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety (Lige, 2021; Sosa et al., 2021). Figure 1 indicates growth in Latinos, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and people of mixed ethnicity over the last 50 years, making the minority the majority in California.

Figure 1

The United States Census Bureau Graph of California Becoming Increasingly Diverse in Population

California’s population is increasingly diverse



SOURCE: Census Bureau decennial counts.

Note. From “California’s Population,” by H. Johnson, M. Cuellar Mejia, and E. McGee, January 2024, Public Policy Institute of California, para. 6 <https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-population/>.

As families struggle with the effects of poverty, children are more prone to poor academic performance, absenteeism, and behavioral issues (Allen-Meares, 1994; Blundo & Savage, 2020; Boatwright & Midcalf, 2019; Watson et al., 2022). One in every five American children growing up in poverty faces an increased chance of developing socio-

emotional problems (Lee & Zhang, 2022). Boatwright and Midcalf (2019) agreed that the longer children remain in poverty, the worse their academic performance will be.

Children who grow up in poverty are less likely to escape poverty as adults (Blundo & Savage, 2020; Danielson & Bohn, 2014). Living in poverty puts a child's physical, mental, and emotional welfare in danger from the start of their education.

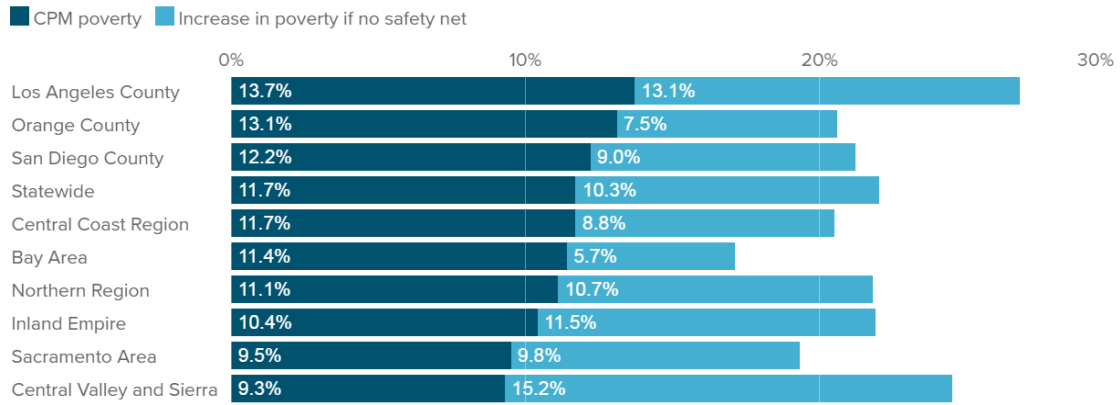
The COVID-19 Pandemic's Effects on Children and Families

One of the recent key drivers of poverty was the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic exacerbated the financial circumstances of both families with and without prior economic issues (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022). According to the Public Policy Institute of California, in the fall of 2021, 28.7% of California residents were poor (Bohn et al., 2023). As a result of the pandemic, social safety net programs such as CalFresh food assistance and the federal Child Tax Credit increased eligibility. Poverty in California has decreased from 34% in 2019 to 28.7% in 2021 because of social safety net programs. If these programs had not assisted families, official poverty levels would have risen by 1.10% between 2019 and 2021. The pressure that the pandemic put on families affected families battling poverty issues before the pandemic and also middle-class families who became unemployed and suddenly needed extra support to have enough resources to provide a safe environment for their children.

Based on the California poverty measure and safety net programs, Figure 2 depicts the predicted poverty levels throughout California regions in the fall of 2021. The California poverty measure takes into account family revenues, safety net resources, and employment and housing expenses (Danielson & Bohn, 2014).

Figure 2

Poverty Rates in California



Note. From “Poverty in California,” by S. Bohn, C. Danielson, S. Kimberlin, P. Malagon, and C. Wimer, October, 2023, Public Policy Institute of California, para. 5 ([California.https://www.ppic.org/publication/poverty-in-california/](https://www.ppic.org/publication/poverty-in-california/)). The estimated poverty rates in California are different in various regions based on the California poverty measure (CPM).

As families struggled with poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, access to mental and healthcare services, and other family concerns, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues for those in need (T. M. Jones et al., 2021). During the pandemic, even families who did not previously require basic needs assistance were impacted because of unemployment, medical debt, and grief and loss (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022). The extra stress caused by the pandemic impacted families physically, mentally, and emotionally (Hosseinzadeh Asl, 2022; T. M. Jones et al., 2021). Remote learning and social distancing increased mental health issues in preexisting student mental health crises (Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission [MHSOAC], 2020). Unemployment and economic uncertainty strained families, raising concerns about domestic violence and child abuse while increasing cases of depression and anxiety (Hosseinzadeh Asl, 2022; MHSOAC, 2020). Students reported

parental neglect, child and adult abuse, a lack of internet access, school disengagement, poor academic performance, and increased substance use (T. M. Jones et al., 2021).

As schools in California opened and closed between May 2020 and January 2021, the 2020-2021 school year impacted all students, especially low-income students (California Department of Public Health, 2021; T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Walters, 2023). During the 2022 state standard English language arts and mathematics tests, only 35% of low-income students met standards in English language arts and 21% in math (Walters, 2023). Students in California who were already behind were impacted even more. California students' proficiency rates dropped drastically from 51% to 47% in English language arts and 40% to 33% in math.

As the COVID-19 pandemic made things worse for vulnerable families, the school district's response to the needs of students and their families during the pandemic was through the support of school social workers with psychological support to teach students and families to cope with stressful situations and the loss of family members because of the pandemic (Hosseinzadeh Asl, 2022). During the pandemic, school social workers were crucial in providing vulnerable children with mental health care and linking them to community services for basic needs (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Kranke & Floersch, 2009; Watson et al., 2022). Overall, the pandemic provided an opportunity to learn more about how pandemics affect child- and community-serving systems such as schools (Watson et al., 2022).

Families' Healthcare Access Challenges

Although 94% of Californians had healthcare insurance in 2020, access to healthcare decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic and is still trying to recover

(Legislative Analyst's Office, 2021; Tan, 2021). As with other family issues affected by the pandemic, healthcare access was not an exclusion. In response to the pandemic, the government retained enrollees in Medi-Cal, a public health insurance program for low-income individuals, for California families to continue accessing healthcare (California Health Care Foundation, 2019; Tan, 2021). Because 19% of Californians live in poverty according to the Center for Poverty and Inequality Research (n.d.), the Medi-Cal program is critical for low-income families to get healthcare.

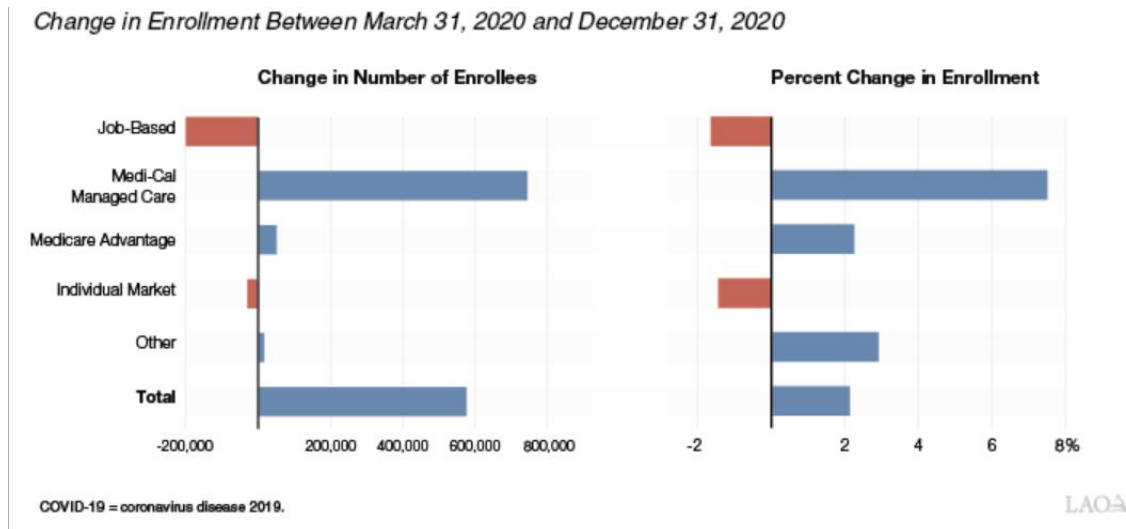
The affordability of healthcare has affected treatment decisions for low-income families (California Health Care Foundation, 2019). The California Health Care Foundation (2019) mentioned that the two challenges of low-income families accessing health care services are medical bills and a lack of doctors or specialists in their community. Many low-income families use their savings or borrow money to pay medical bills.

Because of employment loss, the primary source of health plan enrollments shifted between March 2020 and December 2020. Figure 3 shows a reduction in employment health plan enrollments from 12.38 to 12.18 million, and Medi-Cal managed care plan participants climbed from 9.9 to 10.7 million. According to the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, the most common reason for Californians not to seek medical services is cost or a lack of medical insurance (32.7%; Tan, 2021).

Despite the help from public healthcare programs, healthcare access remains a challenge based on race and ethnicity. In 2020, 11% of African Americans in California reported not having a usual place for health advice, and 27.5% of African American children did not have a source of health care in 2020 despite 88.2% being insured (Tan,

Figure 3

Change in Health Plan Enrollment Since the COVID-19 Pandemic in California



Note. From “Impact of COVID-19 on Health Care Access,” by Legislative Analyst’s Office, May 7, 2021, p. 6 (<https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4426>).

2021). Healthcare costs and the COVID-19 pandemic also affected families with ongoing health issues. Forty percent of Latinos delayed or did not continue with medical services because of cost, lack of insurance, or other insurance-related reasons, and Asian and White populations had an even higher percentage of delaying healthcare services during the pandemic (Tan, 2021). Figure 4 shares the main reasons for delaying or foregoing medical care in California based on race or ethnicity.

The COVID-19 pandemic also impacted vaccine dosages, mental health appointments, and dental visits for children. California’s Legislative Analyst’s Office (2021) reported a 12% decrease in vaccine doses, a 13% decrease in mental health visits, a 33% decrease in outpatient visits, and a 39% decrease in dental appointments in Medi-Cal. Data are collected to understand the long-term impacts of the pandemic’s increasing lack of healthcare access. The California Department of Public Health (2022) is taking a

diverse approach to assess the burden of postpandemic conditions in the state. The pandemic affected many aspects of life for children and their families as societal needs increased physical and mental health support. Because social workers play a critical role in assisting people in need, school social workers have become crucial to support children and their families with community resources for health care (Openshaw, 2008; Watson et al., 2022).

Figure 4

The Main Reasons for Delaying or Forgoing Medical Care in California by Race and Ethnicity

Main Reasons for Delaying or Forgoing Necessary Medical Care in California by Race/Ethnicity, 2020

	Latino	White (NL)	Black or African American (NL)	Asian (NL)	Two or More Races (NL)
Cost, lack of insurance, or other insurance-related reasons	40.0%	28.1%	31.9%	30.0%	28.4%
Health care system/provider issues and barriers	19.4%	16.9%	20.2%	20.0%	30.3%
Personal reasons	27.1%	26.8%	18.3%	28.6%	27.9%
COVID-19	13.5%	28.2%	29.6%	21.5%	13.4%

Note: NL = Non-Latino

Sources: 2020 California Health Interview Surveys.

Note. From “California Reached Health Coverage Milestone With 94% of People Insured in 2020, but Access to Care Remains a Challenge During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” by S. Tan, September 2021, UCLA Center for Health and Policy Research, p. 6 (<https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/publications/Documents/PDF/2021/access-to-care-policybrief-sep2021.pdf>).

Mental Health of Students

Between 2014 and 2018, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that one in five K-12 students had a mental health problem (Sedillo-Hamann, 2022).

Anxiety and depression disorders are two of the top mental health issues children deal with (Maurer, 2019), and the COVID-19 pandemic made these mental health issues more

prevalent (T. M. Jones et al., 2021). Children’s mental health needs have increased by 61% in California, but only 35% of youths who report requiring mental health assistance get it (California Children’s Trust, 2019). The MHSOAC (2020) stated that there was an increase in preexisting students’ mental health needs during the pandemic effect of remote learning and social distancing that decreased access support from peers or adults. Before the pandemic, California noticed a surge in mental health needs because of increasing poverty rates and families coping with natural disasters like wildfires and floods (C. Jones, 2020).

Children are coping with stressful situations that lead to mental health difficulties like anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation (Albrecht, 2019). Tanasugarn (2022) defined emotional dysregulation as feeling overwhelmed and having difficulties controlling emotions like anger. The MHSOAC (2020) recognizes the importance of meeting mental health needs to support students and families for academic success and lifelong well-being. In California, one in three high school students feels chronically sad, and one in six has considered suicide (C. Jones, 2020). In response to the increase in youth mental health needs, the office of education in Sacramento and Fresno has hired licensed clinicians, family therapists, and social workers to work at school sites to support students dealing with emotional dysregulations that increase their mental health issues. According to David W. Gordin, superintendent of the Sacramento County Office of Education and chair of the MHSOAC (as cited in MHSOAC, 2020), “Meeting the mental health needs of children and families is not a discretionary act, but rather an essential one in these times” (p. vi).

As primary mental health providers, school social workers support students coping with mental health issues such as depression and anxiety through individual and group settings (Hosseinzadeh Asl, 2022; Turner, 2019; Watson et al., 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, school social workers were crucial in providing vulnerable children with mental health care and linking them to community services for basic needs and other mental health services such as mental health medications (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Kranke & Floersch, 2009; Watson et al., 2022).

School social workers also support students and their families with individualized education plans, crisis intervention, family therapy, and emergency response (Watson et al., 2022). As school staff dedicated to protecting and caring for the most vulnerable, school social workers are a crucial source of mental health help for students (C. Jones, 2020; Sedillo-Hamann, 2022). The mental health provider ratio in California is 612 to 1, but the American School Counselors Association recommends a ratio of 250 to 1 (C. Jones, 2020). As schools strive to provide a learning environment that promotes academic and behavioral success, the demand for more school social workers grows (C. Jones, 2020; Sosa et al., 2021). In California, 14,336 part-time and 229 full-time school social work job postings were offered on Indeed (n.d.) at the time of this study. School districts recognize the impact mental health concerns have on children's capacity to learn, which is one of the reasons school social workers are employed. If mental and emotional health issues are neglected, the impact will be even greater for students and their families (MHSAAC, 2020; Sedillo-Hamann, 2022).

School Social Workers and Mindfulness Practices

School districts hire school social workers to help students achieve better school

and life outcomes when dealing with student and family challenges. School social workers provide multiple services in various settings and work with a broad population to help children of all backgrounds and socioeconomic levels to operate successfully in the school environment (Alvarez et al., 2013; Openshaw, 2008). School social workers assist children to deal with mental, emotional, and behavioral challenges that affect their lives both in and out of school (Turner, 2019). Overall, school social workers serve as student advocates, connecting children and families to school and community services while promoting educational justice.

Moreover, school social workers are overwhelmed by job responsibilities and the overload of cases (Openshaw, 2008; Sutlief, 2013). Although school social workers feel high satisfaction from their job, they are also prone to personal suffering, burnout, and being unmotivated as a result of an overburden of responsibility and empathy in their work (Rose & Palattiyil, 2020; Sutlief, 2013). Empathy is expected of social workers (Rose & Palattiyil, 2020). School social workers must display empathy, attentiveness, and presence as liaisons between schools and families to establish relationships with students experiencing life challenges (Leyba, 2010; Pyles et al., 2021). Additionally, mindfulness is becoming more widely recognized for its good impacts on physical and mental health and is now flourishing in education (Albrecht, 2019; Armstrong, 2019; C. G. Brown, 2019, ETTY-Leal, 2021; Knoblock, 2017). Research has indicated that mindfulness can aid with stress relief, mental health, and emotional well-being. Lesser (2019) outlined seven mindfulness practices that correspond to the duties and responsibilities of a school social worker, offering a framework that may have a good impact on assisting school social workers in their daily work.

Theoretical Foundations

Mindfulness has Eastern roots traced back to Asian religions like Hinduism and Buddhism (C. G. Brown, 2019; Knoblock, 2017). Weare and Huppert (2019) defined Eastern mindfulness as religions and traditions that foster peace, clarity, calm, steadiness, open-mindedness, and compassion. Eastern mindfulness, like Indian traditions, unites the body, mind, and soul, which are the foundations of Indian psychology. In contrast, Western mindfulness focuses on secular practices that promote physical and mental well-being (Singla, 2011). The father of Western mindfulness, Kabat-Zinn, defined mindfulness as purposefully paying attention, being fully in the present moment, and being nonjudgmental of oneself or others (Caulfield, 2014). Western mindfulness emphasizes stress reduction, improved focus, and emotional regulation (Caulfield, 2014; Jackson, 2020; Knoblock, 2017). According to the literature, mindfulness in schools is developing and evolving, favorably impacting educational obstacles and challenges (Albrecht, 2019). Although mindfulness originated as a spiritual practice, the Western world has accepted a secular form that is gaining acceptance in education (Albrecht, 2019; Armstrong, 2019; ETTY-Leal, 2021; Knoblock, 2017). The following mindfulness theories and models share the theoretical foundations for Western mindfulness. Included in this review of the literature are foundational theories including individual mindfulness theory, self-determination theory, and objective self-awareness theory, in addition to mindfulness models such as MBSR and MBCT. The following social work theories are described, including systems theory and transpersonal theory.

