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Risks and Supportive Factors of Burnout among School Social Workers in Early Childhood Special Education Setting

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the risk and supportive factors of burnout among school social workers in the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) setting. Data was collected through semi-structured standardized interviews with 7 licensed school social workers currently working in this area. Theme coding methods were used to inductively analyze codes in the data and to find common themes from the interviews. Themes that emerged were separated into six categories: personal, organizational, and job structural risks factors, and personal, organizational, and job structural supportive factors. The majority of the findings of this study were consistent with previous research. Other themes that were not consistent with previous research were found. Those themes included the importance of having a flexible work style, the impact of diminishing resources for families, and organizational support related to maintaining licensure requirements. Implications for this study suggest ideas for future research in this area, with hopes to enhance school social work education, research, and training.

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Introduction

Many professionals in the social work field experience feelings of overwhelming stress due to field related challenges (NASW, 2008). For social workers, this level of stress often makes it hard to replenish one's own energy and can result in emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion among social workers refers to the chronic stress that people experience in the helping profession. High levels of this type of exhaustion often results in mental confusion, psychosocial and physical distress and therefore, burnout (NASW, 2004). Work-related stress has profound effects on social worker's physical and emotional health. An NASW survey found that social workers in the following areas reported feelings of fatigue, psychological problems and sleep disorders. Social workers who worked in the mental health areas reported 65% work-related stress, in child welfare 70% work related stress and 65% of work related stress in family focused fields (Arrington, 2008).

According to Maslach (2005) the definition of burnout is when an individual develops a strong negative, hostile, cynical and dehumanized response to their job. Burnout also relates to job satisfaction and the desire to leave one's profession. Maslach (2005) found that individuals who are more satisfied with their jobs have lower levels of burnout. Burnout is a condition that occurs gradually over time and under high stress levels. Individuals experiencing burnout lack the motivation to try to make things better, and thus experience feeling helpless and detached. These feelings are often accompanied by feeling powerless to change and a tendency to stop caring (Hill, 2011). The most widely accepted construct of burnout inventory is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). This model measures three separate components of burnout: emotional exhaustion

(excessive work demands characterized by overwhelming feelings of emotional strain), depersonalization (a tendency to become callous and impersonal when relating to others), and reduced personal accomplishment (feelings of incompetence and a sense that one's efforts are not accomplishing desired outcomes) (Maslach, 2001).

It has been estimated that the ratio of school social workers to students throughout the United States is approximately 1,300 to one (Mandlawitz, 2000). One contributing factor is that retaining school social work professionals is challenging. The importance of job satisfaction among social workers in general impacts turnover rates, absenteeism, client outcomes and recruitment of competent individuals to the field (Jayaratne & Chess, 1984).

School Social Worker roles in early childhood education systems involve implementing interventions at the family, child care, school, and address difficulties as children enter school (Raver, 2003). Early intervention services are typically provided to children from birth to age five who are identified as having a developmental disabilities or being at significant risk for developmental, social, or emotional problems (Azzi-Lessing, 2010).

Home-based and school-based intervention settings are the two primary settings in which school social workers play key roles in providing support to families with children in early education program and to teachers. Home based programs focus on addressing parenting skills as a key factor in promoting children's positive mental health. A number of home-based interventions have been designed to reduce children's risk for emotional difficulties by helping parents increase their positive interactions with their children through intensive interventions such as home visiting, telephone support, and

parenting skills (Raver, 2003). Interventions in school based settings focus on a range of programs designed to lower the risk of children's development of serious problems when their families are struggling with multiple, chronic stressors such as high risk of maltreatment, mental illness, substance abuse and domestic violence. In these instances, School Social Workers are often paired with psychologists and teachers in local districts to provide child and family centered programs, training to educational teachers, and mental health consultation for the students (Raver, 2003).

The role of School Social Workers has typically been consultative in providing support and guidance to teachers and other classroom staff members. Teachers have indicated that without access to classroom based mental health consultation they are nearly twice as likely to report expelling a preschooler (Azzi-Lessing, 2010). Social workers in early education settings help parents to learn behavior management skills, addressing a range of parenting concerns and helping families to access additional resources (Azzi-Lessing, 2010). Social work professionals engage in unique ways to address and manage symptoms of burnout among other helping professionals. Helping professionals often experience feelings of overwhelming stress due to field related challenges (NASW, 2008). This level of stress may make it difficult to replenish one's own energy and can result in compassion fatigue as a primary symptom of burnout (NASW, 2004).

These findings highlight the importance of gaining a deeper understanding of the risks and supportive factors of burnout among school social workers. These research questions may be especially important among professionals and future professionals in the social service fields, such as School Social Work. Understanding the impact of

chronic levels of levels of stress and how these symptoms, if unaddressed, may result in greater psychosocial and physical distress is essential. Developing better preventative programs can help new school social workers be attuned to symptoms and better equipped to prevent burnout. The purpose of this research is to examine the risks and supportive factors of burnout among School Social Workers in the early childhood education setting (ECSE). The research questions will be addressed through qualitative interviews with ECSE School Social Workers.

The present qualitative research examines different aspects of burnout in School Social Workers who are working in the early childhood education setting. Interviews conducted with school social workers in ECSE program settings in two urban School districts provided information about their experiences to inform both risks and supportive factors of burnout.

Literature Review

This literature review examines elements of burnout within the job structure in both home-based and school-based settings in which ECSE School Social Workers function. Organizational characteristics of burnout, personal characteristics, and supportive factors that may reduce or prevent burnout are also discussed.

Job Structure

Research has analyzed specific factors related to social workers' job satisfaction as a preventative factor of emotional exhaustion symptoms of burnout. Um and Harrison (1998) compared effects of job related stress among 165 clinical social workers in the areas of role conflict, environment and workload. The research revealed strong relationships between role conflicts and job-related stress decreased job satisfaction and increased burnout. In the study, subjects attributed accomplishments in the areas of role conflict, work-related responsibilities and social support to higher levels of job satisfaction. Social workers who experienced role conflict and work related ambiguity indicated higher levels of work related stress and increased levels of burnout.

Another study showed similar outcomes in examining job satisfaction among 288 social workers working in community mental health, child welfare and family services settings (Jayaratne and Chess, 1984). Social workers that worked in the areas of community mental health, child welfare and family services indicated an 84% increase in job satisfaction that was attributed to the decrease in the of stress levels in their work environment, role conflict, and work-related challenges. For example, family service and community mental health social workers who perceived a better work environment, lower role conflict and manageable work load tended to scored higher levels of job satisfaction.

Forty-three percent of child welfare social workers indicated that they constantly faced moral dilemmas, high levels of role conflict and higher caseload sizes, and tended to have lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of burnout.

