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Impact of Agency's Climate on Burnout

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Impact of Agency's Climate on Burnout

By

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Social Work St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas St. Paul, Minnesota in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

Social work agencies can play a vital role in reducing burnout of Social Workers today. Determining what agencies could do to lighten the emotional load on its workers is an important topic for Social Workers as well as the clients they serve. This quantitative study surveyed 48 licensed social workers to examine which aspects of an agency's culture contribute to its workers' experience of burnout. Results indicate that the majority of the respondents, 52% (25) indicated that they have already experienced burnout in some form while working at their current agencies. Respondents also felt that the single most important factor in reducing burnout in social workers involved the support they received from their agencies regarding their work/life balance. This study indicated some clear steps that need to be taken by social work agencies. Creating a work environment where conversation and support between coworkers is encouraged and recommended, understanding the significance of workers taking time for their home lives and diversifying workloads can enhance the work experience for social workers and improve the quality of services clients receive. It is clear after analyzing the findings of this study that more research should be conducted on a larger scale to maintain the strongest social workers in the profession.

Acknowledgements

Several people were a huge help in reducing my feelings of burnout while completing this paper and my graduate school education. I would like to thank Colin Hollidge, Laura Lundberg and Rochelle Rottenberg for taking time out of their own busy schedules to form my committee. Their wisdom, guidance and tireless support throughout this long process was a blessing. A special thank you to my wife, Michelle, and my son Josh, your unconditional love and understanding made getting through these many stressful days possible.

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Introduction

If you work in social services, you will inevitably deal with a degree of burnout. Whether it is because of the clients they work with, the resources at their disposal or the wages they are paid, social workers continually deal with a large amount of stress. How that stress is managed will ultimately determine how long the individual will remain a social worker.

Reducing the amount of stress on social workers has been a continued source of intrigue and debate. Research has indicated that a large-scale approach aimed at increasing job satisfaction and reducing burnout is likely to have minimal impact; interventions need to be conducted within each setting and must be directed toward the individual differences of social workers (Jayaratne & Chess, 1984). However, it is clear that some agencies are better than others at mitigating its employees' burnout. What specifically makes a work environment more likely to minimize the burnout of its workers and what can be purposefully done by agencies to reduce burnout, and in turn increase retention, of its workers?

Many studies have been conducted in an effort to understand the impact that burnout can have on workers, and uncover the most appropriate way to minimize burnout. This research has revealed that burnout can go so far as to adversely affect the physical health of social workers (Kim, Ji & Kao, 2011). The impact has led social work agencies to often be shorthanded; struggling with both sick workers and low employee retention. This poses implications to the care that the client receives, as they are consistently dealing with a revolving door of service providers. It is in an agency's best

interest, along with the best interest of its clients, to take steps to reduce worker's burnout.

Suggestions for minimizing burnout have primarily focused on improving the individual's ability to handle stress. For instance [individuals can spend time] "identifying priorities and activities that are effective…and weeding out activities that could be done differently or no longer serve their purpose" (Leyba, 2009). Other suggestions include "supervisory support, peer support groups, and in-service training to be considered as important interventions that can reduce workers burnout and its negative consequences" (Acker, 2012).

Identifying how to deal with the day-to-day stress that social workers experience is significant to the evolution of the industry. It is vital that social work agencies fully understand the role they play in their workers' well being and leverage this role to ensure retention. This knowledge will allow the agencies to provide a high quality of service to their clients by keeping a consistent work force, and will reduce the time and effort spent interviewing and training potential candidates. In this effort to reduce burnout in social work, the saying that "the best defense is sometimes a good offense" rings true. To reduce burnout, we must prevent burnout and the agency one works for often has a larger impact on preventing burnout than the actual job that they are doing. To improve the situation of burnout we must first answer the question: What is the impact of the perceived culture of an agency on burnout in social workers?

Literature Review

Introduction

In the social work profession the term burnout is used frequently. Dialogue surrounding the subject is generally focused on reminding professionals to take care of themselves, but only after a long list of reminders of a variety of tasks they must first complete each day. The term burnout was first used by Herbert J. Freudenberger (1974) who used the term to describe the "gradual emotional depletion, loss of motivation, and reduced commitment among volunteers of the St Mark's Free Clinic in New York's East Village that he observed as a consulting psychiatrist"(Wilmar, Michael & Christina, 2009, p. 205). The term has evolved over the years and led researchers to take a closer look at what has caused this "depletion of energy" in social workers. Much of the research that has been conducted involving burnout of social workers has focused on three major areas which will be reviewed in this literature review: causes of burnout in social workers, prevention of burnout in social workers and lastly the impact that burnout can have on an individual and on the profession of social work.

