Crisis Intervention for Child Protective Services Workers

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Abstract
Crisis in the field of child welfare is ubiquitous. A qualitative inquiry into the work of child protective services (CPS) workers was conducted to explore their perceptions and experiences of crisis and crisis intervention, along with the emotional effects their work has on them. The results of that inquiry were extensive and have been reported by us in other publications. This paper focuses on the study’s finding that workers in the field perceived crisis as deeply interwoven into the fabric of their everyday CPS work. Yet, in spite of this ever-present nature of crisis, none of the workers reported an awareness of crisis intervention theory and purposeful use of crisis intervention skills. This paper reviews our findings on CPS’s experience of crisis and then presents a model of crisis intervention that can be useful in child protective services work. The model is illustrated through a case application. This crisis intervention framework should have applicability across various international contexts since the nature of assisting abused children and the psychological sequelae of abuse are universal. The use of an application that addresses the issues CPS workers experience may help to mitigate much of the well-documented stress of the work and improve outcomes for the children served.

Introduction
The abuse of children is a global problem (Van Soest, 1997) which is addressed by many countries’ child welfare and protection systems. Systems for the protection of children are international phenomena with commonalities and differences (Lewis, et al., 2004; Guidi, 2014; Benbenishty, et al., 2015). Workers in all these systems deal with the traumatic circumstance of child maltreatment while often facing critical public controversy and scrutiny (Ayre, 2001). Workers in the field of child welfare and child protection should fully understand and respond skillfully to the crises and tremendous trauma endured by the children and families they serve and seek to protect. Crisis and trauma are omnipresent in the field of child welfare, but research is scant. This paper will briefly describe results of the first author’s research on the experience of child protective services (CPS) workers regarding their perceptions of crisis and crisis intervention, and then propose a crisis intervention model that may be helpful to international workers in child welfare practice. A case example will illustrate the use of the model in practice.

Crisis in the Child Welfare Field
The nature of crisis in child welfare work was described in 1994 by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) in a publication that was updated in 2003. The earlier publication notes the two types of crises that workers in the field encounter: acute and chronic (USDHHS, 1994). Acute crisis refers to sudden events that affect generally well-functioning families, while chronic crisis refers to a pattern of persistent problems endured by families with overall poor psychosocial functioning. Zell (2006) found that 34% of child welfare caseworkers studied reported dealing with crises on a daily basis. In addition to having to confront emergent situations, the work of child welfare and protective service workers is well documented to be