In a similar way, the research conducted by Shannon and Saleebey (1980) of 41 human service workers in a child protection agency focused on understanding factors that lead to burnout. The researchers measured symptoms of emotional distress from client and job context. Thirty-three participants indicated that excessive caseloads, stressful jobs and inadequate support groups promoted high levels of work-related stress and low levels of job satisfaction. For example, social workers that indicated loss of concern for clients, emotional isolation from work responsibilities and feelings of lower morale had a 90% higher turnover rate within two years. These social workers believed that positive job satisfaction decreased the levels of burnout.

Organizational Characteristics

Research has also focused on the importance of inter-professional relationships that social workers have (within and across organizations in which they function) on job satisfaction and their perceived value of social work skills and expertise. A study by Jacqueline Agresta (2006) of 183 members of the School Social Work Association of American focused on the importance of organizational roles and the perceived importance of School Social Worker roles on job satisfaction. Sixty-eight percent of School Social Workers indicated that frequent contact with administrators increased level of job satisfaction. Eighty percent of school social workers indicated frequent contact with other mental health professionals helped develop positive inter-professional relationships and increase perceived value of social work skills and expertise. Results

suggest that clear definitions and perceived importance of social workers' roles within organizations are predictors of job satisfaction and are preventative factors of burnout. The researcher indicated that the quality of organizational inter-professional relationships is related to job satisfaction among school social workers. Organizations that take steps to minimize role discrepancies and to foster the development of positive inter-professional relationships help professional autonomy and job satisfaction. In educational organization, administrators that provided social workers some autonomy in determining their role responsibilities provide a supportive factor in the prevention of burnout. School social workers indicated that organizations that allowed time for service-related activities, individual or group counseling and decreased routine tasks such as writing reports increased job satisfaction. The value that organizations place on self-defined professional goals is considered to be an important predictor of satisfaction, burnout and retention (Agresta, 2006).

Similar results were found in a study by Schudrich, Auerbach, Liu, Fernandes, McGowan and Claiborne (2012) of 760 social workers in child care welfare agencies. Results indicated that agencies that provide opportunities for promotion, contingent rewards (feeling appreciated and recognized), and adequate pay and benefits, tend to have workers that experience increased job satisfaction and decreased intention to leave. Social workers that indicated being more satisfied with pay, having more opportunities for promotion, and clearer operating procedures also indicated lower intent to leave. Agencies that emphasized career investment and career commitment for their social workers indicated higher job satisfaction among their employees. Social workers that primarily associated job tenure and satisfaction with contingent rewards (i.e. financial),

rather than professional support and growth opportunities, had a greater tendency to leave the organization (Schudrich et al., 2012).

Personal traits

Some researchers have examined personal traits as predictors of burnout among social work professionals. The research has considered personal growth, strengthening of personal relationships, and developing a social consciousness among social work professionals as supportive factors of burnout. Stein and Craft (2007) examined personal growth experiences of 89 mental health professionals and the relationship between personal accomplishment and symptoms of burnout. The researchers found that respondents that reported higher levels of a sense of personal accomplishment also reported higher levels of personal growth related to their work. Seventy-four percent of respondents indicated that they felt that being a mental health professional led to personal growth in several other areas of their own lives. Seventy-eight percent indicated that they had more to offer in their personal relationships as a result of their experiences as a mental health professional. In terms of social consciousness, 88% indicated that after seeing their clients' struggles they developed a stronger sense of social awareness and were willing to advocate for people in similar situations.

Shannon and Saleebey (1980) found similar results in a focus group study of human service workers in a child protection agency. The researchers focused on the development of personal growth as an intervention to cope with burnout. The intervention fostered the development of stress-reducing coping techniques to reduce symptoms of burnout. After participating in the intervention, participants indicated that learning relaxation, mind and body connections, and physical exercises were helpful.

Supportive Factors

The research on burnout has highlighted the importance of social support for professionals and personal support provided by their co-workers, supervisors and spouses. Davis-Sacks, Jayaratne and Chess (1985) compared effects of social support on the incidence of burnout among 238 female child welfare workers in a state social services department. Findings revealed a strong relationship between high levels of co-worker, supervisor and spouse support and decreased symptoms of job-related stress. For example, subjects who tend to want to talk with their co-workers, supervisor or spouse after officially reporting a highly emotional job-related event generally reported lower levels of negative job-related symptoms. Those who did not have social support indicated higher levels of burnout. The willingness of social workers to engage in developing social support systems with their co-workers, supervisor and spouse indicated lower levels of job related stress.

A study by Koeske and Koeske (1989) focused on social support and perceived accomplishments as supportive factors against the negative impact of workload and burnout among 125 social workers in the Pittsburgh area. Researchers measured burnout as emotional exhaustion, workload as amount of work in direct practice, and client contact as the number of clients. Social support was measured as receiving emotional or practical support from persons that participants considered family, friends, co-workers and supervisors. The study found that higher work load demands and less social support were associated with worker burnout. For example, social workers that reported less support from co-workers indicated higher levels burnout and less effectiveness with clients. Researchers have also suggested that social workers who build a strong socially

supportive work environment may decrease their burnout in social service settings (Koeske & Koeske, 1989). For example, social workers that indicated receiving emotional relief from their support network tended to switch jobs less often (Koeske & Koeske, 1989).

Early Childhood Settings

In a study by Rosenkoetter, Hains and Dogaru (2007) the research showed the importance of the role of school social workers in successfully transitioning young children with disabilities from early childhood special education programs into kindergarten. Home-based services begin at birth to three in the hospital with identification of possible need for intervention services and referrals to a program with home-based services for the family. Social workers with early intervention skills help families by providing professional competence. They focus on parents' instrumental and emotional needs and involve family members in the service planning. They emphasize family strengths, are skilled in understanding families' ecological context, and effectively take cultural diversity factors into consideration (Rosenkoetter et. al., 2007). Often social workers co-plan and co-provide for the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). This plan will help the family with services and early intervention between the baby's birth and the child's third birthday. During this time the social worker coordinates assistance with child and family health services, education services, and human service agencies. Social workers also help the families to prepare for coping successfully with early transitions by providing guidance, assistance and coordination (Rosenkoetter et. al., 2007).

Between the ages of three and five years, school-based programing begins and school social workers assist in children's adjustment to the new preschool setting. They may arrange family orientation activities to promote and ease transition. School social workers in the school based setting aid in multidisciplinary collaboration among professional school staff members whom are receiving the child (Rosenkoetter et. al., 2007). In addition to helping families recognize the changes between home-based services to services offered in a school setting, they also provide families with resources needed to transition to a school setting. School social workers are co-planners in the development of the initial Individual Education Program (IEP) which is needed to transition into Kindergarten (Rosenkoetter et. al., 2007).