Causes of Burnout

A variety of factors are taken into account when looking at who is most likely to experience burnout. They can range from characteristics of the work environment, individual characteristics or social supports. The age of the social worker, which is correlated with experience, is widely considered to be the most reliable individual characteristic that will predict the level of burnout (Barford & Whelton, 2010). Brewer & Shapard (2004) conducted a meta-analysis on research that examined the relationship between employee burnout and age or years of experience. Their work indicated that

there was a higher level of burnout in younger workers compared with their older and more experienced coworkers (Brewer & Shapard, 2004). Additionally, previous research has shown that both marital status and whether or not the social worker has children can help us determine if the worker is experiencing or will experience greater levels of burnout. Those workers who are married and have had children are less likely to feel the effects of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1985). A variety of other supports can make a significant impact in dealing with stress. It has been shown that emotional support from colleagues, supervisors, friends, and family can be effective in limiting the harmful effects of burnout on a worker (Maslach & Jackson, 1985). Research has also demonstrated that personality can be helpful when working to identify those individuals that are more likely to experience burnout. In a study conducted by Bakker et al (2006) 80 counselors working with terminally ill patients, were examined to determine why some workers experienced higher levels of burnout compared to others. It was shown that the personality traits that were most consistent in indicating whether or not a worker would become burnt out were neuroticism and extraversion (Bakker et al, 2006). Individuals who experience a high level of neuroticism and who have a tendency to underestimate self performance and a tendency to react with strong emotions and self-criticism in stressful situations seem to be more susceptible to struggling with feelings associated with burnout (Bakker et al., 2006). Workers who are more open to new experiences, agreeable, conscientious and considered to be emotionally stable all have a reduced risk of experiencing burnout (Ghorpade et al., 2007). Manlove (1993) examined 188 child case workers in Pennsylvania to determine the indicators of burnout in workers.

Manlove (1993) agreed that neuroticism was a strong indicator of burnout, however, included in the aspects that were positively related to burnout were work role conflict, and work role ambiguity.

There can be several factors involved in a social worker's work environment that can make a particular job more stressful. Social work as a profession is geared toward being client centered and creating a connection with a client to best provide services. Many social workers are working with clients who are struggling emotionally, physically and psychologically. The toll that working closely with these individuals creates can be taxing. Workers who are unable to find positive and effective ways to deal with the high stress of their jobs are more likely to experience numerous negative consequences including impaired performance, low morale, absenteeism, and high turnover (Beemsterboer & Baum, 1984). More times than not social workers encounter barriers to achieving many of the goals that they are working with a client to achieve (Daly, 1979). This can create frustration especially when a worker feels that they are working harder than his/her client. These kinds of frustrations are more common when social workers are providing concrete services rather than in a more therapeutic setting. Research on this subject was conducted by Rosenbaum (1992) who collected data from 98 master's level social workers employed in 13 acute care hospitals in New York City. Rosenbaum's (1992) research indicated that social workers in fact prefer the portion of their work that involves counseling of clients rather than time spent involving the provision of concrete services.

Leadership in the work environment can also be very important in reducing stress. A situation where the individuals in charge fail to provide adequate direction and

support can lead to higher levels of tension, frustration, and anxiety, which can create an environment where staff question if they want to look for a new job (Pasupuleti et al., 2009). A key component of leadership is to create clear roles so that employees have a good understanding of what they need to do to help both the agency and the population they serve be successful. The stress that workers experience on the job has been shown to be reduced when their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined by their employer (Daly, 1979). In a cross sectional random survey of 1,500 California state-registered social workers, Hansung & Stoner (2008) indicated job autonomy plays a major role in determining if the worker will experience burnout. Another common frustration of social workers is that of an ever-increasing caseload. With turnover so high and agencies struggling to hire new staff, many times an individual's workload can swell to well above where it should be. This can at times create an environment where social workers are not able to do their job as well as they would like to because they have too much to do (Daly, 1979).