Mindfulness Theories

Individual Mindfulness Theory

Langer, a social psychologist at Harvard, is considered the “mother of mindfulness” (University of Minnesota, n.d., para. 1) and the founder of individual mindfulness theory (Lichtner, n.d.). As a social psychologist, Langer (2014) put mindfulness on the map in psychology, which turned previous assumptions about the mind and body connection. Langer researched mindfulness independently from Buddhist practices for the past 40 years, basing it on mindless automatic thinking while doing psychological research (Mind and Soul Foundation, n.d.). Langer described mindfulness as the essence of engagement by which one is present and open to context and perspective (Harvard Business Review, 2014; Langer, 2014). Individual mindfulness theory focuses on cognition and information interpretation (Lichtner, n.d.). As Langer described, during challenging times, people become overwhelmed by overthinking and dealing with life problems rather than observing and making decisions with an open mind and focusing on the present circumstance (Harvard Business Review, 2014). Most individuals live on autopilot, taking actions from a single perspective, causing stress and affecting their physical and mental well-being (Harvard Business Review, 2014; Knoblock, 2017; Mind and Soul Foundation, n.d.). Langer suggested that becoming aware instead of operating on auto-pilot to reduce stress unlocks creativity and helps a person perform better in life.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory, developed in 1985 by psychologists Deci and Ryan, is a motivational theory that helps people attain higher performance and well-being by

using autonomy, competence, and connection (Cherry, 2022; Schultz & Ryan, 2015). According to Cherry (2022), the two essential components of self-determination theory are taking new actions to acquire personal mastery over challenges and internal motivation. People are typically driven by external rewards such as money or prizes whereas self-determination theory focuses on internal motivation such as knowledge acquisition. The desire for growth motivates new behaviors but is also influenced by external factors such as social circumstances and connections (Cherry, 2022; Schultz & Ryan, 2015). Society, communities, schools, and family relationships have an impact on how involved people are in building self-determination. People must be proactive and continually work on their autonomy, connections, and competence to achieve self-determination. Cherry suggested that to improve self-determination, one has to improve self-awareness, engage in self-regulation, have the correct social support, and gain mastery to achieve feelings of competence. When it comes to self-awareness and self-regulation, mindfulness can support increasing the awareness of what is occurring in the present moment, support self-regulation, and assist in selecting a better choice or personal goal to increase feelings of autonomy (Jackson, 2020; Lesser, 2019; Schultz & Ryan, 2015). Niemiec and Ryan (2009) proposed that students be assisted to promote self-determination in school children by raising children's curiosity and motivation to increase academic progress and overall well-being. Chery also advocated improving students' self-determination through unexpected feedback and avoiding excessive external rewards. According to Cherry, Niemiec and Ryan and Schultz and Ryan, self-determination theory is a crucial notion to attain increased well-being. People become

more self-determined and in charge of their lives as their autonomy, connectedness, and competence grow (Cherry, 2022).

Objective Self-Awareness Theory

Objective self-awareness theory is one of the earliest self-theories created by Duval and Wicklund in 1972 (Miller, 2020; Silvia & Duval, 2001). The American Psychological Association defined objective self-awareness as a reflective state of self-focused attention (Miller, 2020). Established by Duval and Wicklund, objective self-awareness theory helped people understand how people develop personal standards based on their external surroundings and how this may change their internal conduct. In contrast to subjective self-awareness, objective self-awareness focuses on individual consciousness (Silvia & Duval, 2001). Miller (2020) provided seven examples of self-awareness practices, including awareness of (a) actions at the moment; (b) attitudes about decisions at the moment; (c) emotional response; (d) perception of others; (e) appearance; (f) inner conflict between personal beliefs and actions, personal beliefs and values; and (g) other people's perspectives, attitudes, feelings, and beliefs. This theory has inspired numerous studies that have aided the understanding of fundamental topics in social psychology, including attitude behavior, self-standard comparison, prosocial behavior, stereotyping, and self-assessment (Silvia & Duval, 2001). Miller believed that if people fail to increase their self-awareness, they will experience more problems in their life. Goleman (2012) defined self-awareness as the ability to understand personal feelings and why they exist, similar to a moral compass. Meditation is one practice that Miller recommended for enhancing self-awareness because it allows one to become more aware of inner thoughts and feelings. K. W. Brown et al. (2007) described how mindful

activities influence specific parts of the brain that aid in maintaining attention and awareness. As people face life obstacles, self-awareness helps them recognize what is happening inside and outside of them in the present rather than in past experiences. K. W. Brown et al. stated, “Awareness is our most direct contact with reality” (p. 212). According to K. W. Brown et al., Miller, and Silvia and Duval (2001), objective self-awareness theory educates people to be aware of external occurrences, but more crucially, the internal response to those external situations.

Mindfulness Models

MBSR

Kabat-Zinn created MBSR in 1979, inspired by the growing interest in mindfulness in the medical and psychological disciplines (Ackerman, 2017). MBSR is an 8-week science-based mindfulness program that promotes daily physical and mental stress relief (Ackerman, 2017; Singla, 2011). With an initial goal of assisting patients dealing with life’s difficulties and both physical and mental illnesses, MBSR is now known for helping patients who suffer from anxiety and panic attacks, depression, eating disorders, fatigue, heart disease, physical pain, posttraumatic stress disorder, and sleep problems (Ackerman, 2017). The American Psychological Association (2019) shared how MBSR helps people become aware of their body, mind, and emotions by using mindfulness meditation and yoga practices. By continually practicing MBSR, new brain paths are created within the brain regions associated with attention and emotional regulation (American Psychological Association, 2019; Knoblock, 2017). Maurer (2019) and Knoblock (2017) shared how practicing mindfulness meditation can aid children and adults with depression and other mental health issues. Kim (2022) also shared the

positive effects of using MBSR to cope with stressful life situations. As a secular version of mindfulness, MBSR shows optimistic results in improving the quality of life in children and adults (Knoblock, 2017).

MBCT

MBCT combines elements of cognitive-behavior therapy with MBSR practices, such as various forms of secular meditation and yoga practices (American Psychological Association, 2019; Good Therapy, 2018). Primarily derived from the earlier work of Kabat-Zinn and Barnard, Segal, Williams, and Teasdale created MBCT to treat patients suffering from depression (Good Therapy, 2018). The first MBCT clinical trial happened in 2000, and research showed an improvement in patients reacting with fewer negative thoughts or unhealthy emotions during stressful times (American Psychological Association, 2019; Good Therapy, 2018). MBCT emphasizes improving metacognitive awareness for the present moment, nonjudgmental awareness of negative thoughts and sensations, and assisting patients to become aware of recurring depressive thoughts to prevent a depression relapse (K. W. Brown et al., 2017; Good Therapy, 2018). Over the past 15 years of MBCT research, it has shown positive results and effects on reducing relapse by 50% in depression and other mental health patients (Good Therapy, 2017). In 2013, after using MBCT with positive results in a fibromyalgia study, MBCT also became popular in treating patients with cancer, diabetes, chronic pain, and epilepsy (Good Therapy, 2017). Since the first clinical trial, MBCT has been shown to improve physical and mental health by lowering stress and enhancing cognitive functioning.

Social Work Theories

Systems Theory

Systems theory, a social work theory that dates back to 1976, is centered on human behavior resulting from family, friends, school, work, and community (Walker, 2019). The systems theory developed as a result of Goldstein, Pincus, and Minahan's observations, creating a unitary framework for social work because the main ideas and practices of social work came from psychology, sociology, and social policy and appeared to be linear for a profession that evolves based on the needs of society (Friedman & Allen, 2014; Walker, 2019). Systems theory became a holistic framework for the social work practices known today (Walker, 2019). Social workers can use systems theory to evaluate the complex nature of human interactions in a social environment (Friedman & Allen, 2014). Walker (2019), for example, outlined family dynamics-based systems theory and how these affect and drive the behavior of each family member. The interconnectivity of families, individuals, and organizations is constantly causing actions and reactions in the systems of society. Systems theory enables social workers to assess problems and build balanced intervention methods by understanding the components and dynamics of client systems (Friedman & Allen, 2014).

Transpersonal Theory

The transpersonal theory is a human development theory pioneered by Carl Jung and linked to transpersonal psychotherapy (Campbellsville University, 2017; Good Therapy, 2017). Transpersonal psychotherapy enhances the study of the mind and body, spirituality, consciousness, and human transformation to help people overcome adversity while developing good habits (Campbellsville University, 2017). This theory combines

holistic and natural psychology, transformative psychology, and ego-transcended psychology (Good Therapy, 2017). Although this theory is not scientific, social workers use transpersonal theory by including mindfulness practices to support their clients with personal growth and development interventions (Social Work Guide, 2020). Because transpersonal theory holistically approaches humans by considering factors like body and mind connection, spirituality, and consciousness, Campbellsville University (2017) encourages social workers to have it as part of their toolkit.

Theoretical Framework: Lesser's Seven Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness programs and various training are developed to assist a variety of professional fields, including education, as more research on mindfulness and its positive impacts is being conducted (Armstrong, 2019; C. G. Brown, 2019; Knoblock, 2017). Within the numerous mindfulness practices, Lesser (2019) offered a new mindfulness framework that can address crucial issues and concerns when pressing demands emerge in society. According to Lesser, mindfulness is a way of being and going beyond simply relaxing the body and mind. The essence of mindfulness is cultivating the self-awareness to appreciate and engage in life with openness and curiosity (Carroll, 2008; Lesser, 2019). Lesser's seven mindfulness practices is a theoretical framework that uses secular mindfulness practices to increase self-awareness, relate to self and others, and integrate the body and mind to experience greater acceptance and add a sense of wonder right amid chaos.

Practice 1: Love the Work

According to Lesser (2019), love of one's work occurs when the body, mind, and heart unite in a deep caring for all one does. Lesser referred to love the work as a

“devotion to a life’s work, a way of being in the world” (p. 56). As people love the work they do, they foster trust in themselves and others because one brings the best intentions by sharing compassion and caring (Gonzalez, 2012; Lesser, 2019). Lesser used this practice to remind people to work harmoniously with their values and objectives while serving others to create trust and cultivate healthier connections. At the same time, loving the work requires courage to be authentic, open, and vulnerable, making one be in the present and embrace life as it is (Carroll, 2008; Gonzalez, 2012; Lesser, 2019). Love the work is a practice to connect with oneself as one serves others with the best intentions.

Practice 2: Do the Work

According to Lesser (2019), doing the work is having a regular mindfulness practice, embodying personal beliefs and objectives, engaging with others, and living a life of growing awareness and helping others. Working mindfully entails observing and participating while retaining an open-hearted awareness of the current moment (Bunting, 2016). The four elements of the do the work practice include listening honestly, prioritizing self-compassion, developing emotional awareness, and seeking alignment (Lesser, 2019). According to Rohn (as cited in Burton, 2018), “One of the greatest gifts you can give anyone is the gift of attention” (p. 16). Being intentional means maintaining focus, awareness, intention, openness, and nonjudgment while remaining kind and compassionate (Burton, 2018; Lesser, 2019). The greater one’s self-awareness, the less one is distracted by their own thoughts (Bunting, 2016). This mindfulness technique teaches people to be less critical and judgmental of themselves and others while remaining present and realizing the reality of any situation.

Practice 3: Don't be an Expert

Lesser (2019) defined don't be an expert as a practice that values inquiry and curiosity over being right all the time. As a person minimizes their biases in every scenario, they can recognize the situation with all of its good and bad aspects. This practice is about expressing vulnerability and letting go of the need to be correct, which helps to reduce misguided actions caused by personal stories or insufficient facts. Don't be an expert means fully appreciating any situation and recognizing what is happening (Carroll, 2008; Lesser, 2019). People who learn to be vulnerable and remain open and curious about life will be able to look at life realities with fewer biases, allowing them to adapt better to any life scenario (Carroll, 2007).

Practice 4: Connect to Your Pain

Based on Lesser (2019), connecting to your pain is a practice that encourages people to be self-aware of their pain, particularly emotional distress, to transform it. Emotional pain offers the advantage of alerting people to pay attention to their emotions to enhance self-awareness and live in alignment. People who live more in tune with themselves can connect with their pain, think more clearly, and make better life decisions (Bunting, 2016; Lesser, 2019). Most people find it simpler to avoid engaging with their pain in a society that values pleasure and achievement (Carroll, 2008). Being mindful entails engaging with one's emotions, such as joy or grief. According to Lesser, emotional distress can only be altered by being acquainted with it rather than avoiding it.

Practice 5: Connect to the Pain of Others

When people are willing to be vulnerable, it inspires others to do the same (Carroll, 2007; Lesser, 2019). Connecting to the pain of others is defined as a

compassionate practice by Lesser (2019). Connecting to the pain of others is a mindfulness practice that fosters empathy and reminds people of their shared humanity. Carroll (2008) referred to connecting all humans concerning each other, which shows understanding, appreciation, and acknowledgment to every human being. People help each other through difficult times by appreciating and being kind to one another (Carroll, 2008; Lesser, 2019). Connecting to the sorrow of others builds compassion, resulting in stronger bonds and communities. Everyone wants to feel as if they belong, and this activity generates a strong sense of belonging (Lesser, 2019). As people become more aware of their pain, they can become more aware of and attentive to the distress of others and be present for them.

Practice 6: Depend on Others

According to Lesser (2019), depending on others requires self-awareness, self-confidence, humility, empathy, and an open mind when confronting circumstances. This mindfulness practice promotes positive group dynamics by empowering others and recognizing team interdependence. When people collaborate to achieve the same goals, it is critical to comprehend their reliance on one another to achieve those goals and establish trust in one another. This mindfulness practice reminds employees to work together and recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses to create better companies (Gonzalez, 2012; Lesser, 2009). Being mindful and reliant on people helps to maintain motivation, engagement, and focus in teams to achieve goals and influence one another (Gonzalez, 2012).

Practice 7: Keep Making it Simpler

Lesser (2019) defined keep making it simpler as making life less complicated to have more focus and presence. Keeping it simple allows people to perceive life challenges in a new light by focusing on what is most important in the current moment. Life is full of difficulties, and this practice reminds people to acknowledge the problem to find a solution. According to Lesser, problems are the richest experience of being human. People exercise acceptance of the present moment and address their physical and emotional reactions to it by recognizing the problem (Bunting, 2016). Lesser outlined the three steps of this mindfulness practice as (a) face the difficulty, (b) accept it, and (c) let go of blame. People can respond better to life challenges by staying present and aware of their bodily and emotional reactions to situations, which allows them to find a better solution (Bunting, 2016; Lesser, 2019). People develop a new relationship with their life issues as they try to make life simpler.

Research Literature Gap

Although mindfulness in education is growing in popularity, most mindfulness research focuses on the advantages of practicing mindfulness for physical stress reduction and mental health support for students or teachers. Every day, school social workers face work-related challenges while assisting students and their families at their schools. Although mindfulness practices are increasing to support mental health professionals, there is a paucity of research on which mindfulness practices school social workers believe are more helpful in creating better outcomes when they serve students and families. As mindfulness research grows in popularity because of its favorable impacts on

well-being, an opportunity to research mindfulness and school social workers is presented.

Summary

School districts attempt to support children and families as much as possible to address pressing difficulties such as poverty, family challenges, mental health, healthcare, and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. School districts hire school social workers to provide extra assistance and resources inside and outside the school to support students and families. According to the literature, school social workers face challenges while assisting students and their families, which affects their physical, mental, and emotional health. On the other hand, literature on mindfulness shares the various positive outcomes in the body and mind as an effect of practicing mindfulness. Although mindfulness in education is becoming popular, there is still a gap in understanding the most useful mindful practices based on Lesser's (2019) mindfulness framework for school social workers to improve their job results.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This study used a multicase study research design to explore the challenges that school social workers in California face when they assist children and their families. Furthermore, this study investigated which mindful practices school social workers believe are more beneficial when supporting students and their families at their schools. The researcher discovered that most mindfulness literature has focused on how mindfulness helps students and teachers, but there is minimal mindfulness literature on school social workers. In contrast to mindfulness literature, school social work literature has focused on job obligations and stress, but more research on mindfulness and school social workers is needed. As a result, qualitative research was conducted in this study to understand the challenges and mindfulness practices of school social workers.

This chapter presents the research methodology that best supported the purpose statement and the justification for its best match to support the research questions. The chapter begins by restating the study's purpose statement and research questions. Following that, the research design for the study is described along with the rationale for the qualitative research methodology. This section includes the population, target, and sample procedures. Following that, the study discusses the study's validity and reliability as well as the data gathering and analysis procedures and limitations. Finally, a chapter summary concludes the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the challenges school social workers experience when supporting students and their families in their schools. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to understand how school social

workers use mindfulness practices to help them respond to the challenges of working with the students and their families in their school based on Lesser's (2019) mindfulness model. The seven practices in the model include (a) love the work, (b) do the work, (c) don't be an expert, (d) connect to your pain, (e) connect to the pain of others, (f) depend on others, and (g) keep making it simpler.

Research Questions

1. What are the challenges that school social workers experience when supporting students and their families?
2. What are the mindful practices based on Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices that school social workers find most useful when responding to the students and their families challenges of the school that they experience?

Research Design

Research design is the broad blueprint of a study effort that other researchers may replicate. A research design outlines the techniques for collecting, evaluating, interpreting, and reporting data for a specific study (Creswell & Clark, 2017). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research provides a more in-depth and complete picture of the phenomena, allowing the researcher to understand how individuals make sense of their lives and experiences. Qualitative research is used to discover more about the nature of a culture, a problem, or individual experiences.

This study used a qualitative research approach to analyze essential themes in great depth for which current information was lacking (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). There was no in-depth knowledge of what mindfulness practices from Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices help school social workers the most when supporting

children and their families. This qualitative study employed research methodologies to provide rich information regarding the best mindfulness practices for school social workers to apply at work. The qualitative data regarding school social workers and Lesser's seven mindfulness practices was acquired using open-ended semistructured interview questions and supporting artifacts aligning with the study topics.

A qualitative multicase study approach was used, which allowed the selection of rich cases from the population to be studied in depth (Patton, 2002). A multicase study allows the researcher to explore similarities and differences between cases (Patton, 2015). The qualitative multicase study aimed to replicate findings among instances to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Patton, 2015). Because there is a gap in research on school social workers and the use of mindfulness at work, the researcher used a qualitative multicase research method to learn more about the unknown phenomenon (Patton, 2015). When participants share their experiences and views, a complete picture of the situation emerges for future studies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

Qualitative Multicase Research Design

The researcher explored many primary qualitative methodology options after concluding that qualitative research was the best match to meet the objective of this study. These methods included case studies, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenological methodologies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). After considering the justification for employing qualitative methods, the researcher determined that a multicase study would be the aligned match for this investigation. The researcher concluded that a multicase study approach would be the most efficient way to uncover

detailed information regarding unknown phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There is a lack of information accessible about the challenges that school social workers face daily while supporting students and their families and how they respond to these challenges through mindful practices. A multicase approach is the most effective method for acquiring in-depth information on a little-known subject (Patton, 2015).

A case study is an in-depth analysis of a bounded system, or case, across time using various data sources gathered in the environment (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). In this multicase study, the bounded system was the school district, the issues that school social workers face when helping students and their families, and the mindfulness practices they choose. This study examined crucial and relevant artifacts, such as descriptions of each school social worker's everyday issues when assisting students and their families and the mindful practices used to aid them with these challenges.

In summary, the researcher examined the collection of interviews and artifacts to identify themes about the challenges that school social workers encounter when they serve students and their families. Furthermore, based on Lesser's (2019) mindfulness framework, school social workers selected the most beneficial mindfulness practices to assist with these issues. As a result, the researcher learned more about the problems faced by school social workers in California to understand better how they adopted mindful practices in response to helping students and their families at their schools.