In a similar study, Azzi-Lessing (2010) discusses ways that social workers improve outcomes for families in early childhood settings. Social workers understand the impact that families and communities have on children's development. Therefore, their roles in birth to age five settings include providing case management and addressing specific problems, such as child abuse and neglect. School social workers strive to deliver services that are family centered, culturally relevant and educationally appropriate for children in early childhood settings. Some of the challenges that school social worker face in working with families of children in their program are parents' feelings of grief, financial concerns, and worries about their children's future. Therefore, social workers have knowledge of child welfare systems and provide support, advocacy and case management or service coordination for the children's families (Azzi-Lessing, 2010).

Another role that social workers provide in these settings is consultative. They provide support, guidance and education to teachers, other classroom and professional

staff in areas of family systems, behavior management, developmentally appropriate skills, consequences of stigmatizing labels and other mental health concerns (Azzi-Lessing, 2010).

Summary

In summary, there are many factors which affect burnout among school social workers, a profession that tends to have higher burnout. High demand environments are risk factors to higher burnout among school social workers. In addition, characteristics such as personality factors, organizational support, and social support, also impact levels of burnout. Certain preventative factors have been shown to decrease burnout by increasing job satisfaction, social and self-care support. Therefore, further research that leads to better understanding risks and supportive techniques may be helpful in strengthening these findings and finding solutions.

Conceptual Framework

The *ecological perspective theory* will guide this qualitative study in order to better understand the risks and supportive factors of burnout among school social workers in the early childhood education setting. This model provides a way to understand human diversity and the relationship between humans and their environments. This perspective views human systems as structural, interactional, bio psychosocial and cultural, and is intended to offer understanding of system behavior (Miley, O'Melia, & Dubois, 2011). In other words, the ecological perspective examines interaction between people and their environment. For example, social workers practice within systems such as agencies, departments, institutions and various other organizations, and they also interact with client systems including individual, families and organizations (Miley at el, 2011). Therefore, in examining the risks and supportive factors of burnout among school social workers in the early childhood education setting the ecological framework provides a wide, comprehensive lens.

Social workers consistently interact with interrelated systems at the *micro level*, *mezzo level* and *macro level*. The *micro level* focuses on work with people individually, in families or in small groups to foster change within personal and social relationships (Miley at el, 2011). For example, researchers have examined the relationships between school social workers and four groups that included clients, parents, colleagues and school administrators with various degree of professional and physical closeness (Cross & Hong, 2012). The *mezzo level* focuses on relationships within organizations and formal groups including structures, goals and functions (Miley at el, 2011). An example of mezzo level factors is the relationship between social worker and their colleagues

(Cross & Hong, 2012). Finally, the *macro level* focuses on social problems in community, institutional, and societal systems (Miley at el, 2011), including, for example, the relationships between social workers' lives and emotions as affected by organizational job structures (Cross & Hong, 2012).

This Ecological Perspective framework was used to guide the development of the interview questions that focused on the importance of protective and risk factors of burnout among school social workers in areas of job structure, organization, personal traits and supportive factors that helped reduce burnout.

Methodology

Research Design

The design of the research was an exploratory and qualitative. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the risks and protective factors of burnout among school social workers in the early childhood education setting. This qualitative design allowed the researcher to explore the experiences of social workers in home-based and school-based settings. Due to the limited literature on early education school social workers, this study enhanced the existing literature on risks and protective factors of burnout among these professionals.

Sample

The population for this sample consisted of social workers currently working with families in the early childhood education programs in two urban school districts in Minnesota. The criteria for selecting clinicians to participate in this study included social workers employed in the early childhood education program and having at least one year of experience in this program setting. Participants were recruited through a snowball sampling method.

Protection of Human Subjects

For their protection, research participants where only known to the researcher. All personal contact information was secured by password on the researcher's personal computer. Notes were taken and that information was stored in a locked and secure location at the researcher's residence, and participants were not identified by name. A consent form was given to potential participants. This consent form was created by the researcher and was based on a template from St. Catherine University/University of St.

Thomas (See Appendix A). The consent form consisted of background information of the study, procedures, potential risks and benefits of participation, compensation, and confidentiality.

Potential participants were given a copy of the consent form and interview questions and were allowed to ask any questions before deciding to participate in the interviews. Moreover, the participants also signed the consent form to signify an understanding of the study. In the consent form, participants were informed that the interview would be audio taped. The researcher transcribed the interviews. The researcher addressed that the information discussed in the interviews would be kept in a secure file cabinet in the researcher's home. The data will be destroyed on June 1, 2013. Following the discussion of the consent form, potential participants were asked to sign the consent form prior to the interview.

Setting

Social workers were affiliated with an early childhood education program, and the interviews were conducted at early childhood education centers. Schools were large organizations that housed early childhood education programs, and these programs served a diverse population.

Instrument

The researcher used a semi-standardized interview schedule. The researcher asked the participants questions in a consistent order; however, the participants had the freedom to divert from the topic at hand. Through a semi-standardized interview, the researcher had the ability to adjust questions that were tailored to each participant. The interview contained demographic information including work experience (See Appendix

B). The questions were reviewed by the researcher's committee members to increase validity and reduce researcher bias.

Data Collection

To locate participants and gather data, the researcher followed these steps:

1. Asked committee members to identify 2-3 potential participants. The committee members gave the names and contact numbers of potential participants to the researcher.

2. The researcher contacted each potential participant and informed them how he/she received their name and introduced the study using a protocol.

3. The researcher distributed questions and consent forms so potential participants could review them before making a decision about whether or not to participate.

4. If interested, potential participants set up an interview with the researcher.

5. If potential participants did not call within one week, the researcher made one follow-up contact to see if they were interested in participating.

6. The interviews lasted 30 to 60 minutes and were conducted at a location within the site agreed upon by the researcher and participant, such as a library conference room.

7. The interviews were audio-taped and were later transcribed by the researcher.

8. Each participant was asked to provide 2 or 3 names of additional, potential participants and the data collection process was repeated until the researcher had scheduled 7 interviews.

Data Analysis

The audio taped interviews were transcribed and the data from the transcriptions were used in this study. Content analysis was used to interpret the meaning of the interviews. Content analysis is a technique that identifies and applies meaning to patterns and themes in raw data (Berg, 2009). Through content analysis, themes emerged from the data. Moreover, an inductive approach was used to analyze the data, meaning that specific raw data was used to create codes and to apply those codes to applicable theories, instead of applying existing theories to explain the raw data, as is done in a deductive approach (Berg, 2009). The researcher examined the data line by line to identify repetitious codes. After the initial coding session, the researcher reviewed the codes and applied a systematic label to the codes. In this manner, themes in the transcription emerged.