It is important to look at common variables in personality organization when examining why social workers in particular experience stress. With annual salaries that are often lower than those of other professions, it is common to see individuals who enter the social work profession more interested in helping people than receiving a large paycheck (Barth, 2003). What many new social workers quickly discover is that often in social work settings only a small portion of time is actually spent working directly with clients. For many social workers approximately 25 percent of their time is spent with clients while the rest of their work day is spent filling out forms, attending meetings, completing paperwork and other related activities (Daly, 1979). Having individuals who

enjoy being around other people completing paperwork all day is a recipe for increasing burnout.

<u>Prevention of Burnout</u>

There has been extensive research looking at the causes of burnout in social workers over the past few decades, as well as looking into variables that help prevent burnout from occurring. When looking at the prevention of burnout much research has been devoted to focusing first on the individual. A wide range of individual techniques and strategies has been hypothesized and explored regarding how to teach people to better handle stress. As some researchers have suggested, training individuals on how to handle this stress should begin well before their first position in the profession. Ospina-Kammerer & Dixon (2001) concluded that burnout among social workers was such a serious threat to the direction of the profession that coping strategies need to be stressed more in graduate schools and during training years. In order for social workers to cope successfully with the stress of their jobs they must have appropriate expectations of what their job is going to entail. Pines' (1993) research, which focused on the assumption that the major cause of burnout lies in our need to believe that our lives are meaningful, determined that "there were four coping strategies for individuals that better enabled them to handle job stress: (1) become aware of the problem (2) take responsibility for doing something about the problem (3) achieve a degree of cognitive clarity, such as what can be changed and what cannot (4) develop new tools for coping" (Pines, 1993, pp. 386-403). These strategies speak to the process that many social workers experience. Many social workers focus so much of their attention on others that they are unable to see the impact their jobs are having on them. Many social workers do not take it upon

themselves to do something about the problem before it is too late. It is also common to see social workers work to do more than they can or even try to change people that don't want to be or can't be fixed.

Other individual techniques that have been researched have been found to have some impact on coping skills of social workers. Research conducted by Azar (2000) pointed out that systemic changes are needed but can be slow to implement, so in the meantime interventions such as cognitive behavioral techniques utilized by individual social workers can be helpful in reducing burnout. This would involve the social worker identifying overly rigid assumptions/expectancies about their job, challenging these assumptions/expectancies and ultimately replacing them with more flexible adaptive beliefs. Other techniques such as mindfulness, practiced by social workers, have also been shown to increase self-care, and thus improve the quality of services that workers provide to their clients (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011).

A major portion of the research has focused on how supervision impacts a social worker's experience of burnout. Chiller & Crisp (2012) presented findings as part of a small-scale exploratory study that looked at the impact of regular supervision on burnout and retention of workers and declared that it is simply good business sense to spend the necessary resources to maintain regular professional supervision to increase the retention rate of social workers. Other research conducted by Bell, Kulkarni & Dalton (2003) surrounding supervision of social workers has looked at why supervision is successful in reducing stress. Consistent, quality supervision can create an environment in which the social worker feels comfortable in expressing fears, concerns, and inadequacies (Bell, Kulkarni & Dalton, 2003). This kind of environment can then enable the social worker to

deal with issues and stressors in a healthy manner as they come up. Quality supervision can reduce emotional exhaustion through simply having additional support available to talk through difficult situations. (Thomas & Lankau, (2009). The need for social workers to have someone who has experience with the same stress they are dealing with is invaluable. The fact that the supervision is consistent, in a caring environment, and empathetic also has an impact on a social worker's experience. In fact, because many supervisors are dealing with a great deal of stress themselves due to juggling clients, organizational and supervisory issues, improper supervision can increase the risk of burnout (Azar, 2000). The best way for proper supervision to take place is in an environment where both the supervisor and the supervisee are adequately supported by the agency they work for.

In order to maintain quality supervision there are several approaches that a social work agency can do to reduce the impact of burnout on its workers. One inexpensive way would be to organize peer support groups for social workers in their agency. Providing the opportunity to talk to others in a similar situation gives workers knowledge, a sense of belonging, self-confidence, structure, and the opportunity for positive change (Peterson, Bergström, Samuelsson, Asberg, & Nygren, 2008). Peer support groups can also be done in a variety of ways that can all be effective in reducing stress including consultation, treatment teams, case conferences, or clinical seminars (Bell, Kulkarni & Dalton, 2003).