Population

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) defined a population as a group of individuals having one or more characteristics that distinguish them from other groups. A population is a collection of individuals or events from which the researcher wants to generalize. The

focus of this study was school social workers in the United States. Based on a database of 30 million profiles that include U.S. Census statistics and job openings, Zippia (2023) reported that over 142,288 school social workers work in the United States. The NASW (n.d.-b) described school social workers as “an integral link between school, home, and community in helping students achieve academic success” (para. 1). School social workers collaborate closely with school administrations, students, and families to develop school disciplinary policies, mental health intervention, crisis management, and support services (Allen-Meares, 1994; Openshaw, 2008; Watson et al., 2022). The number of school social workers in the United States was too large for the study’s resources; therefore, a target population was chosen.

Target Population

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) defined a target population as a set of sampling units from which the sample is drawn. Based on the broader population and time and resource constraints, McMillan and Schumacher (2014) proposed selecting a smaller portion of the larger population and generalizing the study’s findings to that group. A target population was created by examining school social workers employed in California. Patrick Mulkern (personal communication, November 17, 2022), previous president of the California Association of School Social Workers, shared, “It is difficult to determine the exact number of school social workers employed in California since some school districts hire school social workers as Mental Health Clinicians or Counselors.” On the other hand, the U.S. Department of Labor (2023) estimated that 49,310 child, family, and school social workers were employed in California in 2022. The California Department of Education (2023b) reported 940 school districts in the

2021-22 school year. As a result, the research target population included the 49,310 social workers employed by one of California's 940 school districts.

Sample

A sample is a subset of a study's participants taken from the target population and used to generalize to the total population according to Creswell and Guetterman (2019).

The sample for this study comprised school social workers who reflected the target demographic of 49,310 social workers who worked at a school site. Purposeful sampling followed by convenience sampling were used to define the population of this study.

According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling is a selection approach aimed at finding information-rich cases that allow the researcher to learn more about situations that are not well known. A purposeful sample aims to deliberately focus case selection on the objective of the research inquiry, core questions, and data gathered. Purposeful sampling supplies information that provides insights and in-depth knowledge.

Purposeful sampling criteria were defined and established for the sample of school social workers interviewed for this research study. Included in the criteria were six areas that each person must have met to be in this study:

1. School social worker is a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW).
2. School social workers worked at a school district in California.
3. School social workers were current in their position and were at their school site for at least 2 years.
4. School social workers have trained in the use of mindfulness.
5. School social workers have used mindfulness at work for at least 1 year.
6. School social workers belong to a social work association.

Two experts in the area of school social workers assisted the researcher to find a population who met the purposeful sampling criteria and who were willing to be part of the study. The researcher asked the president of the California Association of School Social Workers, and Paul Brazzel, a professor and pupil personnel services credential coordinator at the School of Social Work at San Diego State University to help identify potential school social workers who met all the three purposeful sampling criteria.

The president of the California Association of School Social Workers is the mental health and wellness coordinator at the Sacramento County Office of Education and instructor for the pupil personnel services credential course at California State University Sacramento. In her 18 years of experience in social work, she has been a positive behavior intervention and support coordinator, an educational related mental health services counselor, a district positive behavior intervention and support coach, and a K-12 school social worker for 8 years.

Paul Brazzel is a lecturer at the School of Social Work at San Diego State University and the pupil personnel services credential coordinator. Mr. Brazzel supervises social workers pursuing licensure. Within his 17 years of experience in social work, he has worked with children and families in early education, foster care, and child and family therapy. Mr. Brazzel is also a school district trainer in restorative and trauma-informed techniques. Some of his affiliations include the Social Work Consortium for building professionalism among veteran and new social workers, the Compassionate Learning Communities work group in Lemon Grove School District, the San Diego State University Field Advisory Committee, the NASW, and the California Association of School Social Workers Association where he served as the president for a couple of

years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Brazzel appeared in the Los Angeles Times, where he spoke about the significance of mental health. Each sponsor provided a list of five school social workers who met the stated requirements based on the selection criteria, resulting in 10 initial contacts in the study pool.

After purposeful sampling, convenience sampling was used. Given and Saumure (2008) defined convenience sampling as a sample in which research participants are selected based on their ease of availability. Essentially, individuals who are the most ready, willing, and able to participate in the study are the ones who are selected to participate. For this study, the researcher first determined whether a school social worker fit the criteria, and then asked school social workers about their willingness and readiness. The final five participants in the study were selected based on their availability and desire to be part of the research.

Sample Size

The size of a sample might vary depending on the objective of the investigation, its trustworthiness, and the time and resources available for the study (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) suggested four to 15 cases for a multicase study because less than four cases do not demonstrate adequate interaction between their situations, but 15 or more might be difficult for the researcher to interpret. Many of the most significant breakthroughs have come from small, truly in-depth samples (Patton, 2014). As a result, the researcher chose five school social workers for this multicase study based on this sample size recommendation. Figure 5 represents the breakdown from the population to the sample population.

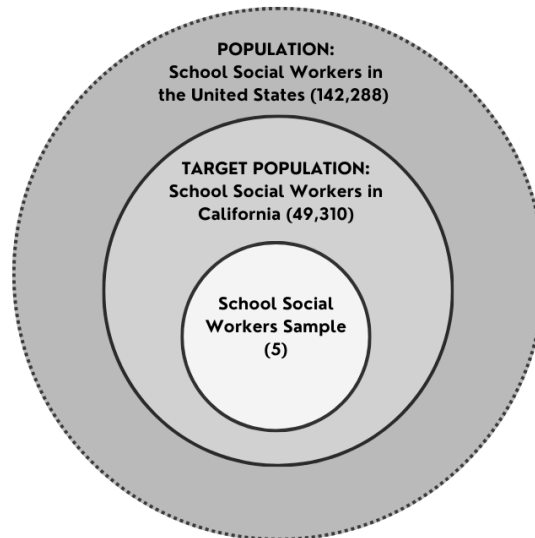
Sample Selection Process

The researcher constructed a sample population for this study using the following process. Initially, the study used purposeful sampling to select samples and then convenience sampling. The researcher contacted the president of the California Association of School Social Workers, and Paul Brazzel, lecturer and pupil personnel services credential coordinator at San Diego State University, to begin the purposeful sample.

Figure 5

Population, Target, and Sample

School Social Workers Population Breakdown



Based on the selection criteria, each sponsor gave a list of five school social workers who satisfied the stated requirements, resulting in 10 first contacts in the study pool. The final five study participants were chosen based on their availability and willingness to participate in the research.

The following criteria helped the researcher choose participants for this study:

1. School social worker is a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW).
2. School social workers worked at a school district in California.
3. School social workers were current in their position and were at their school site for at least 2 years.
4. School social workers have trained in the use of mindfulness.
5. School social workers have used mindfulness at work for at least 1 year.
6. School social workers belong to a social work association.

Then the researcher generated a list of 10 school social worker names, combining the five contacts from each sponsor. The sample selection continued with convenience sampling. The list was made by alphabetizing the last name of each school social worker. The researcher contacted each of the school social workers via email. Once the researcher received acceptance from five school social workers, the researcher had the final sample selection. Five school social workers who were LCSWs had worked for at least 2 years in a school site in one of California's school districts, had been trained in mindfulness, had used mindfulness practices for at least 1 year, and were members of a social work association were part of the purposeful sample.

Instrumentation

Using a qualitative multicase methodology, the researcher collected interview and artifact data aligned with the study's purpose. First, the researcher conducted an extensive literature review about mindful practices and found a framework by Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices that fit the purpose and research questions of the study. The study's research questions sought to uncover school social workers' challenges when

aiding children and families in their schools based on Lesser's mindfulness practices to address such challenges. Interviews and artifacts were used as data collection methods in this study to understand the issues that school social workers encounter when they assist students and their families and the best mindful practices based on Lesser's framework to support their work. Lesser's seven mindfulness practices, which informed the research and interview questions, were as follows:

- Love the work: Start with inspiration, with what is most essential. Acknowledge and cultivate aspiration- your deepest, most heartfelt intentions.
- Do the work: Have regular meditation and mindfulness practice. Learn to respond appropriately at work and in all parts of your life.
- Don't be an expert: Let go of thinking you are right. Step into greater wonder, openness, and vulnerability.
- Connect to your pain: Don't avoid the pain that comes with being human. Transform pain into learning and opportunity.
- Connect to the pain of others: Don't avoid the pain of others. Embody a profound connection to all humanity and life.
- Depend on others: Let go of a false sense of independence. Both empower others and be empowered by others to foster healthy group dynamics.
- Keep making it simpler: Let go of a mindset of scarcity. Cultivate awe and wonder. Integrate mindfulness practices and results.

The researcher constructed two interview questions to inform and address the study's two research questions (see Appendix B). One interview question focused on the challenges school social workers faced when assisting students and their families. The

other interview question focused on identifying the most beneficial mindfulness practices from Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices. Lesser's seven mindfulness practices were chosen as the optimum framework for this study using a synthesis matrix. The researcher had a qualitative research expert examine the mindfulness framework and the research questions to confirm that both interview questions aligned with the research questions and Lesser's mindfulness framework. In addition, nine school social workers were interviewed, including a field-test interview, to evaluate the effectiveness of the interview questions and methodology. The research questions were modified based on the qualitative research expert's review and interview feedback. This qualitative study relied primarily on interviews and relevant artifacts.

Interviews

According to Patton (2015), the qualitative research approach collects information-rich data regarding the experiences and perspectives of those being studied to appropriately address the study's research objectives. The researcher used semistructured, open-ended interview questions to determine which of Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices were most effective for school social workers when they helped children and their families in their schools.

Semistructured and open-ended questions were used in the interviews to obtain rich data from the school social worker's views, emotions, knowledge, and experiences (Patton, 2015). For researchers to gain accurate data, McMillan and Schumacher (2014) suggested that participant responses may be clarified, probed, developed on, and followed. The interviews were recorded to ensure that the information acquired direct quotes from participants and enough content to be understood.

Patton (2015) and McMillan and Schumacher (2014) recommended the following qualitative in-depth interview best practices were used by the researcher: (a) being authentic, (b) maintaining eye contact, (c) using questions and pauses, (d) creating trust, and (e) indicating that the researcher listens and connects with the subject through voice tone, phrasing, and timing, which elicits more trustworthy information. All of these practices were used while the researcher conducted the interviews.

Interview Guide Procedures

The researcher designed an interview guide that began with gratitude for the participant's time and willingness to participate (see Appendix B). The interview guide comprised the study's purpose statement, a copy of the interview questions, and Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices' operational definitions. Before the interviews, the participants received a copy of the seven interview questions, a copy of Lesser's seven mindfulness practices framework, definitions, and participation request letter, informed consent, audio recording release and consent form, and the research participant's bill of rights (see Appendices C, D, E, and F). One interview topic sought in-depth information regarding the challenges that school social workers experience while they supported students and their families at their schools. Five questions focused on determining the most useful mindful practices from Lesser's framework for supporting students and their families at their schools. The primary mindfulness interview question asked participants to describe the overall effect of using Lesser's mindfulness practices to help them respond to the issues that students and their families face at school. The final question allowed participants to share any further information about their challenges or their use of

mindfulness practices at work. Appendix G details the alignment of the research questions, interview questions, and gathered artifacts.

The researcher used semistructured and open-ended interview questions in the interview guide to minimize the variation in the participants' understanding of the interview questions. Using the interview guide allowed the interview to be time efficient and focused because of the consistent format and the school social worker's participation, which led to a richer and more accurate analysis.

The researcher started and ended each interview session by thanking the participants for providing helpful information about their experiences as school social workers. In the beginning, the researcher introduced the purpose of the study and asked the participant whether any clarification of the included documents was needed. The researcher subsequently reviewed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) papers with the participant, including the Participant's Bill of Rights, consent form, and confidentiality agreement. To conclude the interview, the researcher thanked the participant and allowed the participant to restate or clarify any of their answers.

Artifacts

The researcher used artifacts to validate the interview data, which were the primary data. By including artifacts, this study allowed triangulation with the interview data. Data triangulation improves a study's validity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Patton, 2015). Interviews and artifacts data assisted the researcher in inquiring about school social workers' emotions and work-life experiences to answer the study's research questions. Artifacts were used to supplement interview transcripts to boost the trustworthiness of the gathered data.

As supporting artifacts, the researcher concentrated on school district documents, school site reports, and external communication. The researcher began the artifact collection procedure by collecting the school plan for student achievement (SPSA) for each school location where the participants were working. The SPSA provided information on the student population at the school site, parent involvement, funding sources, interventions, tardiness, and the state attendance criteria. The researcher also gathered information on each school district at the Census Reporter (2022a) to gather data on the district's community income, poverty level, ethnic diversity, and educational attainment. Participants also had the opportunity to present artifacts, such as their school or district student and family resources website, that supported their stories about the challenges they experienced while helping students and their families during the interview process. Some of the artifacts provided by the participants included mindfulness training documents or links to the organization they received training from, PowerPoint presentations on the social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum they used, and links to mindfulness workbooks and other tools that helped teach mindfulness to their students. Finally, all the artifacts gathered and used in the study were analyzed using the NVivo™ qualitative coding software program.

The Researcher as the Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument of the study (Patton, 2015). As a result, there is always a risk of the researcher being biased in data collection and analysis because of personal perspectives and experiences (Patten, 2012; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) suggested that a researcher maintains a nonjudgmental position and empathic neutrality while doing qualitative research. At the time of the study, the

researcher had over 22 years of experience in mindfulness practices as a holistic health practitioner and 17 years of experience working in an educational setting. The researcher had extensive experience conducting interviews in both an educational context and as a private holistic health consultant. The researcher's goal to learn more about school social workers using mindfulness at work came from her passion for mindfulness and education. The researcher was aware of the possible risk of bias in data collection and interpretation in this research. Rather than trying to eliminate these subjectivities, it was important for the researcher to identify and monitor them (Patton, 2015).

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), researchers must be mindful of their behavior when conducting qualitative research because it may influence the participants' responses. This includes not sharing personal stories or using body language during interviews that can affect the participant's answers. To avoid research biases, the researcher adhered to the methodology and field-testing protocols throughout the data collection process. According to Patton (2015), the trustworthiness of qualitative data collection depends on the researcher's expertise and objectivity.

Validity

In qualitative research, validity refers to the agreement between the phenomenon and the world's reality (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Creswell (2015) and Patton (2015) defined validity as how well a test instrument measures what it is supposed to assess. The trustworthiness of a study increases with a greater level of validity (Patton, 2015). Before using Lesser's (2019) mindfulness model, the researcher did an in-depth evaluation of mindfulness frameworks to increase the study's validity. After selecting Lesser's mindfulness model, a qualitative research expert assessed the framework and

research questions to ensure that the interview questions were consistent. The researcher used the following seven best practice procedures recommended by McMillan and Schumacher (2014) to increase the qualitative validity of the study:

1. Prolonged and consistent fieldwork. The researcher spent several hours observing and studying several case studies about the real-life experiences of social workers working at a school site. In addition, the researcher looked at items that supported the research themes. Finally, the researcher validated the study's significant conclusions by cross-validation of artifact analysis.
2. Multimethod strategies. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with participants using semistructured interview questions to analyze their verbal and nonverbal behavior. To guarantee that the interviews took place in a convenient setting for the participants, the researcher conducted all of the interviews virtually via Zoom. Furthermore, the researcher inspected any artifacts the participants shared after the interview via email. Finally, the researcher examined the research questions, interview questions, and artifacts to confirm that there were sufficient data to meet the study's objectives.
3. Mechanically recorded data. The researcher used a voice recorder at every interview to create accurate and complete records and photographed significant objects.
4. Member interview verification and participant review. All the interviews were transcribed and forwarded to the interviewee. Each participant was allowed to revise the script to increase clarity, accuracy, and validity. The researcher confirmed the validity and accuracy of the interview transcripts with each

participant.

5. Inclusion of negative or discrepant data. Throughout the data-gathering process, the researcher attempted to identify, document, assess, and publish any negative cases or discrepant data relevant to the research that indicated contradictory emergent themes.
6. Mutual meaning. The researcher provided the operational meanings of terms used in research and interview questions, such as mindfulness and Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices, resulting in a common understanding of the study language. All interviews used the same interview questions. Because the researcher used semistructured interview questions, participants had the opportunity to discuss their work experiences. Finally, the participants and the researcher agreed on the description or composition of events and their meaning.
7. Pilot testing and interview critiques by observers. The researcher conducted a pilot interview in which the researcher created semistructured interview questions based on the criticisms of observers.

Field Testing

Field testing strengthens a study's validity and reliability (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). In this study, the researcher conducted a pilot test interview with a school social worker who qualified the study's purposeful sample criteria but was not an official participant. An expert in qualitative research observed the pilot interview. Following the interview, the researcher requested feedback from the expert and the participant using a series of questions (see Appendices H and I). In addition, the researcher reflected on the interview and changed the interview approach based on

comments from the expert and the participant. The researcher received feedback on the quality of the interview questions, the clarity of the keyword study definitions, the interview timing, and the nonverbal behavior to consider when preparing for future interviews. The feedback and observations from the experts and participants and the diligent notetaking were the most crucial aspects of the field test.

Reliability

In a research study, reliability refers to the possibility that a replicated investigation would yield consistent results (Patten, 2012). Roberts (2010) defined dependability as the degree to which an instrument consistently assesses something from one time to the next. According to other researchers, dependability is acquiring consistent data from an instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patten, 2012). Additionally, a study's instrument is credible if data collection, processing, and outcomes are consistent (Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010).

The researcher used field testing, interview procedures, and uniform interview questions to improve the dependability of this study. In this research, all participants were asked the same interview questions, and the researcher followed the same interview guide for each interview, which strengthened dependability. The interview data offered uniformity through the usage of the interview guide. Furthermore, the interview process was field-tested before implementation. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) stressed the importance of field-testing data collection devices to ensure that inquiries were straightforward and elicited similar responses from participants. Gaining feedback and modifying the interview instrument to improve word and sentence clarity, tempo, and nonverbal behavior resulted in increased reliability.

Intercoder Reliability

An intercoder agreement forms when two or more analysts agree on the same codes to generate data sets such as artifacts and interview transcripts. According to Creswell (2015), an intercoder agreement is a process by which researchers use peer analysis to assess the accuracy of data analysis as discoveries emerge by cross-checking data codes. To evaluate the consistency of the data codes, the researcher acquired feedback from a qualitative research expert to check the reliability of the data codes. The researcher established a .80 level of reliability before cross-checking the data (Lombard et al., 2005). According to Creswell and McMillan and Schumacher (2014), codes with a reliability of .80 or above are used to detect patterns. The researcher used NVivo qualitative coding software to identify themes from the data collected. To do the cross-check, the researcher assessed the themes, created a list of codes, and then requested the help of an external reliability coder.