Researcher Bias

In many cases, researcher bias may affect a study's findings in a qualitative analysis. For example, in this case the researcher expected to observe gaps in the risk and supportive factors given to school social workers. Such biases may have influenced the researcher to identify and address those gaps to increase the value of the study. Furthermore, the researcher had previously worked in school settings and therefore may have been sensitive to the issues of social workers working in this setting. To less the effect of these biases, the interview questions were reviewed by the committee members order to avoid leading questions, and the content analysis approach was utilized in analyzing the transcripts.

Findings

The purpose of this research was to examine the risks and supportive factors of burnout among School Social Workers in the early childhood special education (ECSE) setting. This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of chronic levels of stress and how these symptoms, if unaddressed, may develop into greater psychological distress. Additionally, the study examined personal, organizational and job structural aspects of both risk and supportive factors among ECSE school social worker professionals in both home-based, birth to 3 years of age, and school-based, 3 to 5 years of age settings.

Sample

The seven participants involved in this study worked in the ECSE program of two Midwest urban areas in the Minnesota. All the participants were Licensed School Social Workers and had at least 1 year of experience in their field. The number of years of experience in the ECSE program ranged between 1 to 15 years. The number of years of practice in the field of Social Work ranged between 7 to 32 years. In terms of age, two of the participants were 56 - 65+ years, three were 46 – 55 years, and one was 25-35 years old. Five of the participants worked full-time positions and two participants worked part-time positions. The numbers of clients on the participant's caseloads ranged from 45 to 120. There were fifteen participants of the ECSE programs that were eligible to participate in this study and seven accepted and were interviewed. The seven interviews were conducted during the time period of mid-February to mid-March 2013. All the participants from this study provided information about their valuable experiences working with children and families. Themes were identified when two or more

participants were in agreement on a certain interview question. Themes that emerged

from this study were separated into three categories: 1) personal, 2) organizational and

job structural risks, and 3) supportive factors that may lead to burnout.

Personal Risk Factors

Participants were asked to describe their risks for burnout in their experience with

clients and families, staff and other professionals and community agencies. Three themes

of personal risk factors that were identified by ECSE school social workers were:

personal perspective on work, clients and goals (1); having a rigid work style (2), and the

ability to balance work and personal interest (3).

Perspective on Work, Clients and Goals

Five of the seven (5 of 7) participants identified the importance of having a

realistic view of their ability and awareness to be able to help the majority of the clients

and families on their caseload. Some identified their frustrations about not being able to

solve all the clients and families problems and being aware of their professional limits.

The following quote describes how an unrealistic view of their ability on work, clients

and goals can be a risk factor.

"Being exposed to, over and over again, to issues related to poverty and need and I have been doing this work for obviously quite a while and I still struggle with keeping it in perspective. Seeing people in need and in want especially little children is just not easy and I used to think the thing that would push people away would be the paperwork but with me it is the feeling inadequate to the task of really helping people, the people that we are working with…it is an accumulation of the inability to maintain an adequate perspective. We are all about trying to be balanced and maintain some healthy perspective so we are not pulled to far one way or the other. I think it might move along fast in the human services work because of the challenges we face and the really difficult situation that we see a lot of the people that we work with having to live." (Case 4, Page 3 & 9, Lines 48-55 & 193-200).

Rigid Work Style

Three out of seven (3 out of 7) participants identified the risk factors of not being able to work in various team settings. Participants who were only able to work independently expressed their concerns of not having enough support, and those that were only able to work in team settings expressed struggling with having to maintain relationships with team members. The majority of the school social workers stated that being flexible in both settings was a positive characteristic for a social worker to have. The following quote demonstrates the importance of building team relationships.

"Very often you are pretty isolated from the other social workers because you are supposed to be working in an interdisciplinary team and if you can't form friendships with members of your team you are really going to be in a bad way because the other social workers might see them periodically, but you don't see them very often."(Case 1, Pages 9-10, Lines 207-211).

Balancing Work and Personal Interests

All seven (7 out of 7) participants expressed the importance of being able to create a network of personal connections within the work place and community in order to prevent feelings of isolation. Participants that have work related personal interests outside of their program stated being able to provide better resources to their clients due to having personal knowledge of current community resources. The following quote demonstrates the importance of maintaining community connections in order to help reduce feelings of work isolation and increase client related resources.

"Maintaining and nurturing those relationships out in the community so when you have a question or an issue you can call them and get advice or you can use them as a service and maintain relationships with those people. You try to create an extensive network of people for yourself in the community rather than becoming isolated in the educational setting because it is very easy to become isolated when you are in the schools." (Case 1, Page 12, Lines 265-272).

Organizational Risk Factors

Participants were asked to describe their risks for burnout in their experience with clients and families, staff and other professionals and community agencies. Three themes of organizational risk factors identified by ECSE school social workers were: administration paperwork that does not help the client (1), not being able to provide adequate services due to ECSE administration changes (2), and diminishing resources for families (3).

Administration Paperwork

Six out of seven (6 out of 7) participants expressed their frustration with needing to meet the timelines and provide data driven accountability paperwork for the larger administration. School social workers indicated that these time consuming paperwork duties decrease their abilities to meet all the demands of the families and clients on their caseload. The following quote illustrates this finding.

"*It's time consuming and another thing that I have to remember to do and it is another piece of paperwork that does not necessarily help me be a better service provider for the family. It is data and we are in a data driven world. Education right now is under a microscope and we have to keep providing more and more data to show that we are doing something. It takes away the energy that I provide for your families because you will get cited if you don't do it.*" (Case 7, Page 5, Lines 97-102).

Administrative Changes

All seven (7 out of 7) participants indicated that the constant rule, law and new initiative changes to the early childhood special education program make it difficult to provide adequate services to social workers' caseloads. The participants believed that administrators lack understanding of the practical aspects of ECSE social worker responsibilities in their work setting. They indicated that they are in need of more social

workers in this field due to having one social worker in two or three schools and not

having adequate time to fully understand the new initiatives changes. The following

quote illustrates the frustration with perceived constant organizational changes.

"*Constant rule changes, the district and any district constantly sends down new initiatives or new changes about laws or new interpretations to the laws and so, it changes our job and you have to constantly keep track of this new fancy thing that we have to do or this new rule that we have to follow that we never had to do before." (Case 3, Page 2, Lines 39-43).*

Diminishing Organizational Resources

Six out of seven (6 out of 7) participants reported a lack of adequate testing tools

for English Language Learners which increases the amount of time having to provide

families with resources that can adequately serve that client or family. Larger

organizations make families go through a great deal of work in order to access resources

and many of the clients and families are not able to complete these processes and

therefore are not able to receive adequate services for their children. The following quote

describes how stressful social workers feel with diminishing resources at the

organizational level.