In addition, an agency can reduce stress levels of its social workers by providing training and monitoring an individual's workload. Providing workers with information gives them a better opportunity to name their experience and handle it in a productive

manner (Bell, Kulkarni & Dalton, 2003). Also, limiting the number of individuals on a social workers caseload can help to reduce stress levels (Chrestman, 1995). Along with lower numbers, a diverse caseload can help the social worker keep the difficult material in perspective and prevent the formation of more pessimistic views of clients (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995).

Not only are policies and procedures implemented by an agency important for reducing workers stress, but the atmosphere or work environment of an agency plays a key role in social workers' job satisfaction. A number of key factors attribute to creating a negative work environment, and these factors can increase the likelihood of burnout of its employees. Insufficient administrative support, ineffective communication, and serving too many supervisors have all been shown to increase the odds of workers experiencing burnout (Pincus, 1997). Some positive policy changes can be made that would serve to energize an agency's workforce and increase the possibility of workers remaining in their current roles. An organization that would be willing to allow workers to vary their caseloads and work activities, take time off for vacations, participate in continuing education and make self-care activities more of a priority would reduce the load on their workers (Bell, Kulkarni & Dalton, 2003). It is helpful for organizations to have an understanding that work with many clients, particularly clients dealing with severe trauma, consists of long-term services (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Organizations that are proactive in connecting clients with additional outside services not only better support the client, but also reduce the load on its workers (Bell, Kulkarni & Dalton, 2003). By allowing workers more of a voice in a particular organization, agencies would be able to increase the staff commitment level and at the same time

reduce the risk of staff wanting to leave an agency (Lambert et al., 2012). Additionally, with the costs associated with turnover, increasing the pay and benefits to workers could create a situation where short-term expenses may be offset by long-term savings (Lambert et al., 2012). Unless action is taken by social work agencies, turnover will continue to remain high.

Impact of Burnout

If the issue of burnout is not prevented, quality social workers will continue to leave the profession. This will leave agencies with the unenviable task of continuously finding and training new staff and leaving clients feeling as though they cannot trust the system. Wermeling (2011) conducted a study examining 785 respondents whom were either currently working as social workers or who had recently left the profession. Results indicated that nearly 44% of social workers surveyed were in the process of leaving or were strongly considering leaving the profession (Wermeling, 2011). Burnout in social workers many times results in increasing turnover and their intention to leave an agency (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). With an expected working life of only 7.7 years compared to twenty-five years for a doctor and sixteen years for nurses, previous research demonstrates that social workers are not staying in the profession as long as other professionals (Curtis, Moriarty, & Netten, 2012). Burnout, or emotional exhaustion (a form of burnout), has been shown to be the leading factor that has distinguished individuals who leave their jobs in social work and those who stay (Dickinson & Perry, 2002). In a longitudinal study conducted by Dickinson and Perry (2002) 368 participants completed a survey comparing individuals who leave the social work profession and

those who stay. While there were comparable levels of feelings of personal accomplishment between groups, what separated them related to being comfortably able to discuss work issues with work peers and the opportunity to consistently rely on supervisors for support.

In a separate study that was conducted by O'Donnell & Kirkner (2009) a sample of 201 master's level social workers were tracked for two years following graduation to evaluate if they stayed with the agency they were working for and if they left why they did. Discriminant function analysis was used, allowing for factors taken at the end of the first and second year of employment to predict whether these graduates left or stayed in the industry for an extended period of time. The study revealed the strongest indicator of why workers stayed beyond the two years was because of organizational commitment (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2009). Along with how the organization dealt with its employees' issues of working conditions, supervisor support, job autonomy have all shown to lead to feelings of burnout and impacted the workers' decision to stay or leave the agencies they were with (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2009).

Not only are social work agencies struggling to keep their staff but the physical welfare of that staff is in jeopardy of being compromised. A study conducted by Kim, Ji, & Kao (2011) revealed that burnout can negatively impact the physical health of social workers, with increasing levels of stress and burnout leading to more serious physical health problems. More specifically it was determined social workers dealing with a significantly higher level of stress experienced more headaches, gastrointestinal problems, and respiratory infections (Kim, Ji & Kao, 2011)

Much of the literature points to changes that need to be made in the social work profession. Issues such as poor job conditions, high levels of stress, lack of support and overwork are adding to a crisis in the retention of social workers (Drake & Yadama, 1996). Adding to the seriousness of this situation is that given the depth and difficulty of these jobs many social workers need at least several years of experience to be proficient. Having a workforce that is lacking in this experience due to high levels of burnout in many of its workers is leading to many clients unable to receive the quality of care that they deserve (Drake & Yadama, 1996). Improving working conditions is key in preventing burnout and retaining social workers (Kim & Stoner, 2008). In order to improve working conditions, social work agencies must become more aware of the seriousness of the problem and be willing to take preventative steps to reduce the level of burnout in its workers.