Data Collection

Artifacts and semistructured, open-ended interviews were used to collect data. To begin the data collection, school district records, school site reports, such as the SPSA, and other external communication were gathered. Most of the supporting artifacts were collected before the interviews. School social workers had the option to present supportive artifacts during the interviews.

Human Subject Consideration

UMass Global University IRB reviewed and approved the design of the research before collecting data for this study. IRB policies guarantee that every study is ethical and follows federal standards. After completing the CITI clearance course certification

(see Appendix J) and receiving IRB clearance for this study, the researcher formally invited participants to participate in the study. The Research Participant's Bill of Rights, a formal letter requesting them to join the study, and an informed consent letter were distributed to all participants.

Participants also received contact information, an overview of the study, an estimate of the required time commitment for the study, an informed consent letter, a consent form authorizing the researcher to conduct a recording of the interview with the participants' option to review the transcript after the interview, and a statement emphasizing that the interview was voluntary. Additionally, the researcher provided copies of the participants' consent forms to be interviewed and recorded to reaffirm their willingness to participate in the study. All participants consented verbally to the recording and requested copies of the interview transcripts before the interview.

The participants' anonymity was always maintained by protecting the data collected after each interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Patton, 2015). Participants' names were covered throughout the study by using pseudonyms. Transcripts of interviews and other associated material were destroyed afterward. The identities of the participants were only known to the dissertation chair and the researcher.

Interview Process

All of the interviews were conducted remotely and recorded on Zoom for the convenience of the participants. Because of geographical and time constraints, conducting the virtual interviews was more convenient for the participants and the researcher. Before the interview, all participants received the three interview questions and the operational definitions of Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices. Each

participant received the same interview protocol. The researcher created semistructured and open-ended interview questions, which a qualitative research expert assessed to ensure the interview questions corresponded with the research questions.

The interview process relied on semistructured, open-ended questions regarding using Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices when responding to the challenges of students and their families. Each interview began with a brief discussion of the researcher's background, the study's objective, and a review of the participants' consent paperwork. During this time, participants were reminded that the interview was entirely voluntary. Furthermore, the researcher reminded the participants that the early termination of the interview and the refusal to answer any questions remained within their control.

The researcher began each interview by thanking the participant for their time and willingness to share their knowledge and experiences. Following that, the researcher gathered the demographic information of the participant. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) recommend getting demographic information from participants at the start of the interview to establish rapport and focus attention. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 min. As the interview ended, the researcher thanked each participant for their time and contributions.

The data collection procedure included the following steps:

1. Five school social workers participated in one-on-one, semistructured, open-ended interviews using Zoom as a virtual meeting format as part of an interview methodology.
2. Using Zoom and the Temi app, interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

3. Each school social worker received a copy of the interview transcription to double-check for accuracy.
4. Each school social worker had the opportunity to share artifacts that supported the application of Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices while assisting students and their families during the interview.
5. The researcher compiled interview transcripts and artifacts for each school social worker interview to create a unique report of gathered data.

Artifact Collection

The researcher collected relevant papers and artifacts to supplement the qualitative data collected during the study and expanded on triangulation procedures (Creswell, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Artifacts for this study were official documents reflecting the challenges that school social workers confront when they serve students and their families in their schools. Student demographic data, parental engagement, funding sources, interventions, tardiness, and the state attendance criteria from each school's site SPSA are a few examples of these artifacts. Other artifacts included school site goals from the local control and accountability plan and meeting minutes from the school site council. Mindfulness artifacts would also include the school's website, pictures, workshops attended and offered, school projects or events, and social media content.

Data Analysis

The researcher reviewed the data from the Zoom-formatted interviews with five school social workers. First, the data collected were organized by electronically recording the interviews and transcribing them afterward. Participants reviewed the written

transcripts for accuracy before the data analysis. The researcher read the complete transcript to identify data themes and significant patterns. The data were then electronically coded using NVivo™ software. The coding helped uncover patterns and frequency of topics, categories, and statements in the data (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, The researcher examined the transcript for phrases that exemplified the themes during the data evaluation.

The following data analysis techniques were used:

- Individual data reports from school social workers were compared and examined to identify trends and themes in participant responses and acquired artifacts.
- Identifiers were assigned to patterns and themes to code and store acquired data in NVivo™ software tool.
- The total number of coded participant replies was determined using NVivo™.
- A frequency table was generated to display the extent to which all participants commented on the same theme or pattern.
- Member checking was provided to participants to check their transcriptions against recordings for correctness (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

Member checking did not include findings for verification purposes (Patton, 2015). All data, descriptions, and qualifiers were organized in tables for presentation in Chapter IV. The researcher reviewed the data several times to find the themes that best answered each research question.

Artifacts and Data Triangulation

The artifacts used in this study supplemented the stories offered by the participants during their interviews. Artifacts were included if they were relevant to the

study's purpose and research questions. Based on Lesser's (2019) mindfulness framework, the participants discussed the obstacles they face when they assisted children and their families at their school and the most beneficial mindful practices that helped respond to those challenges. The interview data and artifacts were triangulated by investigating the artifacts that fit the challenges that school social workers experience when they supported students and their families and exploring the application of Lesser's seven mindfulness practices.

Data Representation

The researcher regularly examined the data to identify themes that best answered each of the two research questions. The data were presented in two ways, data frequency tables and representative participant comments. To generate a visual data representation for each research question, the researcher supplied a frequency table for each theme supporting all research questions. The tables included the number of participants who agreed with an identified theme in their interview comments, the frequency with which the identified theme was discussed during the interview, and the frequency with which participants submitted artifacts for the indicated theme. In addition, for each theme, the overall frequency of participant comments and artifacts was included. A data analysis was also given, with the participant's representative comments on each theme. The selected themes for the research questions were discussed and ordered from highest to lowest frequency in the Chapter IV conclusion.

Limitations

The capacity to generalize the findings to another population is known as a limitation (Creswell, 2008). The disadvantage of this study was that it only involved

licensed school social workers who have been in their job for at least 2 years, received training in mindfulness, have utilized mindful practices at work for at least 1 year, and are members of a social work association. As a result, the study restricts learning from school social workers who apply mindfulness techniques at work but have fewer years of experience working at a school site. These same limits offer up new possibilities for future research. Time, geography, sample size, and the researcher as the instrument are all elements that might have impacted the results of this study.

Time

Time was a limitation for this study. School social workers have a demanding schedule both during and after school. School social workers do not work all year. Only a small percentage partially work during the summer. As a result, interviews had to be scheduled far in advance and happened between school hours and evening school events. Some interviewees volunteered to conduct their interviews prior to or after school time. All of the interviews were limited to 60 min to respect the interviewees' time.

Reduced Generalization

The U.S. Department of Labor (2023) reported 49,310 child, family, and school social workers in California in 2022. This study created a target group based on social workers employed in a school site in California to reduce the sample size. As a result, this study generalized to the target group of school social workers working in one of the 1,018 school districts in California.

Purposeful Sampling and Size of the Sample

A sample is a chosen group of people who participate in a study from the population from which the researcher seeks to generalize (Creswell & Guetterman,

2019). Purposeful sampling was used in this study to restrict the target population of 49,310 to a sample of five school social workers. Five school social workers who met the intended sampling requirements and were eligible for the study from that sample of the target population were selected with the support of experts in the field.

Theoretical Framework

After reviewing various mindfulness practices literature, the researcher used Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices model. The seven mindfulness practices are (a) love the work, (b) do the work, (c) don't be an expert, (d) connect to your pain, (e) connect to the pain of others, (f) depend on others, and (g) keep making it simpler. The second research question and two interview questions focus on these seven mindfulness practices. Lesser's mindfulness model was used to have school social workers explain the most helpful mindfulness practices they employed while responding to the challenges they encountered when they assisted children and families at their school. Other mindfulness models were investigated, but Lesser's model appeared more relevant to the investigation. A different framework may have yielded different results.

Summary

Chapter III described the process used for this qualitative multicase study design to discover the challenges that school social workers face when they support students and their families in their schools and to understand how school social workers use mindfulness practices to help them respond to the challenges of working with students and their families in their school based on Lesser's (2019) mindfulness model. This chapter started by describing the research design and the qualitative methods to shape the interview and the chapter's data gathering and analysis. This chapter also discussed the

research instrument, data collection, and analysis procedures, and closed with the study's limitations. Chapter IV describes the data collection procedure and the research's outcomes. Chapter V summarizes the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This chapter outlines the study's methodology, including data collecting and analysis. The purpose statement and research questions are presented, followed by a summary of the study's population, sample, and demography. The key objective of this chapter is to present the data findings, specifically qualitative data reflecting the lived experiences of school social workers' challenges when they serve students and their families at their schools. Additionally, data findings about the mindfulness practices from Lesser's mindfulness framework that are most useful for school social workers when responding to these challenges are presented.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the challenges school social workers experience when supporting students and their families in their schools. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to understand how school social workers use mindfulness practices to help them respond to the challenges of working with the students and their families in their school based on Lesser's (2019) mindfulness model. The seven practices in the model include (a) love the work, (b) do the work, (c) don't be an expert, (d) connect to your pain, (e) connect to the pain of others, (f) depend on others, and (g) keep making it simpler.

Research Questions

1. What are the challenges that school social workers experience when supporting students and their families?

2. What are the mindful practices based on Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices that school social workers find most useful when responding to the students and their families challenges of the school that they experience?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

A qualitative multicase research study was used to highlight the challenges that school social workers face when they support students and their families in addition to the most useful mindfulness practices for school social workers to respond to these challenges based on Lesser's seven mindfulness practices. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with five school social workers identified as licensed clinical social workers who worked at a school site in California for at least 2 years and employed mindfulness at work for at least 1 year. The interviews were conducted virtually and recorded with the permission of the participants. The researcher securely saved the study's data.

Population

A population, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), is a group of elements or cases that meet specified criteria, whether they are humans, objects, or events. It is critical to note the study population in research because it is to this group to which results are generalized. The study's intended population for which the findings applied was school social workers. Zippia (2023) estimated that over 142,288 school social workers are working in the United States, based on a database of 30 million profiles that includes U.S. Census statistics and job openings.

Target Population

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), researchers cannot investigate the entire population for a study. As a result, a smaller number of participants are chosen. The results are generalized to these sampled participants. The study's target population was a group of school social workers employed in California. California has 940 school districts, according to the California Department of Education (2023b). Patrick Mulkern (personal communication, November 17, 2022) stated,

Unfortunately, determining how many school social workers are employed and how many districts employ school social workers is a difficult task. This is due, in part, to the fact that no standard title is used throughout the state. Some are titled as School Social Workers, others as Counselors, yet others as Mental Health Clinicians, and so on.

The U.S. Department of Labor (23023) reported 49,310 child, family, and school social workers employed in California in 2022. As a result, the research target population was 49,310 social workers supporting children and their families in California.

Sample

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) defined a sample as a subset of a study's participants taken from the target population and used to generalize to the complete population. As a result, the sample for this study included individuals who represented the target demographic of 49,310 social workers working at a school site in California. A purposeful sampling criteria were developed to establish a sample population of school social workers for this study. According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling is a

selection procedure aimed at uncovering information-rich situations that assist researchers to comprehend issues for which they do not have sufficient knowledge.

The following purposeful sampling criteria were used to define the sample population of school social workers for this research. The criteria included six areas that each participant must have met to participate in this study:

1. School social worker is a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW).
2. School social workers worked at a school district in California.
3. School social workers were current in their position and were at their school site for at least 2 years.
4. School social workers have trained in the use of mindfulness.
5. School social workers have used mindfulness at work for at least 1 year.
6. School social workers belong to a social work association.

To help identify possible school social workers who fulfilled the purposeful sampling criteria, the researcher enlisted the help of two social work experts, a social work professor at San Diego State University and the president of the California Association of School Social Workers. To help identify potential study participants, the researcher contacted both the social work experts and discussed the purposeful sampling criteria. The final sample was five school social workers working within one of the 1,018 school districts in California who met the purposeful criteria and were available and willing to participate in the research.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability data were used in this study to obtain trustworthy data and eliminate mistakes. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), having two or more coders

code the same data to ensure agreement on how the data are coded boosts the accuracy of the information and reduces the possibility of potential bias. As a result, two more expert researchers shared and classified 20% of the study's qualitative data. The intercoder reliability was more than 82%, indicating that the data coding agreement was clear. According to Creswell and Poth, good qualitative reliability requires at least 80% agreement. As a result, the intercoder reliability for this study was determined to be satisfactory, and the qualitative findings were deemed legitimate.

Demographic Data

The study involved five participants who matched the eligibility criteria; the participants verbally consented and were recorded on the Zoom platform. Each participant was described using specific demographic information, such as total years as a school social worker, years as a school social worker in the current school site, county of the school district, public or private status of the school, school grades they support, student ethnic index, and free and reduced lunch percentage in their schools. Table 1 displays the demographic information for each participant by a number ranging from 1 to 5.

Participant 1 supported students and their families in one elementary school in San Diego County with students from kindergarten to sixth grade. In the 2022-2023 school year, the elementary school enrolled 439 students. Of these students, 69% were Hispanic, 13% were African American, 10.3% were White, 1.6% were Asian, 0.5% were Filipino, 0.7% were Pacific Islander, 0.7% were American Indian or Alaska Native students, and 4.3% were two or more races. Sixty-six percent of students receive free or reduced lunch (EdData, n.d.). The 2022 Census reported for this school population

reported that 32% of household income was under \$50,000, and 11% of children under 18 years-old live below poverty (Census Reported, 2022a).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Total years as a school social worker	Years as school social worker in current site/s	County of the school district	Public or private school	Supporting grades	Student ethnic diversity index	Free and reduced lunch 2022–23
1	10	8	San Diego	Public	K-6	School 1: 34	School 1: 66.7%
2	18	7	Los Angeles	Private	1-12	School 1: 16	School 1: 00.0%
3	7	6	Santa Clara	Public	K-8	School 1: 50 School 2: 32 School 3: 32 School 4: 45 School 5: 47	School 1: 39.1% School 2: 08.8% School 3: 11.5% School 4: 67.7% School 5: 56.1%
4	15	5	San Mateo	Public	9-12	School 1: 50 School 2: 69 School 3: 57 School 4: 56 School 5: 60	School 1: 36.8% School 2: 19.6% School 3: 20.2% School 4: 40.3% School 5: 31.6%
5	16	10	San Bernardino	Public	K-5	School 1: 37 School 2: 33	School 1: 72.4% School 2: 81.6%

Participant 2 supported students and their families at one private prekindergarten to 12th-grade school site in Los Angeles county. The participant mainly worked with first to eighth-grade students and once a week with 12th grade students. In the 2022-2023 school year, the school enrolled 211 students. The school student diversity included 68% White, 12.9% Hispanic, 4.6% Asian or Pacific Islander, 1% African American students, and 13.4% have two or more races (Public School Review, n.d.). The yearly tuition for this school is \$19,200, and 48% of students receive financial aid. The population’s

median household income is \$92,000 per year. The school has ranked 50 out of 93 as the best private K-12 school in the Los Angeles area (Niche, n.d.).

Participant 3 supported students and their families in five different schools in Santa Clara county. The school's grades range from kindergarten to eighth grade. In the 2022-2023 school year, the district hosting the five schools enrolled 8,800 students. Of these students, 56.4% were Asian, 26.5% Hispanic, 6.6% Filipino, 4% White, 1.2% African American, 0.3% Pacific Islander, 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native, 4.4% reported two or more races, and 0.3% did not answer. The free and reduced meals within the five schools ranged from 8.8% to 67.7% (EdData, n.d.). The 2022 Census reported that 26% of the household income in the school district population is under \$50,000 per year, and 18% of children under 18 years old live in poverty (Census Reporter, 2022d).

Participant 4 supported students and their families and other school social workers in five different school sites in San Mateo county. The five schools were high schools supporting students between ninth and 12th grade. In the 2022-2023 school year, the district hosting the five high schools enrolled 4,326 students. Of these students, 33% were Hispanic, 26.4% Filipino, 15.7% Asian, 15% White, 1.2% African American, 0.8% Pacific Islander, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, 8% reported two or more races, and 0.4% did not answer. The free and reduced meals within the five high schools ranged from 19.6% to 40.3% (EdData, n.d.). The 2022 Census reported that 17% of the household income in the school district population is under \$50,000 per year, and 8% of children under 18 years old live in poverty (Census Reporter, 2022f).

Participant 5 mainly supported special education students and their families in two elementary schools with kindergarten to fifth grade in San Bernardino county. In the

2022-2023 school year, one of the schools enrolled 446 students. Of these students, 62.1% were Hispanic, 16.6% African American, 11.9% White, 5.2% Asian or Pacific Islander, 0.9% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander and 3.4% reported two or more races. The percentage of these students who received free or reduced lunch was 74.24% (EdData, n.d.; Public School Review, n.d.). The second school enrolled 438 students in 2022-2023. Of these students, 67% were Hispanic, 14% White, 8% African American, 4% Asian, 1% American Indian, and 6% reported two or more races. The students who received free and reduced meals in the second school was 81.6%. According to the 2022 Census report, 41% of the school district's household income is less than \$50,000 per year, and 28% of children under the age of 18 live in poverty (Census Reporter, 2022b).

A case study, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is an in-depth description and examination of a bounded system. The delimited system in this multicase study was the school site and the issues school social workers face when serving students and their families. This study examined relevant artifacts such as public school site and district data, local control and accountability plan reports, school strategic plans, school websites, and descriptions of the issues school social workers experience when they served students and their families (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The researcher collected and evaluated data from five participants to learn about their challenges and the most beneficial mindfulness practices from Lesser's (2019) mindfulness framework when they supported students and their families at their schools. The researcher employed semistructured interviews with open-ended questions guided by the theoretical framework derived from the literature review about mindfulness and

current school challenges. The research questions were answered using qualitative data from in-depth interviews and artifacts. The major qualitative data were gathered through face-to-face virtual interviews with five school social workers and artifacts that supported the interview data. The researcher spent 5 hours conducting interviews and an equal amount of time analyzing the items.

Data Analysis for Research Question 1

What are the challenges that school social workers experience when supporting students and their families?

The following sections address the qualitative data from the five interviews with school social workers that were organized into themes. The information presented came from Interview Question 1. The subsections that follow provide answers to Research Question 1. Table 2 displays the themes and frequency of occurrence.

In summary, with a total frequency of 18, all five participants identified not having enough time during the workday to help all students and their families as the number one challenge they faced. Four of the five school social workers emphasized the challenge of connecting children to outside resources, especially mental health services, with a total of 15 frequencies. Family life difficulties was the third-highest theme, with 14 frequencies. Following that, with 11 frequencies, school social workers described the influences of the outside school environment as an additional challenge when assisting students. With a frequency of 9, student emotional dysregulation constituted the fifth challenge mentioned by school social workers. Finally, with an 8% frequency, three out of every five school social workers referred to the issue of a lack of language diversity among school social workers to assist children who speak another language. As

previously stated, the first interview question elicited this information about the life experiences of school social workers. The next section outlines an analysis of the qualitative data for the themes in answering the first research question using individual experiences.