"*That can be stressful, the diminishing resources and all the different hoops we all want families to jump through to get what they need and sometimes it seems a little bit ridiculous what we expect families to do just to get a little bit of help for their child." (Case 7, Page 2, Lines 37-41).*

Job Structural Risk Factors

Participants were asked to describe their risks for burnout in their experience with

clients and families, staff and other professionals and community agencies. Three themes

of job structural risk factors that were identified by ECSE school social workers were: the

climate and culture of the work setting (1), role interpretation in the job structure (2), and the intensity or severity of issues families and kids face (3).

Climate and Culture of the Work Setting

Four of the seven (4 out of 7) participants described how working with staff members that are negative or incompetent increased their frustration of being in secondary settings. Some school social workers described that working with other professionals who may be burned out themselves caused more challenges in the work setting. Some care providers or teachers in a secondary setting (for example, home daycare, head-start or classrooms) give "push back" on the intervention plans for the clients which increases work setting risk factors for social workers. The following quote illustrates the difficulty of working with teachers or other providers in a negative work setting.

"It is always hard working with incompetence or lack of expertise and the confusion of who is their boss. Sometimes they think we are their boss and we are all peers and they come to us and want us to solve problems that really are not appropriate for us to solve and sometimes I feel like their mom and that feels icky." (Case 2, Page 2, Lines 24-29).

Role Interpretation

Five out of seven (5 out of 7) participants described how role confusion with school staff causes more non related social work responsibilities for the social worker. Social workers described how stressful it is when they are put into situations where they have to mentor a teacher or other school staff who is their peer. The lack of ECSE responsibilities among school staff or other professionals may be a risk factor to social workers. The following describes how some social workers are put into roles that are not their responsibility.

"I think one of the risks is role confusion when staff expects school social workers to do more than it is our jobs to do. I think teachers get frustrated and it is very challenging to feel like is it really my role to teach the teacher, to mentor the teacher; it is not my role, but you get put into that role and you want the team running smoothly." (Case 3, Page 2, Lines 31-39).

Severity of Issues Families and Children Face

Five out of seven (5 out of 7) participants described the experience of being over-exposed to issues related to poverty, abuse and neglect of children and how that contributes to their everyday stress. Some social workers reported feeling inadequate to help families who are in severe mental health crisis. Social workers also reported frustration with school teachers not understanding the intensity of poverty related issues that some of the families and children of the ECSE program may be in. The following quote illustrates this theme.

"Sometimes we are expected to be a clinical setting when we are not and the last thing on earth I want to do is restrain a kid and I have had to do that on a couple of times this year and it would be the thing that makes me leave this job. We all get this training every year on this non-violent crisis intervention and it works completely against philosophically who I am as a person and how I interact with children. Some of these kids are raw. They come in here traumatized and raw and living and breathing their trauma and there is no other intervention that is going to put a stop to the destructive behavior in that moment sometimes. Keeping it safe is what you are required to do and I don't really know how we will ever get to a place where we never have to do that again with a kid." (Case 5, Page 12, Lines 256-268).

Personal Supportive Factors

In this section participants were asked to reflect on their current position and describe what have been supportive factors against burnout with clients and families, staff and other professionals, community agencies and self-care. Two themes of personal supportive factors that were identified by ECSE school social workers are: having healthy habits and routines (1), and self-awareness of stress triggers (2).

Healthy Habits and Routines

All seven (7 out of 7) participants described the importance of having personal rituals or regular routines that involve personal interests outside of work. Some examples include music, journaling, meditation, or reading books. Being part of the school system is a supportive factor because it has built-in breaks for social workers working in a host setting. Personal retreats like vacations, summer breaks and school holidays are supportive factors during the stressful times of the school year. All participants expressed that following basic everyday routines helps reduce the stress for example, sleeping, eating and physical activity. The following quote illustrates this finding.

"*Maintaining a sense of humor and personal relationships with my family and my friends outside of work is important. The nice thing about working in the schools is that you get regular breaks. If you choose not to work summers you get 11weeks off. In other positions you don't have that. I like to sit by the ocean and stare at the ocean." (Case 1, Pages 13-14, Lines 297-305).*

Self-Awareness of stress triggers

All seven (7 out of 7) participants reported that being aware of their stress triggers during the stressful times and having self-awareness of coping skills has been positive for them. Some school social workers reported that they listen to their peers when they mention how stressed out they seem to be. All participants indicted that when they are not at work they try to maintain personal relationships and allow time for family. The following quote illustrates a social workers self-awareness of the work.

"*I think we social workers put a lot of stress on ourselves as professionals to be and do all and I think we put a lot of stress on ourselves. I don't think that we can expect ourselves to be perfect but I think that how you perceive that (the social work) is probably one of the lenses that can lead to burnout." (Case 6, Page 5, Lines 103-106).*

Organizational Supportive Factors

Participants were asked to describe ways they experienced autonomy in their work setting. In addition, they were asked to describe ways that their district supported their professional development as school social workers. They were also asked to describe supportive factors related to staff, professionals, and community agencies. Two themes of organizational supportive factors that were identified by ECSE school social workers were: having open communication and trust with ECSE administration (1) and organizational professional development training (2).

Communication and Trust of Administration

Four out of seven (4 out of 7) participants described their experience of having a lot communication and supervision support with their district lead social worker during high risk times with clients. Several social workers reported having the administrative freedom to run their current program and also being allowed to work independently. Three indicated that having the trust of administration and not experiencing imposed pressure from the district lead social worker or peers has increased their job satisfaction. The following quote demonstrates this finding.

"I do like the feeling of our little program and there is a principal and people above her and all that but they give us free range to run our little program here. Our district facilitator is really supportive and she is really good about getting back to me. As urban school social workers we do our little professional development and send one representative to the main building of social workers so that we can have input into whatever professional development as a huge staff." (Case 2, Pages 2-3, Lines 44-66).

Organizational Professional Development

All seven (7 out of 7) social worker participants indicated that the districts supported their ability to maintain both of the necessary licensures was a supportive

factor. Having district, state and national level, professionally and peer-driven trainings have allowed school social workers to concentrate on their responsibilities to their clients and less on worry about maintaining their license. Two social workers indicated that it was important to them that the administrative leaders seek social workers' input on training topics. This gives school social workers the ability to incorporate more social work focused trainings at the district level. The following quote supports this finding.

"Our lead, I think she does a really nice job of making sure we get training for the legal requirements for both of our licenses to be a school social worker. She is very good about setting those up. I think that ECSE administration is pretty encouraging of giving us time off to gain more information or more skills from outside agencies. Staff development money is not always possible, but you can get the time off and that is nice." *(Case 7, Page 3, Lines 59-65).*

Job Structural Supportive Factors

Participants were asked to describe ways they experienced autonomy in their work setting. They were also asked to describe supportive factors related to staff and professionals and community agencies. Two themes of job structural supportive factors that were identified by ECSE school social workers were: being part of the ECSE program structure (1) and supportive interdisciplinary team member relationships (2).