Conceptual Framework

Several theoretical perspectives influenced the development and direction of this study. The primary theoretical perspective that had an impact on this study centered on the person in environment theory. The person-environment fit was described by Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson (2005) as "the compatibility between an individual and a work environment that occurs when their characteristics are well matched" (p.281). In this theory are several different types of interactions that are examined. They include the person-environment interactions, person-vocation fit, person-job fit, person-organization fit, person-group fit and person-supervisor fit. This concept is focused around the idea that an individual cannot be accurately evaluated without first looking at the factors in the individual's environment that may or may not be having an impact on them. This perspective allows interventions for the client to be focused on the individual, his or her environment or both.

Another significant theoretical perspective that influenced this study was that of systems theory. Forte (2007) described structural functionalism, which is considered a version of systems theory, as, "referring to formal or informal patterns of action. This structure provides an order and predictability to system processes and functioning" (p.165). So when looking at this study it is important to look at how social worker's behaviors are often determined and influenced by the norms, role expectations and the power that makes up the agency structure that these workers work for. The environment that is created in these agencies is going to have an impact on how individuals experience their work.

Methodology

Introduction

The research design for this project was a quantitative survey that focused on determining how social work agencies can best reduce the risk of burnout in their employees. The research question for this project was: how does the climate or culture of a social service agency impact burnout in social workers?

Sample

The sample for this project consisted of 48-licensed, master's level social workers currently working in the state of Minnesota. The sample was obtained using non-probability purposive sampling to locate the participants. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants are only licensed social workers working for agencies in Minnesota.

Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval for this study, the researcher contacted the Minnesota Board of Social Work to identify potential participants in this study. A randomized list of 300 social workers, licensed in the state of Minnesota through the Minnesota Board of Social Work were then sent an email that included a cover letter explaining the research project (attached as Appendix B), the work environment survey (Appendix A) and an individual demographic data collection form. Those individuals who were willing to complete the survey were then directed to a link on *Survey Monkey* to complete the survey. The completed surveys were then kept in the researcher's *Survey Monkey* account.

Measurement

The questions in the survey were designed with the intention of identifying what social service agencies are doing or could be doing to reduce the level of burnout of their workers. This survey was designed to evaluate several specific key factors in a work environment including: job autonomy, supervision, opportunities for career development, support amongst coworkers, clarity of job responsibilities and diversity of workload. These particular topics were chosen as the result of previous research as several other possible causes of burnout could have been included.

Protection of Human Subjects

Several steps were taken to protect the confidentiality of participants in this study. The cover letter given to all participants included a reminder that they should not enter either their names or the names of the agencies they work for on the survey. There were instructions not to use any other identifying information, particularly the name of the agency they work for, when completing the survey. The letter also made clear that their names would not be used and all research information would be kept anonymous. When this research project was completed all information was deleted from the researcher's *Survey Monkey* account.

It was made clear throughout the process that participants in this study are voluntary. If they did not wish to participate they did not have to fill out the survey. If they were unsure or felt uncomfortable about answering a particular question they were instructed to skip that question and leave it blank. It was also noted in the cover letter that by completing and submitting the survey, participants were giving their consent for the researcher to use the information in the survey for the research purpose.

Results/ Findings

Introduction

The results from this quantitative research study revealed what factors social workers feel are most significant in reducing their experiences of burnout at their social work agency. Descriptive statistics are used to illustrate these findings.

Experience with Burnout

Table 1 depicts participants' experience with burnout.

Table 1

Have you ever experienced burnout at your current agency?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	6.3	6.3	6.3
Yes	25	52.1	52.1	58.4
No	20	41.7	41.7	100.0
Total	48	100.0	100.0	100.0

The frequency distribution shown above demonstrates that of the 48 social workers polled regarding whether or not they have experienced burnout at their current agency, 25(52.1%) answered yes and 20(41.7%) answered no.