Table 2

Themes, Participants, Sources, and Frequency, Highest to Lowest Frequency, for Research

Question 1

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. There is not enough time to support the intensive needs of all students and families	5	13	5	18
2. Hard to connect students to outside services	4	13	2	15
3. Family life stressors are rampant	3	10	4	14
4. Impacts from outside the school environment	3	9	2	11
5. Students have emotional dysregulation	3	6	3	9
6. Language diversity makes it difficult to support an ethnically diverse student population	3	5	3	8

Theme 1: There is Not Enough Time to Support All Students and Families

The first research question for this study asked school social workers to describe the challenges they experience when assisting students and their families. According to the data analysis, the number one challenge that school social workers encounter when serving students in their schools is not having enough time to support the intensive needs of all students and families. All participants shared daily examples that compromised

their time to meet and follow up with students as they would have liked. Table 3 shows the frequency of this theme.

Table 3

Theme 1: Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
There is not enough time to support the intensive needs of all students and families	5	13	5	18

As a result of dealing with a large number of students, multiple responsibilities, and a daily emphasis on responding to student mental health crises, all school social workers reported not having enough time to serve all students and their families. Participants 3 and 4 discussed how they supported five different school sites by dividing their working days between all schools. Participant 5 also stated that she worked at four school sites during the COVID-19 pandemic because her school district only hired two school social workers for the district’s seven schools. Participant 3 was assigned to work at two schools during the time of the interview. Participant 3 mentioned, “I am supporting 3,300 when I am supposed to support 500. There is just not enough time to do what our students need.” Participant 2 worked at a private school that supports prekindergarten to 12th grade students. Participant 2 continued to share how her day “fills up very quickly” by teaching 13 SEL classes per week, mentoring teachers, mentoring and training assistants, and being the mental health provider and supporting students between the first and 12th grade. School social workers are the first responders to students’ crises because they are primary mental health providers in schools.

All school social workers acknowledged the difficulty of being flexible with their time to serve students in distress. Participant 1 stated, “I’m trying to support all students and their families, and it’s sometimes difficult because it’s not an easy fix. It is not as simple as taking deep breaths, calming down, and returning to class. It is not always easy.” Participant 5 also acknowledged the difficulty of dividing her time between aiding special education children and general students. Participant 5 explained, “I can’t see my clients if I’m dealing with an emergency . . . I can’t be in two places at the same time.” Participant 2 reported her daily experience of finding a quick substitute teacher for her SEL class when a sobbing student appeared at her office door before teaching time and following up with the children’s parents before bed. She stated, “I’m trying to find time in my schedule to ensure that I’m following up . . . Personally, it’s putting my head on the pillow, wondering if I did enough and how that student is doing.”

The school social worker’s work schedule prioritized aiding students in crises while keeping up with their other professional responsibilities. As reported by all participants, school social workers are constantly in triage when they support students and their families, depending on how acute or urgent each case is. Participant 3 said,

When I’m doing a crisis response, everything comes down to this connection to the student in front of me and how we’re going to walk through this together . . .

It’s always evident that this is the most important thing I can accomplish today.

Theme 2: Hard to Connect Students to Outside Services

Based on the first research question focusing on the challenges school social workers face while working with students and their families in their schools, the second highest challenge, with a frequency of 15, was connecting students to outside services.

Although most participants referred to this challenge based on outside-the-school mental health services, one participant also mentioned the challenge of connecting homeless families to shelters. Most participants shared their experiences about the challenges of linking students to outside services and an increase in follow-up time for each case. Table 4 shows the frequency of this theme.

Table 4

Theme 2: Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Hard to connect students to outside services	4	13	2	15

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, school social workers observed an increase in out-of-school mental health services. Four out of five interviewees highlighted the difficulty of referring children to outside assistance because of extensive waiting lists, healthcare insurance policies, and overall limited resources in times of crisis. Participants 2 and 5 discussed their difficulties in referring students to outside mental health clinics based on their health insurance. Participant 5 noted,

If they have Medi-Cal, it is pretty easy to find at least a place to connect them to . . . The waitlist is ridiculously long, but at least the student is on a waiting list. In contrast, dealing with private insurance is quite complicated.

Participant 2 added, “It’s been hard to make referrals, post the pandemic because the therapists are fully booked, and families had issues with their private insurance referrals and reimbursements.”

School social workers continue to follow up with the student until he or she receives outside mental healthcare. Follow-up time for the school social worker increases as does time to help the student. Participant 3 said,

We do try hard to connect students to services outside of school . . . but for underresourced families, it is difficult to access off campus. The student may not be able to obtain the necessary assistance that year. So, when we return the following year, there has been a year of increasing trauma, and the demands are much bigger.

Smaller districts face a greater challenge because their resources are limited. Participants 4 and 5 discussed their job experiences in a smaller district. Participant 4 mentioned the variances in community-based services related to the school district location:

While many services are centered in the San Francisco area, our district is in San Mateo County, and the resources are limited. We are a tiny school district. We're having trouble finding outside agency therapists and family therapists because everyone is on a waiting list.

Participant 5 reaffirmed this by stating, "The biggest challenge is sometimes connecting families to community-based services. We are a small district, so our resources are also small." Participant 4 also expressed concern about the rise in unhoused families and the difficulty in locating shelters for children and their families: "Normally, we can call three agencies and get a family in, but that's not the case right now. The area's shelters are overflowing."

Most school social workers noted an increase in necessities such as mental health care and housing during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. As school social workers work to assist families in obtaining the additional assistance required to meet these basic needs, they face the challenge of connecting students and their families with outside providers or community resource services because of longer waiting lists and an intricate private insurance process. Participant 3 explained this challenge by using water skiing as an example, describing the experience of dealing with limited resources during times of increased need:

It always feels like I'm being dragged face-first through the water. As if I never get to the summit. Every day, I think I'm going to reach the top and be able to help them the way I want to, but I never do.

Theme 3: Family Life Stressors Are Rampant

Continuing to answer the first research question about the challenges school social workers experienced as they support students and their families at school, the third-highest challenge, with a frequency of 14, was family life stressors. Three out of five participants mentioned this challenge and gave examples of how families are experiencing stressful life situations and how this impacts their work. Table 5 shows the frequency of this theme.

Table 5

Theme 3: Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Family stressors are rampant	3	10	4	14

As families experience rampant life stressors, school social workers noticed the impact this has on fully serving students and their families. Three participants who worked at Title 1 schools, funded by federal funds because of the enrollment of a high percentage of low-income students, spoke about their experiences of how behavior issues increased in students. At the same time, parent engagement decreased because of living in a socioeconomically challenged community. One of the most common problems that school social workers noticed from these low-income communities was families dealing with homelessness. Participant 4 told the story of a single woman who lived in her car with her two disabled children. She said, “It’s just very difficult to have families that are unhoused and living in cars . . . We’re seeing an increase in the number of unhoused families. That is extremely difficult.” Unfortunately, overcrowded shelters do not help school social workers who are attempting to aid students and families experiencing homelessness.

Participant 1 also discussed the mental health impact of family life pressures on children, saying, “They might be 10 years old, but they’re still throwing tantrums or like really can’t manage their emotions due to their own personal and life family challenges.” Participant 3 also emphasized the difficulties of working in a low-income community where 90 to 100% of students are socioeconomically challenged, and how “a lot of mental discipline is required to stay balanced in the midst of that.” Although school social workers are the primary mental health providers for students in times of emotional distress, a lack of parental engagement makes communication with parents more difficult. Participant 4 expressed, “It’s hard to engage them [parents], not because they do not care

but because they are working like crazy, or they are dealing with community or family violence or tenuous housing.”

School social workers in low-income neighborhoods have noted an increase in community and family violence that spills into the school as well as mental health problems in kids. Participant 1 discussed his experience with student misbehavior issues triggered by family-related problems. Participant 3 and 4 shared their experiences of helping families dealing with grinding poverty. As families face life challenges, school social workers see an upsurge in student support for mental health and the need to assist families in locating resources with basic daily demands. Overall, the experiences from three school social workers shared that the more challenges families have, the more it impacts the overall well-being of children.

Theme 4: Impacts From Outside the School Environment

Triggered by the challenge of family stressors, the next challenge school social workers had, with a frequency of 11, was the impact from outside the school environment. The same three participants who discussed the impact of family difficulties on children’s well-being discussed how the outside environment also affected children’s well-being. Three participants related stories and events of how community and family dynamics influenced their work and made it difficult for students to sustain healthy behaviors. Making impacts from outside the school environment was the next challenge for most interviewees. Table 6 shows the frequency of this theme.

As explained by Participant 1,

The biggest challenge that I face as a school social worker is trying to support students emotionally, intellectually, and physically. We want to keep them safe.

But we only have them during the school day. Ultimately, they are going back to the same environment in their home.

Table 6

Theme 4: Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Impacts from outside the school environment	3	9	2	11

As school social workers mentioned previously about family life stressors, they also recognized the influence family and community members have over students. Participant 1 added, “Sometimes it’s not easy for us to support them [students] because they are getting a different message at home on managing stress.” Participants 3 and 4 focused on sharing stories happening outside the school environment linked to poverty, community violence focused on race, and the impacts of emotional distress produced by COVID-19. Participant 3 mentioned the emotional impact a big group of her students experienced from losing a family member during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant 3 shared, “This zip code had the highest mortality rate during the pandemic. Students lost the kind of person who held the family structure together.” Participant 4 also added to this theme the ongoing racial violence around her school community affecting students.

Three participants described different examples of the influence the outside school environment has on students, making children a product of their environment. Although school social workers teach students to create healthier habits, they agree that children always return to their family habits. Participant 1 mentioned,

I can tell them this is a better way to handle stress, but that is not what they are used to their entire life. That is not how they handle problems at home. Then students come to school and have conflicts with peers or adults.

As school social workers try to support students holistically by teaching more positive and healthy ways to manage their stress and emotions, they also described the challenge to sustain the new healthy habits in children because of the outside school environment. Participant 3 concluded talking about this challenge by saying, “I am sending students home to systems that continue to cause them harm, and I can’t address it because I only get the students when they are at school. That’s a challenge.”

Theme 5: Students Have Emotional Dysregulation

The majority of school social workers reported an increase in the need for mental health support needs for children as a result of emotional dysregulation and the previously identified challenges. With a frequency of 9, students’ emotional dysregulation was another everyday challenge for school social workers. Three participants provided their experiences and examples of consistently assisting students with emotional dysregulation. Table 7 shows the frequency of this theme.

Table 7

Theme 5: Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Students have emotional dysregulation	3	6	3	9

Participants recognized the connection between the issues children and families encounter outside of school that increases emotional dysregulation in children as they

narrated stories about the challenges they have when assisting students. Participant 1 explained, “We have many students who can’t control their emotions. They could be fifth-graders still throwing tantrums because of all the difficulties in their personal or family lives.” Students’ behavior in the classroom reflects their experiences with life issues outside of school. Participant 1 said, “Then they come to school, and they have conflicts with peers or have difficulty taking direction or become defiant towards authority figures.” Participant 5 also stated how the COVID-19 pandemic’s closures harmed students’ social basic skills: “Students are experiencing significant social delays. They don’t know how to work together or interact with one another. We’ve encountered challenges with regulation with transitional kindergarten and older students.”

Constantly, school social workers noticed how students who are dealing with stressful situations and are not able to regulate their emotions healthily end up harming themselves. Participant 4 shared, “Unfortunately, a student committed suicide this week. He was a charismatic senior, and it impacted many students.” Participant 5 also mentioned a couple of stories of students dealing with anxiety and depression. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic and closures of schools increased cases of mental health issues in students, Participant 5 mentioned how school social workers were already busy supporting students with mental health and behavioral issues before the pandemic. Participant 5 explained, “In 2018 and 2019, I spent several days at one of my school sites just helping contain and de-escalate students dealing with mental and emotional challenges.”

Students struggle to regulate their emotions as they experience familial issues and other external influences. Students who are unable to manage their emotions healthily have an impact on themselves and other classmates. Participant 1 concluded by stating,

Ultimately, if we have students who have difficulty regulating their emotions in a way that they can't have positive relationships at school or manage their impulses or their anger, then if they're not able to do that, that is when we see the behavioral challenges come out. Acting out aggression toward students, confrontation, and overall emotional outburst.

Theme 6: Language Diversity Makes it Difficult to Support an Ethnically Diverse Student Population

The last common challenge mentioned by school social workers, with a frequency of 8, was not being able to support children because of language barriers; in one example, the participant was the only mental health clinician in her school who could assist monolingual Spanish-speaking students. Three participants offered their experiences and perspectives on language obstacles in serving children and their families at their schools. Table 8 shows the frequency of this theme.

Three school social workers discussed the cultural diversity of the students and families they served. Participant 3 stated that the two largest populations at her school were Spanish and Vietnamese speakers, and she did not speak either of these languages. Even though her school site employs bilingual community liaisons to assist with communication, she saw a gap in translation between parent communication and comprehension of academics and mental health.

Table 8*Theme 6: Participants, Source, and Frequency*

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Language diversity makes it difficult to support an ethnically diverse student population	3	5	3	8

Participant 4 stated, “We need to meet the language needs of our students and families, and we do not.” Participant 4 is not bilingual and works at five schools where most students are Spanish speakers. The inability to communicate in the primary student’s language while assisting students and their families is a challenge that monolingual school social workers face daily in California. Participant 5 said, “We have many cultures, we are ethnically very diverse . . . We must acknowledge that some of our children come from other countries, states, and cultures.”

Even when school social workers are bilingual and can support monolingual-speaking students, there is the problem of being the student’s only resource. Participant 5 described how she asked to help Spanish-speaking general students when her role was to assist special education students. She said, “How is that equitable to the other children who are not monolingual but require mental health services? I feel like I am fighting between two houses.” All three participants agreed that they worked in school districts with a diverse ethnic population and the necessity to serve students and parents in their native language. Unfortunately, these same participants recognize the existence of a significant gap in assisting students and their families in their language, making it another challenge for school social workers.

Data Analysis for Research Question 2

What are the mindful practices based on Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices that school social workers find most useful when responding to the students and their families challenges of the school that they experience?

The following sections address the qualitative data from the five interviews with school social workers organized into the mindfulness practices from the highest to lowest frequency. The information presented came from Interview Question 4. The subsections that follow provide answers to Research Question 2. Table 9 displays Lesser's seven mindfulness practices and frequency of occurrence.

In summary, do the work, with a frequency of 26, was the most useful mindfulness practice of the Lesser's (2019) mindfulness practices. All participants agreed that frequently practicing mindfulness was valuable to enhance awareness and be more present when supporting students and parents. Connect to the pain of others received the second highest frequency (10), and keep making it simpler received the third highest frequency (9). When asked about the most beneficial mindfulness practices from Lesser's mindfulness practices to support them when enduring issues while serving students and their families, the top three replies were do the work, connect to the pain of others, and keep making it simpler. The frequency of connect to your pain was 6. Both love the work and don't be an expert had a frequency of four. Surprisingly, the prevalence of depend on others was nil. As previously indicated, the fourth interview question elicited this information concerning the most useful mindfulness practices for school social workers when they experienced challenges while serving students and their families at their school based on Lesser's mindfulness framework. The following section provides an

Table 9

Mindfulness Practices, Themes, Participants, Sources, and Frequency, Highest to Lowest Frequency, for Research Question 2

Mindfulness practice	Theme	Participants	Frequency of the mindfulness practice		
			Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Do the work	Mindfulness must be practiced regularly to aid in being focused and present, regulating emotions, and remaining calm under stressful situations.	5	21	5	26
Connect to the pain of others	Increased empathy and caring for others while assisting them through difficult times.	4	10	0	10
Keep making it simpler	Simple mindfulness activities aided in remaining present and focused.	4	8	1	9
Connect to your pain	Improved physical and emotional self-awareness to recognize what they brought to their work.	3	6	0	6
Love the work	Aided in bringing a compassionate viewpoint when supporting others, resulting in increased empathy.	4	4	0	4
Don't be an expert	Stepping back to allow others to speak up, leads to developing autonomy and agency in others.	2	4	0	4
Depend on others	This mindfulness practice had no theme.	0	0	0	0

overview of the qualitative data analysis for each mindfulness practice in answering the second research question using individual experiences.

Mindfulness Practice: Do the Work

Do the work is a mindfulness practice that Lesser (2019) described as regularly practicing mindfulness to embody personal values and objectives and foster awareness while helping others. With a frequency of 26, this mindfulness practice was the most useful for school social workers when they experienced challenges while supporting students and their families at their school. All five interviewees shared stories about how they practiced mindfulness for themselves and with the students and explained why doing the work is essential in their profession. Table 10 shows the frequency of this mindfulness practice. For this second research question, school social workers expressed perceptions about the most useful practices for themselves and their students and families.

Table 10

Do the Work: Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of the mindfulness practice		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Mindfulness must be practiced regularly to aid in being focused and present, regulating emotions, and remaining calm under stressful situations.	5	21	5	26

When faced with challenges as they assisted students and their families at their school, all participants stated that doing the work was the most useful mindfulness practice. They agreed that to teach and lead students through mindfulness exercises, they

also needed to practice mindfulness. For example, Participant 4 stated that she had been practicing mindfulness for 15 years; the rest of the school social workers claimed that they had been practicing mindfulness for at least 8 years.

All five participants offered numerous examples of practicing mindfulness daily to stay grounded and more efficient when they assisted students during a crisis.

Participant 3 explained,

Before I walk into the office, I stop in the parking lot, take three deep breaths, and feel the ground . . . I must be deeply grounded for everyone else to be able to settle and feel safe enough to deal with whatever the issue is.

School social workers perceive a greater awareness and connection to their body, emotions, and environment as an outcome of practicing mindfulness.

A greater self-awareness also enabled school social workers to be more authentic when practicing mindfulness, which resulted in a stronger connection with students.

Participant 2 explained that being authentic means acknowledging her emotions and modeling self-regulation to pupils: “Let’s take three deep breaths together. Honesty, I did it for myself because I have been running around campus. Thank you so much for taking the time to do this with me.” Participants found that as students witnessed them practicing mindfulness with them, the students responded by becoming more relaxed and open when discussing their struggles. Participant 3 said, “I want them to feel more connected with their physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts that they are having.”