Structure of ECSE Program

All seven (7 out of 7) participants emphasized the importance of the structure the early childhood special education setting allowing defined caseloads, therefore increasing their ability to do more direct work with children and their families. This structure also allows flexibility to schedule and coordinate meetings with clients and providers. They also mentioned the importance of being able to work outside of the building settings and having the ability to support clients with their outside meetings and appointments. All

respondents expressed their satisfaction of being able to develop relationships with their clients and families. The following quote illustrates this finding.

"ECSE is different than other school social work in that you are really super autonomous in this world compared to a regular school social worker. It is more defined than a lot of school social work. You really get to know your clients. I know every family and that is different than when I was a regular school social worker." (Case 2, Page 4, Lines 79-87).

Interdisciplinary Team Relationships

Six out of seven (6 out of 7) respondents emphasized the importance of having formed team meeting relationships with teachers and other school staff. All respondents explained how having monthly peer meetings improves peer support during high risk issues with clients. Peer support and consultation also helps to provide accountability for paperwork and time lines that drive most of the school's programing. Another stress reducer in the workplace identified was interdisciplinary team support. This factor helps school social workers coordinate with teachers and other providers on the interventions that will be used on clients and it helps reduce role confusion and increase professional social support. The following quote illustrates the importance of working in a team setting.

"This program happens to be a team that really has made an effort to be as cohesive as possible considering how itinerant we are. There are people who are out and about across St. Paul and not everybody gets back to the office but we make an effort to touch base as much as possible. I feel like the staff is really supportive of each other so we have lunches together as much as we can. The enjoyment of the people you are working with in your work place, I have found it to be pretty positive." (Case 4, Page 6, Lines 130-138).

Discussion

Seven participants were involved in this study, three of whom were from the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) program in the school districts of a Midwest urban area. All the participants were Licensed School Social Workers and had at least 1 year of experience in their field. The number of years of experience in the ECSE program ranged between 1 to 15 years. The number of years of experience in the field of Social work ranged between 7 to 32 years. Five of the participants worked full-time positions and two participants worked part-time positions. All the participants were seasoned professionals and represented many years of experience working with children and families, and responded to semi-structured interview questions about risk and supportive factors of burnout among school social workers in early childhood settings.

Personal Risk Factors

The three themes related to personal risk factors discovered through this study were personal perspective on work, clients and goals (1), having a rigid work style (2), and having the ability to maintain balance between work and personal interest (3). The theme regarding personal perspectives on work, clients and goals focused on the social workers' ability to have a realistic view of their ability and awareness to be able to help the majority of the clients and families on their caseload. Some social workers identified their frustrations about not being able to solve all the clients and families' problems and being aware of their professional limits.

The finding of flexible work style was not reflected in the literature and three out of seven (3 out of 7) participants stated this as a personal risk factor. Participants described that school social workers that could not work in an interdisciplinary setting or

as a team would experience increased stress which may represent a risk factor for burnout. The participants emphasized that due to the nature of the work and setting of the ECSE program, school social workers must have the ability work independently and be able to develop relationships within a team setting.

The finding about the importance of having the ability to maintain balance between work and personal interest was consistent with the literature (Azzi-Lessing, 2010). These findings related to social workers' ability to recognize the importance of developing and maintaining community connections in order to better serve their needs. Another important finding was the ability of school social workers to strive to deliver services that are family centered, culturally relevant and educationally appropriate for children in the early childhood settings. Some of the challenges that school social worker face with the families of the children in their program are feelings of grief, financial concerns and worries about children's future. Consistent with the literature, effective school social workers have knowledge of child welfare systems and they provide support, advocacy and case management for the families of their child clients (Azzi-Lessing, 2010).

Organizational Risk Factors

The three themes related to organizational risk factors discovered through this study were administration paperwork (1), the lack of time given to serve families and clients of the ECSE programs due to the new administrative initiatives and changes (2), and the diminishing resources available to families (3). The finding reflected in the literature by authors Um and Harrison (1998) compared effects of job related stress among 165 clinical social workers in the areas of role conflict, environment and

workload. Findings revealed strong relationships between job-related stress, decreased job satisfaction and increased burnout. In the study, subjects attributed accomplishments in work-related responsibilities and social support to higher levels of job satisfaction. Social workers who experienced work related ambiguity indicated higher levels of work related stress and increased levels of burnout (Um and Harrison, 1998).

In a similar finding, not having enough time to serve clients due to new initiatives and administrative changes, in a study by Koeske and Koeske (1989), the amount of direct practice work with clients and the lack of co-worker and supervisor support increased emotional exhaustion as a risk factor to burnout. The researchers measured burnout by looking at emotional exhaustion, workload as amount of work in direct practice, and client contact. Social support was measured as receiving emotional or practical support from persons that participants considered co-workers and supervisors. The study found that higher work load demands and less social support were associated with worker burnout (Koeske & Koeske, 1989). Therefore, increasing administrative changes and new initiatives without the administrative support may be an organizational risk factor for burnout.

A finding that was not reflected in the literature is the diminishing resources for families. Six out of seven (6 out of 7) participants reported that due to the lack of adequate testing tools for English Language Learners increases the amount of time that school social workers spent on having to provide families with resources that can adequately serve them. Larger organizations make families go through a great deal of work to access resources, and many of the clients and families are not able to complete these processes and are therefore not able to receive adequate services for their children.

Participants emphasized the importance of organizational resources for all the families that ECSE school social workers serve.

Job Structural Risk Factors

The three themes related to job structural risk factors discovered through this study were, the importance of work culture and climate (1), role interpretation (2) and the severity of issues that the families that school social workers face (3). The findings on the importance of work culture and climate were reflected in the literature by Jayaratne and Chess (1984). The researchers examined 288 social workers in mental health, child welfare and family service settings and the results showed that 84% of the increase in job satisfaction was attributed to the work environment. Forty-three percent of social workers that indicated having constantly faced work related dilemmas, high levels of conflict and negative work environment tended to have lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of burnout (Jayaratne & Chess, 1984).

In another study, decreasing role interpretation among school social workers and other professional staff , Um and Harrison (1998) compared the relationship between role conflicts and job-related satisfaction. The researchers compared effects of job related stress among 165 clinical social workers in the areas of role conflict and work environment. Findings revealed strong relationships between role conflicts and job-related stress decreased job satisfaction and increased burnout. In the study, subjects attributed accomplishments in role conflict and social support to higher levels of job satisfaction.

The finding highlighted that understanding of the severity of issues that families and clients experience may increase school social workers' job structural stress that leads

to burnout. Stein and Craft (2007) supported these finding in their study of work-related

personal growth experiences with their clients. They examined work-related growth

experiences of 89 social workers and the relationship between their knowledge of social

issues that their clients face and job related stress. The researchers found that

respondents that reported higher levels of a sense of work related accomplishments also

reported higher levels of personal growth related to their work. Eighty-eight percent

indicated that after seeing their clients' struggles they developed a stronger sense of

social awareness. There were some social workers in which having this awareness

increased their compassion fatigue and, therefore, decreased their job satisfaction (Stein

& Craft, 2007).