Amount of Authority Given to Social Workers

Table 2 depicts participants' feelings about how the authority given to them to do their jobs can reduce burnout in social workers.

Table 2

Amount of Authority to do One's Job

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	2.1	2.1	2.1
	Essential	15	31.3	31.3	33.4
	Very Important	18	37.5	37.5	70.9
	Important	10	20.8	20.8	91.7
	Somewhat Important	4	8.3	8.3	100
	Not Important	0	0	0	100
	Total	48	100.0	100.0	

The frequency distribution shown above demonstrates that 15(31.3%) agreed it is essential, 18(37.5%) very important, 10(20.8%) important, and 4(8.3%) somewhat important that the authority given to them to do their jobs is a factor in decreasing burnout. The mean score for this question is 3.92.

Quality of Supervision

Table 3 depicts participants' feelings about how the quality of supervision can reduce burnout in social workers.

Table 3

The Quality of Supervision Received

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2.1	2.1	2.1
Essential	14	29.2	29.2	31.3
Very Important	17	35.4	35.4	66.7
Important	11	22.9	22.9	89.6
Somewhat Important	5	10.4	10.4	100
Not Important	0	0	0	100
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

The frequency distribution shown above demonstrates that 14(29.2%) agreed it is essential, 17(35.4%) very important, 11(22.9%) important, and 5(10.4%) agreed it is somewhat important that the quality of supervision they receive is a factor in decreasing burnout of social workers. The mean score for this question is 3.68.

Clarity of Guidelines

Table 4 depicts participants' feelings about how clear job guidelines reduce burnout.

Table 4

The Clarity of the Job Guidelines

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2.1	2.1	2.1
Essential	12	25.0	25.0	27.1
Very Important	13	27.1	27.1	54.4
Important	22	45.6	45.6	100.0
Somewhat Imp.	0	0	0	100.0
Not Important	0	0	0	100.0
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

The frequency distribution shown above demonstrates that 47(97.1%) of participant responses gathered reported that the clarity of guidelines is at least important in reducing burnout in social workers. The mean score for this question is 3.79

Supervisors Recognition of Work Done by Employees

Table 5 depicts participants' feelings about how the recognition they receive from their

supervisors can reduce burnout in social workers.

Table 5

Supervisor(s) Adequately Recognize(s) the Work Done by Employees

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2.1	2.1	2.1
Essential	18	37.5	37.5	39.6
Very Important	13	27.1	27.1	66.7
Important	14	29.2	29.2	95.8
Somewhat Important	2	4.2	4.2	100.0
Not Important	0	0	0	100.0
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

The frequency distribution shown above demonstrates that 45(95.8%) of respondents felt

that recognition of their work was at least important and 2(4.2%) felt it was somewhat

important and no respondents felt it was not important in reducing burnout in social

workers. The mean score for this question is 4.0.

Opportunities for Promotion

Table 6 depicts participants' feelings about how the opportunities they have for

promotions can reduce burnout in social workers.

Table 6

Opportunity for Promotion

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2.1	2.1	2.1
Essential	1	2.1	2.1	4.2

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Important	17	35.4	35.4	39.6
Important	19	39.6	39.6	79.2
Somewhat Important	9	18.8	18.8	97.9
Important	1	2.1	2.1	100.0
Not Important				
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

The frequency distribution shown above demonstrates that 18(43.8%) of respondents felt

that opportunities for promotion is at least very important, 19(39.6%) felt it was

important, 9(18.8%) felt it was somewhat important and no respondents felt it was not

important in reducing burnout in social workers. The mean score for this question is

3.17.

Diversity of Workload

Table 7 depicts participants' feelings about how diversity of a workload can reduce

burnout in social workers.

Table 7

Diversity of Workload

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	2.1	2.1	2.1
	Essential	2	4.2	4.2	6.3
	Very Important	22	45.9	45.9	52.2
	Important	17	35.4	35.4	87.6
	Somewhat Important	3	6.3	6.3	93.8
	Not Important	3	6.3	6.3	100.0
	Total	48	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 demonstrates that participants felt that diversity of workload was a factor in

reducing burnout in social workers.   22(45.9%) participants felt it was very important

and 17(35.4%) felt it important. The mean score for this question is 3.36.

Opportunities to be involved in Decision Making

Table 8 depicts participants' feelings about how opportunities to be involved in decision-making at their agencies can reduce burnout.