Their own experiences and the research they have done on the good impacts of mindfulness are what motivated school social workers to use mindfulness exercises as another tool to help their students. Participant 1 described how he incorporates

mindfulness practices like breathing exercises into his classroom to assist students in calming down after recess:

This is how I begin class. I utilize my singing bowl and lead some breathing exercises to help the students relax, concentrate on their breathing, and return to the present moment. I like doing the work because it establishes the habit of practicing mindfulness.

When students practiced mindfulness daily at school, school social workers noticed calmer and better emotionally regulated students. Students who develop the practice of becoming aware of their bodies and emotions will be able to self-regulate during a crisis. As students face difficulties both within and outside of school, they can employ mindfulness activities to manage their reactions to their surroundings in a healthy way.

Daily mindfulness practice helps adults and children stay focused in the present moment, control emotions, and remain calm in stressful situations. Mindfulness is a learnable skill but must be practiced daily to reap its rewards. Practicing and experiencing mindfulness was crucial for school social workers when they worked with students and their families.

Mindfulness Practice: Connect to the Pain of Others

Lesser (2019) described connecting to the pain of others as when a person can be empathetic toward others while also encouraging personal development and inner strengths in others. With a frequency of 10, this mindfulness practice was the second most useful for school social workers when experiencing challenges while supporting students and guardians. Four out of five interviewees shared stories and their life

experiences about the importance of connecting to the pain of others in their profession. Table 11 shows the frequency of this mindfulness practice.

Table 11

Connect to the Pain of Others: Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of the mindfulness practice		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Increased empathy and caring for others while assisting them through difficult times.	4	10	0	10

Four participants agreed that it is critical to connect with the pain of others when assisting students and their families at their schools. School social workers shared their experiences and examples of how they connected to the pain of others regularly.

Participant 2 said, “Connecting to the pain of others is just that awareness that allows me to meet the need that is before me.” Empathy and compassion were present as school social workers coped with challenging situations while aiding students and their families to work together and create resilience. Participant 3 said, “When I am doing a crisis response, everything comes down to this connection with the student in front of me and how we are going to walk through this together.” When school social workers offered compassion to struggling children and families, they demonstrated that they cared about their pain and suffering, which helped students and families gain strength and resilience.

Additionally, these four participants agreed that connecting to the pain of others meant putting themselves in the shoes of others to comprehend their challenges while being able to work together and support them professionally. Participant 4 explained,

As in social work, a primary ethic is to be strength-based to avoid drowning in despair. It's depressing, just like the families who have been living in their cars, but these kids come to school every day. That is incredible. There is a fine line between pity and compassion.

Participant 2 shared, "We always say don't go in the well with them because somebody needs to get them out."

Most school social workers emphasized the necessity of demonstrating empathy and compassion in their work to better assist students and parents when facing life challenges. Connecting to the sorrow of others did not imply that they had to rescue the student from their suffering; rather, it meant assisting and supporting a student on their growth journey. This mindfulness practice increased feelings of empathy and caring for others while assisting them through difficult situations.

Mindfulness Practice: Keep Making it Simpler

Keep making it simpler is a mindfulness practice about simplifying life by staying present and focusing on the most crucial task (Lesser, 2019). With a frequency of 9, this mindfulness practice was the third-highest most useful mindfulness practice for school social workers when they experienced challenges while supporting students and their families. Four participants shared stories and their life experiences about keeping things simple. Table 12 shows the frequency of this mindfulness practice.

Four participants shared their experiences with how simplifying things allowed them to be more present and focused while assisting students and their families at their schools. Also noted by these four participants was the significance of keeping things simple for themselves and their students when they practiced mindfulness and dealt with

day-to-day issues. One participant explained, “There are so many things going on in our brain at one time that it can be overwhelming, so just making it simple, like focusing on our breathing, helps to stay in the present.” Participant 2 also discussed how using this practice helped her build a daily mindfulness practice that she uses without the need for any external tools. Participant 2 said, “I do not require lavender, candles, or cushions. I just need my breath.”

Table 12

Keep Making it Simpler: Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of the mindfulness practice		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Simple mindfulness activities aided in remaining present and focused.	4	8	1	9

Making it simpler for school social workers also means making mindfulness accessible to children and other adults. When teaching mindfulness to students, school social workers preferred to keep things simple because they wanted their students to learn about the simplicity of mindfulness and how to use it during challenging times.

Participant 3 shared, “I teach my students a mindfulness practice with structured breathing, and they can use it underneath the bottom of their desk so no one knows what they are doing.” Another participant said, “I want for people to have the experience of feeling deeply connected, and keeping it simpler is making sure people have access to mindfulness whenever and wherever they are.” Participant 1 shared what he tells his students: “You are in this moment, and there is nothing you can do about the past or the future right now, but let’s stay in this moment and make the most of it.” Keep making it simpler is a mindfulness practice that assists school social workers to remain present and

focused as they face multiple challenges when serving students and their families at their schools.

Mindfulness Practice: Connect to Your Pain

Connecting to your pain, according to Lesser (2019), is the knowledge and acceptance of physical and mental distress rather than overlooking it. With a frequency of 6, three participants mentioned this mindfulness practice as the most useful mindfulness practice for school social workers to adopt while assisting students and their families. These participants gave work-life examples of how connecting to their pain helped them deal with work challenges. Table 13 shows the frequency of this mindfulness practice.

Table 13

Connect to Your Pain: Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of the mindfulness practice		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Improved physical and emotional self-awareness to recognize what they brought to their work.	3	6	0	6

Three school social workers discussed how connecting to their pain helped them better serve children by enhancing their self-awareness, which enabled them to recognize their suffering. School social workers gained a clear understanding of what they brought to the table when they assisted others by increasing their physical and emotional awareness using this mindfulness practice. Participant 3 opened up and gave her story about how a family loss forced her to leave her job for a while to deal with her loss because she felt she could not help students the way she wanted to in her emotional condition. Another participant said, “Connecting to my pain helps me learn and

understand my internal landscape . . . I took a deep breath this morning, and then there was tenderness and great grief.” When school social workers connect with their pain, they are authentic with themselves and others. Participant 4 stated, “This morning, I told my coworkers that I was feeling dysregulated. I woke today feeling anxious. That is the most beautiful aspect of this practice.”

These three participants acknowledged that connecting to their pain increased their awareness of their emotions, and by being aware of their feelings, they determined whether something was hindering them from serving their students or families to the best of their abilities. Connecting with your pain is a mindfulness practice that raises awareness, especially of emotional distress. According to three participant narratives, when someone becomes aware of their distress, they can choose the best course of action. Participant 3 concluded,

I ended up leaving my job until I had done my grief work so that I could be present and clear of what I was bringing into the room and knowing if I was bringing into the room was helpful for the people in it.

Connecting to your pain is a mindfulness practice that allows school social workers to be aware of their emotions while truthfully serving students and families by separating their feelings to be fully present when assisting children and their families at their schools.

Mindfulness Practice: Love the Work

Love the work is a practice that entails applying a loving perspective to whatever one does (Lesser, 2019). With a frequency of 4, four participants agreed on the usefulness of this mindfulness practice to help them have a different perspective of their challenge as they supported students and their families. Four school social workers shared stories and

their perspectives on why loving the work was an essential practice in their job. Table 14 shows the frequency of this mindfulness practice.

Table 14

Love the Work: Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of the mindfulness practice		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Aided in bringing a compassionate viewpoint when supporting others, resulting in increased empathy.	4	4	0	4

Four participants believed that enjoying their jobs as school social workers was simply part of their job. Although they thought it was crucial to enjoy their job as they assisted students and their families at their school, these participants were more interested in the aspect of this practice that helped them use a loving perspective when confronted with difficulties when they assisted their students or parents. Participant 4 stated that while supporting students who had lost a classmate to suicide, she found that loving her profession helped her stay focused during challenging moments. Participant 5 commented, “When I want to pull my hair out and wonder if this is still my thing. I consider the student or parent with whom I am having the most difficulty and approach the situation with compassion.” All four participants reported that as a result of loving the work, they felt more empathy and compassion for children and adults going through difficult times. They become less overwhelmed and frustrated when confronted with work challenges as they practiced loving the work. Love the work is a mindfulness practice that assists school social workers to view situations with care and compassion.

Mindfulness Practice: Don't Be an Expert

According to Lesser (2019), don't be an expert is the ability to let go of the conviction that one is accurate and instead display vulnerability. This mindfulness practice was mentioned by two participants, giving it a frequency of 4. Two school social workers discussed their experiences with this mindfulness practice with children and adults, allowing others to acquire greater autonomy and agency. Table 15 shows the frequency of this mindfulness practice.

Table 15

Don't Be an Expert: Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of the mindfulness practice		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Stepping back to allow others to speak up, leads to developing autonomy and agency in others.	2	4	0	4

Don't be an expert was chosen by two participants as the most useful mindfulness practice when supporting students and their families at their schools. Both participants felt that not being an expert was part of being mindful and allowed students to build autonomy and agency. One participant described how she let one of her students be an expert and teach her how to play baseball. This experience made an immense impact on the student. Participant 3 remarked,

It was so transformative for him to be the expert and teacher in the room . . . It is rare for students to be allowed to be experts. Children continually get told what to do by grownups, which disconnects children from themselves. Because of this, many students' self-esteem suffers.

According to two participants, students’ sentiments of autonomy increased as they were allowed to be the experts in the room and speak about their needs and desires. Participant 4 said, “Being mindful means I don’t get so stuck on making it my way . . . I give my students a voice by asking them which mindfulness exercise they prefer.” These two participants stated that one of their aims as school social workers was to assist children in increasing their autonomy and agency because they recognize that they cannot support students in all difficult times. Don’t be an expert is a mindfulness practice that encourages participants to let go of their position of authority to allow their students to shine and speak up.

Mindfulness Practice: Depend on Others

Lesser (2019) described depend on others as giving up the false sense of independence to enable others and create a self-supportive community while working toward the same goal. None of the participants selected this practice when asked what mindfulness practice was the most useful when serving students and their families at their schools. Depend on others had a frequency of 0. Table 16 shows the null frequency of this mindfulness practice.

Table 16

Depend on Others: Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of the mindfulness practice		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
This mindfulness practice had no theme.	0	0	0	0

During the interviews, none of the five participants mentioned depend on others as a mindfulness practice that they felt was the most useful when they faced the

challenges of supporting students and their families. None of the participants shared stories that connected to this mindfulness practice. Surprisingly, this mindfulness practice had a frequency of zero.

Summary

This chapter covered the purpose statement, research questions, and methodology in detail, covering the data-gathering process, population, and sample. A complete presentation and analysis of the data analysis included five interviews and supporting evidence from artifact reviews. Understanding the issues that school social workers confront while serving students and their families at their schools is crucial for many reasons. Even when the challenges are related to the student's outside-school dynamics stressors, school social workers see these as their own because they impact the child's well-being. Inside-school challenges such as not having enough school social workers to support all students and families, schools not being able to serve students and parents efficiently because of language diversity and limited community resources place additional strain on school social workers who are already managing multiple cases.

In the same way that it is crucial to acknowledge the challenges that school social workers face every day, it is also vital to understand how mindfulness practices benefit school social workers when they face these challenges. Based on Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices, school social workers identified the most effective mindfulness practices for them while they assisted students and their families at their schools. The most significant mindfulness practice for school social workers was embodying mindfulness or doing the work. Mindfulness practices help school social workers gain awareness and empathy for themselves, their students, and their surroundings.

Mindfulness practices assist school social workers to stay present and focused on what is essential at the time by strengthening their general awareness. Many of these instances include effectively supporting students during times of crisis.

Six themes emerged from the data regarding the challenges school social workers experience when supporting students and their families at their schools (see Table 17). Additionally, seven themes emerged from the data regarding the mindfulness practices most useful for school social workers when dealing with these challenges (see Table 18). The tables summarize the themes and frequencies for each research question.

The final chapter of the study includes a summary of the study’s significant findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions. The chapter concludes with implications for action, proposals for additional research, and concluding remarks and thoughts.

Table 17

Themes, Participants, Sources, and Frequency, Highest to Lowest Frequency, for Research Question 1

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
There is not enough time to support the intensive needs of all students and families	5	13	5	18
Hard to connect students to outside services	4	13	2	15
Family life stressors are rampant	3	10	4	14
Impacts from outside the school environment	3	9	2	11
Students have emotional dysregulation	3	6	3	9
Language diversity makes it difficult to support an ethnically diverse student population	3	5	3	8

Table 18

Mindfulness Practices, Themes, Participants, Sources, and Frequency, Highest to Lowest Frequency, for Research Question 2

Mindfulness practice	Theme	Participants	Frequency of the mindfulness practice		
			Interviews	Artifacts	Total
Do the work	Mindfulness must be practiced regularly to aid in being focused and present, regulating emotions, and remaining calm under stressful situations.	5	21	5	26
Connect to the pain of others	Increased empathy and caring for others while assisting them through difficult times.	4	10	0	10
Keep making it simpler	Simple mindfulness activities aided in remaining present and focused.	4	8	1	9
Connect to your pain	Improved physical and emotional self-awareness to recognize what they brought to their work.	3	6	0	6
Love the work	Aided in bringing a compassionate viewpoint when supporting others, resulting in increased empathy.	4	4	0	4
Don't be an expert	Stepping back to allow others to speak up, leads to developing autonomy and agency in others.	2	4	0	4
Depend on others	This mindfulness practice had no theme.	0	0	0	0

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes the study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The key and the unexpected findings are addressed, followed by the conclusions drawn from those findings. A discussion regarding the implications of action highlights Lesser's (2019) mindfulness techniques that school social workers might employ to respond to the challenges they confront when serving children and their families at their schools. There are also recommendations for future studies that may add to the depth of understanding about mindfulness practices used by school social workers as they respond to challenges while they support students and parents in their schools. This chapter finishes with the researcher's concluding thoughts and remarks.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the challenges school social workers experience when supporting students and their families in their schools. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to understand how school social workers use mindfulness practices to help them respond to the challenges of working with the students and their families in their school based on Lesser's (2019) mindfulness model. The seven practices in the model include (a) love the work, (b) do the work, (c) don't be an expert, (d) connect to your pain, (e) connect to the pain of others, (f) depend on others, and (g) keep making it simpler.

Research Questions

1. What are the challenges that school social workers experience when supporting students and their families?

2. What are the mindful practices based on Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices that school social workers find most useful when responding to the students and their families challenges of the school that they experience?

Methodology Review

A qualitative multicase study was used to describe the lived experiences and challenges school social workers experience when they support students and their families at their schools. Furthermore, school social workers described the most helpful mindfulness practices from Lesser's (2019) mindfulness framework when dealing with these challenges. The methodology was designed to answer the two research questions of this study.

The researcher interviewed five school social workers who had encountered challenges while supporting students and their families at their schools. Additionally, they practiced mindfulness at their schools for at least a year and employed mindfulness practices in their work. The five qualitative interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded with permission. The researcher safely saved the data gathered for the investigation.

The study's population consisted of school social workers who faced challenges while attempting to serve students and their families and had practiced mindfulness in their current position for at least 1 year. Because it was unfeasible to research all 142,288 school social workers in the United States, a target population of school social workers in California was chosen for this study. The researcher contacted the 2022 president of the California Association of School Social Workers, who reported that determining the number of school social workers in California was difficult because of school districts

hiring school social workers under job titles other than school social workers. The researcher determined the number of 49,310 child, family, and school social workers employed in California using data reports from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics website. A purposeful sampling criterion was established to identify a sample population of school social workers for this study. Purposeful sampling is a selection technique meant to uncover information-rich situations that assist the researcher in understanding topics that are not well understood (Patton, 2015).

As a result, the study's target population was 49,310 child, family, and school social workers in California. Because the multicase research was designed to analyze five cases, the researcher enlisted the help of two school social work experts to find participants who matched the purposeful sample criteria. Each expert provided a list of five school social workers who met the requirements for purposeful sampling. The final five participants were selected from the 10 first contacts based on their availability and willingness to partake in the research.

Major Findings

The research data were collated and categorized into themes to produce key findings for the study of school social workers who had used mindfulness practices when responding to challenges when serving students and their families. Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices were also collated and categorized with a specific theme per practice. The qualitative data comprised five individually virtual in-depth interviews with artifact-reviewed evidentiary support from each participant's district and school site. The researcher determined that data with four or more occurrences with at least three to five participants in the obtained responses were designated a theme within the qualitative

data. When identifying key findings, living experiences, professional challenges, student and family challenges, and mindfulness practices and solutions were considered.

Three of the following key findings highlight the challenges that school social workers experience when supporting students and their families. Following these three findings, one key finding from Lesser's (2019) mindfulness practices that was the most useful for school social workers when supporting children and their families is presented.

Key Finding 1

School social workers have insufficient time to support all the students and families in their schools because of the multiple challenges students and their families experience.

The first major finding of the study is that all school social workers agreed that they were severely short on time to support all the students in their schools because of the multiple challenges students and families experience. Because school social workers try to support the whole child's physical, mental, and emotional well-being, they work with students' school concerns and any challenges the student's family is experiencing.

According to the NASW (n.d.-b), social workers assist families with basic needs, mental health, and any other assistance needed by families to succeed in society. Overall, school social workers play a crucial role in fostering a better school environment by assisting children and their families with life difficulties that affect a child's education.

The truth is that many students deal with life challenges such as guardian unemployment, housing insecurity, and a lack of access to healthcare and mental healthcare (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022). Even when school districts hire school social workers to provide mental health services (Alvarez et al., 2013; Lige, 2021;

Webber, 2018), all participants agreed on the difficulty of connecting students with outside community services such as supporting students and families with access to outside -school mental health and healthcare services and housing or shelter resources. All the participants reported doing SEL classes, one-on-one and group therapy, classroom support, and student mental health emergencies. Participants 2, 3, 4, and 5 additionally mentioned mentoring teachers, training assistants and social work interns, and managing other social workers or interns while supporting students and their families at their schools. With such a demanding profession, it is not rare that the NASW reported that the top work-related stressor for social workers was insufficient time to complete their tasks (Sutlief, 2013).

Four of the five participants worked with low-income families. Most low-income families are immigrants, a pattern that has expanded over the past 50 years, bringing cultural diversity into California schools (Center for Poverty and Inequality Research, n.d.; Goodwin, 2017; Sosa et al., 2021). Because of the increase in multicultural children in schools, bilingual and multilingual school social workers assist monolingual students, giving school social workers an extra duty. When discussing the necessity to support monolingual students while also dealing with another student's situation, Participant 5 stated, "I can't be in two places at once."