Personal Supportive Factors

The two themes related to personal supportive factors discovered in this study

were the importance of healthy habits or routines (1), and having self-awareness of stress

(2) that may be supportive factors against burnout among school social workers. These

findings were reflected in the literature by Shannon and Saleeby (1980) who studied a

group study of social worker in child protection agencies. The researchers focused on the

development of personal growth as an intervention to cope with burnout. The

intervention fostered the development of stress-reducing coping techniques to reduce

symptoms of burnout. After participating in the intervention, participants indicated that

learning relaxation, mind and body connections, and physical exercises were helpful in

relieving stress (Shannon & Saleeby, 1980).

The theme of having self-awareness of coping skills as a supportive factor against

burnout was not reflected in the literature. All seven (7 out of 7) participants reported

that having an awareness of their stress triggers during the stressful times and being able to use coping skills has been positive for them. School social workers who listen to their peers when they mention their high levels of stress were effectively able to refocus their attention on self-care techniques.

Organizational Supportive Factors

The two themes related to organizational supportive factors discovered in this study were having open communication and trust with ECSE administration (1), and organizational professional development training (2). In similar findings, Davis-Sacks, Jayaratne and Chess (1985), found effects of high level social support on the incidence of burnout among 238 female social workers in social services department. This finding revealed a strong relationship between high levels of co-worker and supervisor support and decreased symptoms of job-related stress. Subjects who did not have a high level of social support indicated higher levels of burnout. In order to further help contribute to lower job related stress, organizations must be willing to engage social workers in developing social support systems with their co-workers and high level administrators (Davis-Sacks, Jayaratne & Chess, 1985).

A theme that was not reflected in the literature was the importance of organizational professional development training. All seven (7 out of 7) participants in this research indicated that the support they received from their districts to maintain both of the required licensures may be a supportive factor. Having district, state and national level professionally and peer driven trainings have allowed school social workers to concentrate more on their responsibilities to their clients and less on maintaining their license. Social workers indicated that it is important to them that administration leaders

continue to seek out social worker input on training topics. This gives the school social

worker the ability to incorporate more social work focused trainings at the district level.

This is important because ECSE school social work is a unique area, and having licensed

school social workers has positively impacted the lives of families and clients in the

special education system. Having administrative support for social work licensure

requirements will continue to help schools and students receive social work services,

which represent a strong asset to the educational success of students that ECSE school

social workers serve.

Job Structural Supportive Factors

Two themes that were related to the job structural supportive factors discovered in

this study were being part of ECSE program structure (1), and having supportive

relationships with interdisciplinary team members (2). In the literature, Rosenkoetter,

Hains and Dogaru (2007) focused on the importance of the role of school social workers

and their connection with the family in successfully transitioning children with

disabilities in ECSE programming. The literature emphasized the responsibilities that

school social workers in the early intervention programs provide the families they serve.

Social workers provide professional competence, focus on parents' instrumental and

emotional needs, the involvement of family members in the service planning, emphasis

on family strengths, sensitivity to family ecological context and consideration of cultural

diversity. Often social workers co-plan and co-provide for the Individualized Family

Service Plan (IFSP). Social workers also help the families to prepare for coping

successfully with early transitions by providing guidance, assistance and coordination

(Rosenkoetter et. al., 2007). This study reflected the importance that school social

workers in the ECSE program play in the positive intervention of their clients. Therefore, being part of this ECSE program structure also helps develop a supportive job structure for school social workers.

Another finding reflected in the literature in support of the importance of team relationships within the job structure may be a supportive factor against burnout. Agresta (2006) studied 183 members of the School Social Work Association of America, and focused on the development of inter-professional relationship and increased job satisfaction. The findings indicated that the quality of organizational inter-professional relationships is related to the job satisfaction among school social workers. Organizations that take steps to foster the development of positive inter-professional relationships help professional autonomy and job satisfaction. School social workers indicated that organizations that allowed time for service-related activities, individual or group counseling and decreased routine tasks such as writing reports, increased job satisfaction and decreased burnout (Agresta, 2006).

Researcher Reaction

The researcher documented reactions or emotions while conducting the interviews. The researcher was surprised to hear the extent of the responsibilities that an ECSE school social worker had on a week-to-week basis. Most of the school social workers that were interviewed were located in at least two different school or job settings. They traveled all over the city to cover their sites and met with families and providers at home and at other locations such as day-care settings and head-start locations. The researcher gained valuable insights about how ECSE School social workers' responsibilities are different than those of regular school social workers. The

researcher learned that almost all, which the exception of one school social worker, routinely practiced some type of self-care intervention. Finally, the researcher was able to observe the amount of care, enjoyment, and fulfillment the school social workers interviewed had related to the work they provided and families they served.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

In future studies a larger sample size would be more desirable to gain more information about risk and supportive factors. The researcher's recommendation to increase larger sample size would be to have easier access to larger school district data bases in order to be able to connect to other school social workers to interview.

A second limitation to the study was the lack of time to gather subjects, interview and transcribe the material. Being able to have more time to conduct the research would have been beneficial to the overall results of the study.

A third limitation was the limited perspective of the research collected and analyzed from the perspective of a social work direct service providers. Another potentially valuable perspective might be interviewing school social work supervisors in order to learn more about the parallel supervisory relationship in the context of the ecological perspective. Future researchers may elicit data more relevant to the ecological perspective, focusing on the supervisory parallel relationship, collecting information from participants such as supervisors or interns.

A final limitation was selection bias in the study. School social workers that volunteered are more likely to be those that enjoy their jobs and who may be less likely to feel burned out. The researcher could broaden the sample by providing incentives to

increase the possibility of interviewing those who may feel less fulfilled, higher levels of burnout, and less support in their current jobs.

Implications for Social Work

An implication for school social workers that this study highlighted is the importance of school districts having programs that help reduce work-related stress for the school social workers operating in their school settings. One example is the concern about increase in paperwork that prevents time with clients. Many social workers that were interviewed in this study expressed frustrations with administrators adding unnecessary paperwork to their responsibilities. They perceived that greater paper work demands limited the amount of time they could spend serving their clients. The results of this study suggest that if administrators could increase the use of technology and limit changes to the ECSE program, such approaches may help streamline paperwork and increase time with clients.

A second implication that this study highlighted is the limited community resources available to families and clients that school social workers serve. For example, in this study many school social workers expressed concerns with the lack of culturally relevant resources available to the diverse families they work with. Due to legislative changes and funding cuts, many programs that help families have been limited. The results of this study suggest that there is a need for more advocacy at the legislative level in order to demonstrate the importance of increasing funding for school and other community based organizations that are helping families with barriers and families from diverse backgrounds.

A third implication for social workers that this study highlighted is the importance of having formal peer consultation meetings. For example, many school social workers indicated that peer consultations helped reduce work-related stress when they were able to process difficult cases and develop a network of peer support groups. Most licensed school social workers currently do not have formal supervision to help with difficult cases as non-licensed social workers do. It is important that school administrators put in place formal supervision and consultation opportunities for licensed school social workers in order to help reduce work related stress.

The final implication for social worker that is highlighted in this study is the importance of having an understanding of the risk and supportive factors for burnout among professionals in this area of school social work. School social worker training programs and administrators are encouraged to provide preventive practices by promoting opportunities for understanding and identifying signs of burnout in order to help decrease work-related stress that may cause burnout.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the risks and supportive factors of burnout among School Social Workers in the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) program settings. This research focused on the risk and supportive factors in the areas of personal, organizational, and job structure that helped reduce burnout symptoms. The qualitative design of this study created a descriptive picture of participants' feelings toward ECSE school social work. The interview structure was a strength in this study. A semi-structured interviewing style allowed flexibility to

gain a deeper understanding of the topics addressed. Finally, the participants in this study had years of valuable experience, which enriched the data.

Certain themes in the research were particularly strong regarding identified risk factors. For example, 5 out of 7 participants indicated that the personal risk factor of school social workers' inability to realistically understand their impact on clients was an important risk factor. In addition all 7 participants indicated that a lack of balance between work and personal interest was another personal risk factor. With regard to organizational risk factors, 6 of the 7 participants indicated that an increased in administrative paperwork reduces availability of time spent with clients thus representing a risk factor. Also related to organizational factors, 6 out of 7 participants indicated that diminishing organizational resources was a risk factor. With regard to job structural factors, 4 out of 7 participants indicated that a negative work culture was a risk factor. Finally, 5 out 7 participants indicated that a lack clarity in their role and aspects of role interpretation were risk factors.

In this research, several themes identified were related to supportive factors against burnout. In the area of personal factors, 7 out of 7 school social workers indicated that the development of healthy habits or routines was a helpful supportive factor. In addition 7 out of 7 indicated that having self-awareness of stress related triggers was also a supportive factor. With regard to organizational supportive factors, the 4 out of 7 participants indicated that having open communication with ECSE administration was a supportive factor, and 7 out of 7 indicated that administrators continued support for professional development opportunities was an important supportive factor. With regard to job structural factors 7 out of 7 participants identified

the importance of being part of the ECSE program structure as an important supportive factor, and 6 out of 7 indicated that developing interdisciplinary team member relationships was a supportive factor.

The research focused on ECSE school social worker and who were able to share their experiences in several content areas. Previously, limited research and literature has been conducted on this specialized area of school social work. The current research added to this limited area of research, but there is need for future research in this area.

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Appendix A.

What are the Risks and Supportive Factors of Burnout among School Social Worker in Early Childhood Education Settings?

IRB#12-EXP-80

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the risks and supportive factors of burnout among school social workers in the Early Childhood Education setting. This study is being conducted by: Veronica Freeberg, a graduate student at the School of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas and supervised by research chair Dr. Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., LISCW. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because of your work experience as a school social worker in the early childhood education setting. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to discover more about the risks and supportive factors of burnout among early childhood education school social workers. Approximately 8-10 people are expected to participate in this research.

Procedures:
If you decide to participate, you will be asked to do the following: to complete 7 written questions about demographic, setting and level of experience before meeting with the researcher. The participant will then meet with the researcher to answer 7 qualitative questions regarding your experience with risks and supportive factors working as a school social worker in the early childhood education setting. The interview will be audio recorded, and the researcher will take notes. You will be given the questions in advance. The interview will be held at a location mutually agreed upon by you and the researcher, and the interview will be a single session 30-60 minutes long.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
The study has minimal. You may feel uncomfortable discussing your experience with risks and supportive factors for burnout. To address this risk, you will be provided the questions before you decide to participate or not. Also, you can choose to or not answer any questions during the interview. Questions may trigger some emotional discomfort and the researcher will also provide a debriefing and a list of resources for all participants.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained in connection with this research study that could identify you will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable. Your employer (past or present) will not know your responses. The

researcher will keep the research results in a password protected computer in a locked file in the researchers' office, and only the researcher will have access to the records while the researcher transcribes and works on this project. The researcher will finish analyzing the data by May 19, 2013. The researcher will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you. All audiotapes will be destroyed on that day also.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Catherine University, the University of St. Thomas, or the School of Social Work. You may refuse to answer any question (s) you wish. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will not be used. Question may trigger some emotional discomfort and the researcher will also provide a debriefing and a list of resources for all participants.

Contacts and Questions
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the researcher, Veronica Freeberg at 612-227-0591. You may ask any questions you have now, or have any additional questions later, the researcher or the faculty advisor will be happy to answer them. You may contact me Dr. Michael Chovanec at (612) 690-8722. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the College of St. Catherine Institutional Review Board at (651) 690-7739.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:
You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study anytime.

I consent to participate in the study and I agree to be audio-taped.

_____   _____

Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

_____

Print Name of Study Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   **Date**

Appendix B.

Interview Questions

Instructions to the respondent: Please review questions prior to the interview.

In Section A: Demographic Information, please fill out or circle the appropriate response based on your experience prior to the interview. While reviewing the questions, feel free to write notes, thoughts, or reactions to questions, which will enhance the richness of the discussion.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. What is your age range?

   o 25-35

   o 36-45

   o 46-55

   o 56-65+

2. What are your levels of licensure? _____

3. How many years of experience do you have in the field of Social Work? ___yrs.

4. How many years of experience do you have working in the early childhood

   education program?_____yrs.

5. How many years of experience do you have working in the following settings?

   o Birth to Three _____yrs.

   o Three to Five _____yrs.

6. How many hours do you work?

   o Part-Time _____hrs.

   o Full-Time _____hrs.

7. How many clients do you have on your caseload? _____

a. Do you feel that this number is acceptable or optimal? Please explain.

8. Describe your responsibilities as a school social worker in your current position?

9. What are the major risks for burnout that you experience in your current work setting? Respond as it relates to your work in the following areas:

a. Clients, Staff and other professionals, and Community factors?

10. Do you experience autonomy in your work setting? If yes, in what ways?

11. What are some of the factors that cause loss of motivation in your work with clients, staff and other professionals, and other community factors?

12. How does your district support professional development of school social workers?

13. In your current position what are the major supportive factors against burnout in working with the following:

a. Clients, Staff and other professionals and, other community factors

14. Is there anything else that you think might be helpful to me as I complete this study?