All five school social workers noted an increased demand for their services at times of community needs, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. As the demands of students and their families grow, school social workers struggle to find time to help all students and families in need. Participant 4 described how she had to rate her cases daily from acute to intense to balance them and follow up on them. Participant 2 noted that

following up with a parent at 8:00 PM was not unusual. Although the American School Counselors Association recommends 250 students per mental health provider, all the participants working at a public school site mentioned working with a larger population than 250 (C. Jones, 2020). Participant 3 shared that she supported 3,300 students, and Participants 3, 4, and 5 discussed supporting students and families in multiple school sites within the week. Although the demand for school social workers is growing (C. Jones, 2020; Sosa et al., 2021), the majority of school social worker's jobs are part-time (Indeed, n.d.). While trying to help the most at-risk students and families within the limited working hours, school social workers experience the challenge of managing their time in an already demanding profession.

Key Finding 2

The shortage of community-based resources impacts the support school social workers can provide to students and their families.

The second major finding of the study was that school social workers spoke about the lack of community resources, especially regarding mental health and homelessness, and how it impacts their work when supporting students and their families at their schools. As school social workers support students with mental health issues, they find out about family stressors that affect the overall well-being of the child. School social workers serve as a bridge between schools and families (Alvarez et al., 2013; T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Lige, 2021). As families suffer from the consequences of poverty, such as homelessness, food insecurity, and access to mental and healthcare services (T. M. Jones et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2022), school social workers step up to provide community services to students and their families.

Unfortunately, school social workers face the challenge of extensive waiting lists when connecting students and families to community mental health services and shelter access. School social workers discussed the difficulty of linking their students to the appropriate resources because community resources have diminished while the needs of students and their families have increased. Participant 3 stated, “Just not having enough resources impacts how we can support students.” Based on the participants’ real-life experiences supporting students and their families, mental health and housing services were the top subjects for which families required additional assistance, but access was difficult to obtain. Participants 2, 3, and 4 particularly mentioned the long waiting list for mental health and housing community services and how it took extra time to follow up to support the student or family. Participant 3 discussed the impact she noticed on students who did not receive necessary community services and how the students were more at risk a year later. When she related a scenario about a single mother living in her car with two disabled children, Participant 4 expressed the emotional impact of not being able to connect students with community-based services and how it affected the student’s life inside and outside of school. Students and families in need continue to suffer as the work of school social workers is hindered by a lack of community services.

Many similarities exist between the narratives of the participants and the literature data on mental health and homelessness issues. Children’s mental health needs in California have grown by 61%, yet only 35% of these children receive the necessary mental health services (California Children’s Trust, 2019). At the same time, the California Department of Education (2023a) stated that 224,191 students are homeless in the state, maintaining it as the state with the largest homeless population. If mental health

and homelessness concerns are neglected, the impact on children and their families in California will be devastating.

Key Finding 3

As student diversity increases in schools, language gaps pose a problem in adequately supporting students and their families.

The third major key finding of the study was that school social workers stated that the increasing language gaps in their school population are negatively impacting key communication between schools and homes. The truth is that California's public school enrollment is becoming increasingly diverse. Minority populations have expanded dramatically since 1970, making minorities the majority in California (Johnson et al., 2024). The growth in cultural and language diversity in California is apparent in the school population, where one in every five children is an immigrant or the child of an immigrant (Goodwin, 2017). In the 2022-2023 school year, the California Department of Education (2023) reported that there were 1.113 million English learners.

School ethnic diversity and language arose as school social workers discussed the challenges they confronted when serving students and their families. School social workers support students and their families in need, and immigrant families are always vulnerable or impoverished (Goodwin 2017; Sosa et al., 2021). School social workers discussed the language diversity in their schools and how it impacted communication between schools and families. Participant 3 noted that there was still a vast amount of translation to be completed by the school district to help families fully understand the educational system, particularly about mental health. Participant 4 also pointed out a lack of language support, describing how her district failed to address the language needs of

their families and how this became a challenge for school social workers because of a lack of clear communication between schools and homes. Participant 5 said that being a school social worker who could serve monolingual Spanish-speaking students was a challenge because it kept her away from supporting other students who needed mental health support.

All the participants worked at school sites where Hispanic and Asian students were the highest population. Hispanic student population ranged from 12.9% to 69%, and the Asian student population ranged from 1.65 to 56.4%. Filipino student population ranged from 0.5 to 26.4%, African American student population ranged from 0.1 to 16.6%. White student population stayed below 15% at public schools but 68% at a private school. Pacific Islanders, American Indian, and Alaska Native student populations were the lowest percentages in all the participants' school sites. The range of the diverse school population in the participants' school sites reflects the literature on minorities expanding in California. The more diverse the student population at schools, the more school districts must seek to satisfy the needs of students and families in their language to maintain clear communication between the school and home.

Key Finding 4

Practicing mindfulness helps school social workers be more compassionate, present, empathetic, self-aware, and calm while supporting students and their families with life challenges.

The fourth and last major finding of the study was that all school social workers felt it was important to practice mindfulness to be more compassionate, present, empathetic, self-aware, and calm when supporting students and their families. School

social workers are prone to physical, mental, and emotional fatigue because they work in a profession that supports children and adults with mental and emotional well-being daily (Rose & Palattiyil, 2020; Sutlief, 2013). At the same time, mindfulness literature emphasizes the benefits of practicing mindfulness for stress relief, mental health, and emotional well-being. Armstrong (2019), C. G. Brown (2019), and Knoblock (2017) discussed the numerous benefits of using mindfulness practices to promote children's and adults' overall well-being. Bunting (2016) and Lesser (2019) mentioned how practicing mindfulness increased self-awareness and the ability to stay in the present moment. Carrol (2007) discussed how mindfulness enables humans to be more compassionate and empathic by demonstrating understanding and respect and acknowledging the sorrow of others.

Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices are a mindfulness framework that employs secular mindfulness practices to increase self-awareness, relate to self and others, and integrate the body and mind to experience greater acceptance and add a sense of wonder amid chaos. Many of the roles and duties of a school social worker align with Lesser's mindfulness framework. When significant demands emerge, Lesser's mindfulness framework offers mindful practices that address pressing issues and concerns.

All five participants provided stories about employing mindfulness practices to stay calm and present when supporting students and families experiencing difficulties. The participant's stories mirror the statements in the literature and Lesser's (2019) mindfulness framework. All participants commented on how mindfulness boosted their self-awareness, compassion, and empathy for their clients and themselves. Participant 3

described the traumatic experience of losing a loved one and how practicing mindfulness helped her see that she was not in the optimal emotional state to support her students and families. Participant 4 also mentioned how mindfulness strengthened her self-awareness, allowing her to connect with her sorrow and recognize that if her suffering increases, she becomes less helpful when addressing the needs of her students and families. School social workers agreed that practicing mindfulness helped them see circumstances more compassionately. Participant 5 remarked, “When I begin to examine things through the lens of compassion, I shift . . . I notice that I am less frustrated, more open to solutions, and willing to collaborate.”

School districts hire school social workers to support students and families with life challenges. School social workers face challenges while assisting students and their families. When faced with work challenges, mindfulness practices helped school social workers feel less overwhelmed. All participants agreed that practicing mindfulness made a significant difference in fulfilling the needs of students and their families at their schools.

Unexpected Finding

Depend on others was not mentioned as one of the most useful mindfulness practices by any of the participants.

After analyzing the qualitative data for Lesser’s seven mindfulness practices Research Question 2, one unexpected finding emerged from the study. When it comes to helping students and their families, none of the participants mentioned depend on others as one of the most useful mindfulness practices. One participant quickly stated that she needed to improve on this practice but continued to share her experience with other

mindfulness practices that she found were most useful for her to use when supporting students and their families.

Conclusions

The key findings resulted in four conclusions based on the lived experiences of five school social workers who have used mindfulness practices when they experience challenges while supporting students and their families at their schools. The qualitative data and the literature were used as evidence to support the four conclusions.

Conclusion 1

Students and families deal with many life challenges that affect their emotional well-being, making school social workers crucial employees in promoting healthier schools and communities.

It can be concluded that without sufficient school social worker staffing at each school, students and their families will not have the necessary services to respond to the multiple challenges of students and their families. Many of the tasks of a school social worker that assist children's physical, mental, and emotional well-being are addressed in the social work literature. School social workers help students with academic challenges and family issues that affect their well-being inside and outside the school. According to Kranke and Floersch (2009), school social workers serve as a bridge between schools and families, making them vital in schools. Students and families are at risk of not receiving the necessary support and guidance to overcome life stressors and challenges, such as mental health and healthcare and housing programs, to name a few. As a result, school social workers play a crucial role in creating healthy schools and communities. The following evidence supports this conclusion:

- All the participants discussed the various life stressors their students and families experienced and how outside-of-school events affected students' mental and emotional health. Four out of six themes in this study highlighted the challenges school social workers experience while supporting students and their families with family and community stressors, connecting them to community resources, and supporting students with increased emotional dysregulation. These four themes made 49 frequencies, 65% of the total 75 frequencies on all six challenge themes.
- All the participants shared multiple stories of how their workday fluctuated from helping students with emotional dysregulations, supporting students with one-on-one or group therapy, teaching SEL classes, following up with community resources to help students receive healthcare or mental health services, following up with shelter waiting lists, and speaking with parents about the student's academic challenges or disciplinary issues, and any other necessary support that students and families need.
- All participants stated that they had to be flexible with their time while supporting students and their families in crisis. All the participants shared stories about student and family challenges not having a simple solution. All participants agreed that supporting students and families takes time and perseverance.

Conclusion 2

Essential student and family well-being needs will not be satisfied unless considerable increases in resources for schools and their communities are made.

It can be concluded that without community services, particularly in the areas of mental health and homelessness, school social workers will be unable to meet the needs of students and families. According to the literature and the experiences of school social workers, California children are in desperate need of mental health and housing support. According to the California Children's Trust (2019), children's mental health needs have increased by more than 50%, and more than 1,500 children are homeless in San Diego County (San Diego Youth Services, n.d.). Although school social workers provide mental health support, many students require mental health treatments outside of the school setting, such as mental health prescriptions and other therapies. The same is true for housing concerns. Furthermore, students attending a small district school face significant challenges because of insufficient community resources greater than other school districts (American University, 2020; Vincent, 2018). Because poverty is a critical issue affecting student's current and future life, social workers must connect to community-based services when serving students and families impacted by the effects of poverty issues (Florida State University, 2019). The following evidence supports this conclusion:

- All participants provided stories about how a shortage of community-based services affects their work when supporting students and families dealing with much deeper stressors that require outside-of-school assistance. Connecting students to community services was the second highest challenge, with a frequency of 15.
- All the participants shared about the long waiting lists for mental health and shelter access, which hindered their work because they could not move forward to helping other students because of the follow up they had to do on the same

community service for the same student. Participant 2 mentioned how important it was for her to continue to support her students until they all received access to the needed resources. Unfortunately, with fewer community resources and more at-risk student cases, school social workers had to rebalance their cases daily to work on the most urgent cases. Participant 3 mentioned how every day was a triage while trying to support her students and dealing with long waiting lists for community-based services.

Conclusion 3

School districts must adapt to support a changing diverse school population.

It can be concluded that school districts and schools must adapt to the changing school diversity, culture, and language to properly serve the needs of students and their families. As California's school population diversity increases, communication gaps between school and home grow because of a lack of awareness of linguistic and cultural differences. When it comes to immigrant families, students and their families face the challenge of acquiring a new language and cultural practices. Because of emotional trauma and poverty-related concerns, many school social workers interact with immigrant families (Sosa et al., 2021). While school social workers support immigrant students and their families, they develop trusting relationships (Leyba, 2010; Pyles et al., 2021; Sosa et al., 2021), but being unable to communicate with parents because of a language barrier or failing to understand family dynamics because of cultural differences can hurt developing relationships with immigrant students and families.

Additionally, school social workers who can help these students and families are splitting their time between English learners and English-speaking students even though they

already face challenges with a shortage of time. A frequency of 19 between the language diversity and family dynamics themes supports this conclusion. The following evidence also supports this conclusion:

- Four participants mentioned how family dynamics played a huge role in the students' response to learning positive life habits and behaviors when they faced challenges. Participant 1 described how students returned to their home setting where family members most likely owing to cultural traditions, did not respond to obstacles in the same way he trained his students to respond. Participant 1 asked, "If family members model a different way to handle their problems, why would the child listen to us more than their parents and the people they love?"
- School social workers shared stories about how they understood the importance of recognizing that their students came from different countries with different cultures and languages. At the same time, they shared stories about how the school district was falling behind in supporting these students and families. For example, school districts did not have enough translation services or lacked bilingual school social workers who could fully understand the language and culture of all their students and their families. Bilingual or multilingual school social workers had to divide their already short time supporting English learners and English-speaking students.

Conclusion 4

School social workers who practice mindfulness better serve students and their families who experience difficulties in life.

It can be concluded that school social workers who practice the key tenets of mindfulness will be more compassionate, present, empathetic, self-aware, and calm when supporting students and their families. In a profession that requires social workers to demonstrate empathy for their clients (Pyles et al., 2021), practicing mindfulness is more than practicing relaxation techniques (Lesser, 2019). Lesser (2019) defined practicing mindfulness as a way of being. Thich Nhat Hanh described mindfulness as accepting everything without judgment in the present moment (Jackson, 2020). According to Bunting (2016) and Burton (2018), practicing mindfulness helps people maintain an open-hearted awareness, which aids in better listening and helping others in the best way possible. According to Carrol (2007), those who learn to be open and vulnerable can view life situations with less bias.

Compared to the participants' narratives, the literature supported how school social workers perceived and experienced mindfulness. All the participants provided stories of how regularly practicing mindfulness helped them to become more aware of themselves and others and to keep calm and assist others in staying calm during stressful moments. Participant 3 described how mindfulness assisted her in becoming aware of her physical, mental, and emotional state before coping with a crisis. Taking three deep breaths before entering a room helped Participant 3 stay grounded and also gave a sense of peace to any circumstance, making others feel calm and cared for. Participant 5 also mentioned how practicing mindfulness has made her feel ready and prepared to handle any situation with compassion. The following evidence supports this conclusion:

- The five top mindfulness practices from Lesser's (2019) mindfulness framework that school social workers mentioned to be the most useful when supporting

students and their families shared themes of being present and focused, increasing empathy and caring, and improving self-awareness. The combination of these themes made a frequency of 55, 93% of the total 59 frequencies on all seven mindfulness practice themes. All the participants shared personal stories about how practicing mindfulness increased their self-awareness, presence, tranquility, compassion, and empathy.

- All the participants agreed that it was necessary to practice mindfulness daily to build a natural reflex that helped them stay calm and open to solutions. Additionally, it helped them see the students' and families' challenges through a lens of care and compassion.

Implications for Action

Implication for Action 1

School districts must employ at least one full-time social worker per school site.

This study's data and literature discussed how school social workers serve students in and out of school, resulting in healthier school and community environments. Furthermore, these data revealed the challenges of school social workers coping with severely short time while serving students and their families. Based on the conclusion that schools today do not have sufficient school social workers to support all the students and families confronting multiple challenges, the goal is that school districts must employ at least one full-time social worker per school site who can serve one school population rather than multiple school sites per week. To accomplish this, the following actions are recommended:

- School administrators and school board members need to become more educated

on the crucial role that school social workers provide in schools. School social work associations such as the School Social Work Association of America and the California Association of School Social Workers should promote educational events by which school administrators become aware of the influential work school social workers do when it comes to promoting a healthier school environment that aligns to the eight state priorities in the local control and accountability plan.

- Schools should use their existing supplemental funds from state and federal governments to employ at least one full-time school social worker. School social workers mainly work with low-income populations (Allen-Meares, 1994), which means schools with Title 1 and state supplemental funds should use existing funds to hire at least one full-time school social worker per school site. According to Openshaw (2008), one of the fundamental roles of school social workers is to build relationships. Working at one school site, as opposed to multiple schools, will help school social workers understand the needs of the school population and create stronger relationships with students and their families, school staff, and community resources.
- Universities must begin to plan for a substantially greater number of school social workers to fulfill the increased demands in this field. Universities can expand social work programs, particularly in school social work. Universities can also provide or promote existing financing programs for students interested in school social work. Finally, universities must collaborate with school districts to give students the opportunities to obtain practical experience while working at a school

site.

Implication for Action 2

Community service funds must be coordinated with school social workers at each school.

The data and literature from this study explored how school social workers face challenges when connecting students and their families with community resources, particularly those related to mental health and housing support services. Based on the conclusion that school social workers will be unable to meet the needs of students and families without community resources, particularly in mental health and homelessness, it is recommended that school community service funds be coordinated with school social workers at each school site. Schools receive funds for community service to improve children's educational outcomes. Part of the community service funds help form relationships with community organizations and local governments to provide services and resources that benefit students' well-being (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). School social workers must help coordinate community service funds at their schools because they interact directly with at-risk students and families who require community-based services. To accomplish this, the following actions are recommended:

- School social workers must conduct an assessment to identify the gaps in services and resources. Based on the needs identified, school social workers should lead the coordination of school-community partnerships and maintain partnerships with community agencies. Additionally, community agencies must share the school's goals around the health and wellness of students.
- Existing community service funds should assist in providing the resources the

school population needs. School social workers, for example, can use community service funds to promote mental health services to students and families. The funding can also assist to organize community outreach projects like food drives or meeting other community needs. Finally, community service funds can help encourage parent involvement by providing volunteer opportunities or organizing parent-teacher conferences to keep parents informed about their child's education. School social workers can best help coordinate community service funds to support the school's student population and their families because they are the most knowledgeable about family challenges within their communities.

- Each school should appoint a social worker to oversee the coordination of school-community collaborations. This action will help coordinate existing community services with incoming school social workers and keep an updated list of community resources available to support students and their families.

Implication for Action 3

School districts must hire school social workers and translation services of varied ethnicities that can support the school's cultural and linguistic diversity.

The data and literature of this study shared that the school student population in California is increasingly diverse. Based on the conclusion that school districts must adapt to the changing diverse school population, school districts must hire school social workers of varied ethnicities who can support the school's cultural and linguistic diversity. Additionally, school districts must provide the necessary translation services as needed to build better communication between school and home. To accomplish this, the following actions are recommended:

- Based on the student demographic, school districts must identify the linguistic needs of their school sites. Once the prevalent languages are identified, school districts must align their recruitment of school social workers to meet the variety of cultural and linguistic needs in their schools. Hiring school social workers who are familiar with the student population's culture and languages will aid in the creation of faster, more trustworthy relationships between school social workers and family members, resulting in improved communication between school and home.
- School districts must provide translation services, such as official school documentation, in the preferred language of all student populations. This action will help alleviate the extra support from school social workers who are being used to support monolingual students and families. Families will be able to obtain vital educational material in their language, resulting in improved communication between school and home.

Implication for Action 4

Include mindfulness training in the university's curriculum for school social workers.

The data and literature of this study shared that school social workers deal with daily challenges while supporting students and their families in stressful situations. Additionally, it shared information on the usefulness of practicing mindfulness to create an overall sense of well-being. Based on the conclusion that regularly practicing mindfulness increases compassion, self-awareness, empathy, and calmness, school social

workers must learn to use mindfulness practices for themselves and when supporting others. To accomplish this, the following actions are recommended:

- Every university must provide a mindfulness curriculum as part of their pupil personnel services credential for social work students interested in becoming school social workers, starting with mindfulness training for social work students to learn and practice mindfulness for themselves. Second, the program must include classes that teach social work students how to teach mindfulness to children and adults. Finally, the curriculum must incorporate witnessing a mindfulness specialist practicing mindfulness with children or adults at a school site during school hours.
- Universities must establish a mindfulness summer program to instruct current school social workers in the use of mindfulness for themselves and at work. The university can collaborate with school districts that provide summer school for school social workers to get experience with mindfulness in the educational setting.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study presented findings and conclusions to the literature on the challenges that school social workers experience when supporting students and their families in their schools. Furthermore, it contributed findings and conclusions to the literature on the most useful mindfulness practices for school social workers when confronted with such challenges. Although this study was a glimpse of these school social workers' lived experiences, it has the potential to inspire future research into the complexities of the challenges school social workers experience and the mindfulness practices that can assist

them to face these challenges. The following are recommendations for future research based on the findings of this study:

- It is recommended to use a mixed method, including a survey about school social workers' challenges and a rating of the usefulness of Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices to add strength and information to the research findings and conclusions.
- It is recommended to conduct a multicase study that focuses on the challenges faced by school social workers while helping a specific ethnic student population and adopting mindfulness practices to support children and their families. These new data will assist school systems and social workers in better serving California's culturally diverse student and family population.
- It is recommended that future studies focusing on school social workers only working at elementary, middle, or high schools be researched to understand the needs of those grade students and their families and what mindfulness practices are most useful for school social workers when supporting these students and families.
- It is recommended to replicate this study on school social workers and Lesser's seven mindfulness practices to give further strength and information to the findings and conclusions of this study because this was a multicase study of five participants.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

This study provided a meaningful, challenging, relevant, and enlightening learning experience. The dissertation process has allowed me to investigate the increasing

topic of mindfulness in education and the challenges that school social workers experience while supporting students and their families in their schools. Additionally, it highlighted the most useful mindfulness practices for school social workers when they experience these challenges. The time, dedication, and commitment were well worth the gains in deep understanding, connecting with the work of school social workers, and the opportunity to think critically at a sophisticated level. Sincere gratitude goes out to everyone who helped make this research endeavor a reality, beginning with the school social workers who agreed to participate in this research, my teachers, mentor, committee members, and everyone who believed in the value of this study.

As a result of this dissertation journey, I have recognized that finishing this study is not the end; it is an opportunity to continue to engage with and learn more about mindfulness in education. My desire to serve as an inspirational, mindful, and solution-seeking leader with extensive expertise in holistic living and a passion for mindfulness and education is what motivates me. My daily inspiration comes from my mission to introduce more kindness into the school system. This study is a significant milestone in my educational journey because it reflects my life passion, inspires me to be a mindful leader, and is a respectful way to highlight the work of school social workers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Synthesis Matrix

References/ Resources	COVID AND SCHOOL S	FAMILY CHALLE NGES	SOCIAL WORK	SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER S	Mindful ness Research	Mindful ness in Education
	-Mental health in education -COVID and schools -Family needs -Family challenges -Poverty	-Family needs -Family challenges -Poverty -Mental health -Substance abuse	-Social work and mindfulness -Social worker’s burnout -Social workers and stress	-School social worker role, functions, and challenges -Mental health and social work services -Social work in education	- Mindfulness seminal work - Mindfulness practices - Mindfulness and stress reduction -Stress and Children - Mindfulness benefits	- Mindfulness for leaders - Mindfulness in education - Mindfulness and mental health -Stress managemen t and mindfulness
Albrecht (2019)		x			x	x
Allen-Meares (1994)		x	x	x		
Alvarez et al. (2013)		x	x	x		
Armstrong (2019)		x			x	x
Birnle et al. (2010)		x			x	
Blundo & Savage (2020)		x			x	x
Brandsma (2017)					x	x
Brown (2019)					x	x
Chen & Kuo (2020)		x			x	x

Cook-Cottone (2017)					X	X
Etty-Leal (2021)		X			X	X
George (2012)					X	X
Goodman & Greenland (2009)					X	X
Guenther et al. (2021)		X			X	X
Jackson (2020)		X			X	
Jalón et al. (2022)	X	X			X	
Jones et al. (2021)	X	X	X	X		
Kaoun (2019)					X	X
Katz (2019)		X			X	
Khalatbari (2016)		X			X	
Kim Dong (2022)		X			X	X
Kinsella et al. (2020)			X		X	
Knoblock (2017)					X	X
Kranke & Floersch (2009)		X		X		
Lesser (2019)		X			X	X
Leyba (2010)		X		X		
Lige (2021)		X	X	X		
Maurer (2019)		X			X	

Openshaw (2008)		x	x	x		x
Pyles et al. (2021)			x		x	
Rose & Palattiyil (2020)			x		x	
Singla (2011)					x	x
Stahl & Goldstein (2010)		x			x	
Stierhoff (2018)		x			x	
Sutlief (2013)		x	x		x	
Watson et al. (2022)	x	x	x		x	
Weare & Happert (2019)		x			x	x
Webber (2018)		x		x	x	
Wells (2015)					x	x
Williams & Kabat-Zinn (2013)		x			x	

Appendix B

Interview Protocol and Questions

Hi, my name is Catalina Andrade, and I am a doctoral candidate at UMass Global in the area of Organizational Leadership.

First and foremost, I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your answers will help fill a gap in research about understanding the most useful mindfulness practice, based on Lesser's (2019) mindfulness framework, that can help school social workers better support students and their families.

I am conducting a study to describe the challenges school social workers experience when supporting students and their families in their schools. Additionally, the purpose of this study will be to understand how school social workers use Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices to help them respond to the challenges of working with students and their families.

I am conducting five interviews with school social workers like yourself. The information you provide, together with historical and archival data, ought to provide an understandable overview of the most helpful Lesser's mindfulness practices for school social workers to apply when assisting students and families.

I will be reading most of what I say. The reason for this is to guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all participating school social workers will be conducted in the most similar manner possible.

Informed Consent (required for Dissertation Research)

I will like to remind you that any information obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via electronic mail to check that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

You received the Informed Consent and UMass Global Bill of Rights in an email and responded with your approval to participate in the interview. Before we start, do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview, you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether. However, I

will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent to ease our discussion and accuracy.

Prior to this interview, you received information concerning the purpose of the research, a copy of the interview questions, a copy of the definitions of Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices, the UMass Global's Participant's Bill of Rights, and the Informed Consent form. After reviewing the protocols, you were offered an opportunity to ask questions concerning the research and the consent process. At that time, you provided verbal consent to be a participant in the interview. For purposes of verifying your consent, would you again provide a verbal yes as to your consent that will be included in the recording of this interview? Thank you.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Let us get started then, and thank you again for your time.

Here is a list of Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices and their definitions.

Lesser's Seven Mindfulness Practices

- 1. Love the work:** Love the work entails applying a loving perspective to whatever one does.
- 2. Do the work:** Doing the work involves regularly practicing mindfulness to embody your values and objectives and fostering awareness while helping others.
- 3. Don't be an expert:** Don't be an expert is the ability to let go of the conviction that one is correct and instead demonstrate vulnerability.
- 4. Connect to your pain:** Connecting to your pain means being aware of and accepting physical and emotional distress rather than avoiding it.
- 5. Connect to the pain of others:** Connecting to the pain of others is the ability to empathize with others while encouraging personal development and inner strength in others.
- 6. Depend on others:** Depending on others entails giving up a false sense of independence to enable others and create a self-supportive community while working toward the same objective.
- 7. Keep making it simpler:** Making it simpler is simplifying life by remaining present and focusing on the essential task at hand.

Interview Questions

School Social Worker's Challenges

1. What challenges do you, as a school social worker, experience when supporting students and their families at your school?

Possible questions that can be added for clarification:

- a. Could you tell me more about that challenge?
- b. Can you explain how this challenge impacts your ability to support students and their families?

Mindfulness

2. Could you tell me about the mindfulness training you did?

Possible questions that can be added for clarification:

- a. How much time did it take?
- b. Do you continue to train in mindfulness?
- c. Did you witness an expert using mindfulness practices at a school site, or did you just hear or read about it?

3. What curriculum do you use when working with students, and does it contain mindfulness practices, or do you add them on your own?

Possible questions that can be added for clarification:

a. Is the curriculum you employ used throughout the district or only at your school?

4. Based on Lesser's seven mindfulness practices, which are the most useful for you when responding to the students and their challenges? And Why?

Possible questions that can be added for clarification:

- a. What is the outcome of using this mindfulness practice?
 - b. Do you use this mindfulness practice as a preventative or intervention approach while working with students?
5. Have you had parents decline programs because they believe mindfulness is inappropriate due to religious or cultural beliefs?
6. How do other school personnel react to the usage of mindfulness practices at your school?
7. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the challenges that you experience when supporting students and their families or how you utilize mindfulness at work that I did not ask?

Thank you very much for your time. If you like, when the results of my research are known, I will send you a copy of my findings.

APPENDIX C

Participation Request Letter

THE CONTRIBUTION OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES CHALLENGES AMONG SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS: A QUALITATIVE MULTI-CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS IN CALIFORNIA.

Date:

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a multi-case study about school social workers and the most useful mindfulness practices for supporting students and their families. The main investigator of this study is Catalina Andrade, Doctoral Candidate in University of Massachusetts Global Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are a school social worker in California, who met the criteria for this study because of your known expertise as a school social worker who utilizes mindfulness practices.

Five school social workers from California will participate in this study through an electronic interview. Participation in the interview should require about one hour of your time which is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study is to discover and describe the challenges school social workers experience when supporting students and their families at their school. Additionally, the purpose of this study is to understand how school social workers use mindfulness practices to help them respond to the challenges of working with the students and their families based on the seven mindfulness practices from Lesser's (2019) framework.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, you will be sent an email link to meet via Zoom. A virtual interview (via Zoom) will be scheduled that will last approximately one hour. For the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as a school social worker regarding the use of Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices while you respond to the challenges of working with students and their families in your school. The interview session will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to arrange time for the interview questions, so for that purpose, enough time will be given to you to schedule the interview according to your availability.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation, but your feedback could help identify the challenges school social workers experience while supporting students and their families in their school and the most useful mindfulness practices while responding to these challenges. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

You are encouraged to ask questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me by email at XXXXXXXX@mail.umassglobal.edu. You can also contact Dr. Tim McCarty, dissertation chair by email at XXXXXXXX@umassglobal.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-9800.

Respectfully,

Catalina Andrade

Catalina Andrade
Doctoral Candidate, UMass Global

Appendix D

Informed Consent

INFORMATION ABOUT: The Contribution of Mindfulness Practices to Supporting Children and Their Families Challenges Among School Social Workers: A Qualitative Multi-Case Study of School Social Workers in California

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Catalina Andrade, Doctoral Candidate

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Catalina Andrade, a doctoral candidate from the Ed.D. program in Organizational Leadership at the University of Massachusetts, Global. The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to describe the challenges school social workers experience when supporting students and their families in their schools. Additionally, the purpose of this study will be to understand how school social workers use mindfulness practices to help them respond to the challenges of working with the students and their families in their school based on Lesser's mindfulness model (2019): Love the work, Do the work, Don't be an expert, Connect to your pain, Connect to the pain of others, Depend on others and Keep making it simpler.

This study will add to the body of knowledge about describing the challenges that school social workers confront while assisting students and their families and the most useful mindfulness practices that can assist them when dealing with these challenges. This will support school social worker associations and social work education organizations in planning and facilitating effective professional learning that results in school social workers improving their practice which will ultimately result in increasing student and their family's support.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in an individual interview. The interview will last 45-60 minutes and will be conducted virtually via Zoom. Completion of the individual interview will take place the last week of September through October, 2023.

I understand that:

- a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.
- b) I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study, all recordings will be destroyed. All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.
- c) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding the challenges school social workers confront while assisting students and their families and the most useful mindfulness practices that can assist them when dealing with these challenges. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights into the challenges school social workers experience when working with students and their families and the most useful mindfulness practices that can assist them with these challenges. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.
- d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Catalina Andrade at XXXXXXXXX@mail.umassglobal.edu or by phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX; or Dr. Timothy McCarty, Advisor, at XXXXXXXX@umassglobal.edu.
- e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.
- f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of data is to be changed, I will be informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of

Academic Affairs, UMass Global, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618,
Telephone (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s
Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the
procedure(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix E

Audio Recording Release & Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: The Contribution of Mindfulness Practices to Supporting Children and Their Families Challenges Among School Social Workers: A Qualitative Multi-Case Study of School Social Workers in California

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Catalina Andrade, Doctoral Candidate

RELEASE: I understand that as part of this study, I am participating in an interview which will be audio recorded as a digital file, per the granting of my permission.

I do not have to agree to have the interview audio recorded. In the event that I do agree to have myself audio recorded, the sole purpose will be to support data collection as part of this study.

The digital audio recording will only be used for this research. Only the researcher and the professional transcriptionist will have access to the audio file. The digital audio file will be destroyed after three years. The written transcription of the audio file will be stored in a locked file drawer and destroyed three years following completion of this study.

I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed I will be so informed and my consent obtained.

I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs, UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618 Telephone (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research participant's Bill of Rights.

CONSENT: I hereby give my permission to Catalina Andrade to use audio recorded material taken of me during the interview. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for audio recording of me to be used in this research study.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F

Research Participant's Bill of Rights



UMASS GLOBAL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Appendix G

Alignment Table

Research Study Title

The Contribution of Mindfulness Practices to Supporting Children and Their Families Challenges Among School Social Workers: A Qualitative Multi-Case Study of School Social Workers in California

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the challenges school social workers experience when supporting students and their families in their schools. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to understand how school social workers use mindfulness practices to help them respond to the challenges of working with the students and their families in their school based on Lesser's (2019) mindfulness model. The seven practices in the model include (a) love the work, (b) do the work, (c) don't be an expert, (d) connect to your pain, (e) connect to the pain of others, (f) depend on others, and (g) keep making it simpler.

Research Questions

1. What are the challenges that school social workers experience when supporting students and their families?
2. What are the mindful practices based on Lesser's (2019) seven mindfulness practices that school social workers find most useful when responding to the students and their families challenges of the school that they experience?

	Research Questions	Interview Questions	Follow-up Questions for Clarification	Artifacts
School Social Worker's Challenges	1. What are the challenges that school social workers experience when supporting students and their families?	1. What are the challenges that you, as a school social worker, experience when supporting students and their families at your school?	a. Could you tell me more about that challenge? b. Can you explain how this challenge impacts your ability to support students and their families?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) • Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) • School Site Council (SSC) meeting minutes
Mindfulness	2. What are the mindful practices based on Lesser's seven mindfulness practices that are most useful: Love the work, Do the work, Don't be an expert, Connect to your pain, Connect to the pain of others, Depend on others, and Keep making it simpler, that school social workers use when responding to the students	2. Could you tell me about the mindfulness training you did?	a. How much time did it take? b. Do you continue to train in mindfulness? c. Did you witness an expert using mindfulness practices at a school site, or did you just hear or read about it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindfulness certificate of completion or artifact related to mindfulness training.

	and their families challenges of the school that they experience?			
		3. What curriculum do you use when working with students, and does it contain mindfulness practices, or do you add them on your own?	a. Is the curriculum you employ used throughout the district or only at your school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum or framework used by school social worker.
Lesser's Seven Mindfulness Practices	2. What are the mindful practices based on Lesser's seven mindfulness practices that are most useful: Love the work, Do the work, Don't be an expert, Connect to your pain, Connect to the pain of others, Depend on others, and Keep making it simpler, that school social workers use when responding to the students and their families challenges of the school that they experience?	4. Based on Lesser's seven mindfulness practices, which are the most useful for you when responding to the students and their challenges? And Why?	a. What is the outcome of using this mindfulness practice? b. Do you use this mindfulness practice as a preventative or intervention approach while working with students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School's website • Pictures • Workshops attended and offered • School projects or events • School social media content

Love the work	Operational Definition: Love the work entails applying a loving perspective to whatever one does.			
Do the work	Operational Definition: Doing the work involves regularly practicing mindfulness to embody your values and objectives and fostering awareness while helping others.			
Don't be an expert	Operational Definition: Don't be an expert is the ability to let go of the conviction that one is correct and instead demonstrate vulnerability.			
Connect to your pain	Operational Definition: Connecting to your pain means being aware of and accepting physical and			

	emotional distress rather than avoiding it.			
Connect to the pain of others	Operational Definition: Connecting to the pain of others is the ability to empathize with others while encouraging personal development and inner strength in others.			
Depend on others	Operational Definition: Depending on others entails giving up a false sense of independence to enable others and create a self-supportive community while working toward the same objective.			
Keep making it simpler	Operational Definition: Making it simpler is simplifying life by remaining present and focusing on			

	the essential task at hand.			
		5. Have you had parents decline programs because they believe mindfulness is inappropriate due to religious or cultural beliefs?		
		6. How do other school personnel react to the usage of mindfulness practices at your school?		
		7. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the challenges that you experience when supporting students and their families or how you utilize mindfulness at work that I did not ask?		

Appendix H

Field Test Interviewee Feedback Questions

While conducting the interview, the interviewer should take notes of their clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question. After you complete the interview ask your field test interviewee the following clarifying questions. **Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation.** Either script or record their feedback so you can compare with the other two members of your team to develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a school social worker when working with students and their families at your school?
2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok? Was the pace okay?
3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked?
4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?
5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview... (I'm pretty new at this)?

Appendix I



Interview Feedback Reflection Questions for Both the Interviewer and the Observer

Conducting interviews is a learned skill and research experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. Complete the form independently from each other, then discuss your responses. Sharing your thoughts will provide valuable insight into improving the interview process.

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate? Did the respondents have ample opportunities to respond to questions?
2. Were the questions clear or were there places where the interviewees were unclear?
3. Were there any words or terms used during the interview that were unclear or confusing to the interviewees?
4. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous? For the observer: How did the interviewer appear during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
5. Did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared? For the observer: From your observation did the interviewer appear prepared to conduct the interview?
6. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
7. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
8. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
9. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?
10. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
11. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

Appendix J

CITI Clearance “Protecting Human Research Participants” Course Certification



Completion Date 20-May-2022
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 49006693

This is to certify that:

Catalina Andrade


Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Subjects Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Massachusetts Global

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.



Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w8e5af6f8-44f5-4d46-849c-13df6e3f0f8d-49006693