Table 8

Opportunity to be Involved in Decision-making

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	2.1	2.1	2.1
	Essential	15	31.3	31.3	33.3
	Very Important	22	45.8	45.8	79.1
	Important	9	18.8	18.8	97.9
	Somewhat Important	1	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Not Important	0	0	0	100.0
	Total	48	100.0	100.0	

The frequency distribution shown above demonstrates that 46(97.9%) of respondents felt that opportunities to be involved in decision making is at least important and 1(2.1%) felt it was somewhat important and no respondents felt it was not important in reducing burnout in social workers. The mean score for this question is 4.08.

Support for Work/Life Balance

Table 9 depicts participants' feelings about how support for work/life balance can reduce burnout in social workers.

Table 9

Support for Work/Life Balance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	2.1	2.1	2.1
	Essential	25	052.1	52.1	54.2

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Important	14	29.2	29.2	83.4
Important	7	14.6	14.6	97.9
Somewhat Important	1	2.1	2.1	100.0
Not Important	0		0	100.0
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

The frequency distribution shown above demonstrates that 46(97.9%) of respondents felt that support for work/life balance is at least important and 1(2.1%) felt it was somewhat important and no respondents felt it was not important in reducing burnout in social workers. The mean score for this question is 4.34.

Network of Support amongst Coworkers

Table 10 depicts participants' feelings about how a network of support amongst coworkers can reduce burnout in social workers.

Table 10

A Network of Support Amongst Coworkers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2.1	2.1	2.1
Essential	19	39.6	39.6	41.7
Very Important	16	33.3	33.3	75.0
Important	10	20.8	20.8	95.8
Somewhat Important	2	4.2	4.2	100.0
Not Important	0	0	0	100.0
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

The frequency distribution shown above demonstrates that 45(95.8%) of respondents felt that a network of support amongst coworkers is at least important and 2(4.2%) felt it was somewhat important and no respondents felt it was not important in reducing burnout in social workers. The mean score for this question is 4.11.

Ratio of Paperwork to Client Interaction

Table 11 depicts participants' feelings about how the ratio of paperwork to client

interactions can reduce burnout in social workers.

Table 11

The Ratio of Paperwork to Client Interaction

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	4.2	4.2	4.2
Essential	5	10.4	10.4	14.6
Very Important	23	47.9	47.9	62,5
Important	15	31.3	31.3	93.7
Somewhat Important	3	6.3	6.3	100.0
Not Important	0	0	0	100.0
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

The frequency distribution shown above demonstrates that 43(89.5%) of respondents felt

that the ratio of paperwork to client interactions is at least important and 3(6.3%) felt it

was somewhat important and no respondents felt it was not important in reducing burnout

in social workers. The mean score for this question is 3.65.

Impact of Caseload Size on Meeting Client Interaction Expectations

Table 12 depicts participants' feelings about how the impact of caseload size on meeting

client interaction expectations can reduce burnout in social workers.

Table 12

The Impact of Caseload Size on Meeting Client Interaction Expectations

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2.1	2.1	2.1
Essential	11	22.9	22.9	25.0
Very Important	25	52.1	52.1	77.1
Important	11	22.9	22.9	100.0
Somewhat Imp.	0	0	0	100.0
Not Important	0	0	0	1000.0
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

The frequency distribution shown above demonstrates that 47(97.9%) of respondents felt that the impact of caseload size on meeting client interaction expectations was at least important in reducing burnout in social workers. The mean score for this question is 4.0.

Correlations

A significant positive correlation (r = .361; p = .013) existed between 'quality of supervision' and 'job guidelines,' suggesting that as the quality of supervision increases so does participants' clarity around job guidelines. There was also a statistically significant positive correlation (r= .400; p= .005) between 'workload' and 'quality of supervision,' suggesting that as the quality of supervision increases so does participants diversity of workload. Similarly, there is a statistically significant positive correlation (r= .488; p=0.00) between 'balance between work/life' and 'support system amongst coworkers,' suggesting that as the balances between work and life increases so does participants support system amongst coworkers. It was determined that there is not a statistically significant correlation(r= .100; p= .500) between participants' responses to amount of authority given and impact of caseload size.

Demographics

The average age of respondents was 47 years old. There were 9(18.7%) male respondents and 39(81.3%) female respondents. Of the respondents, 2(4.3%) were African Americans, 43(91.7%) were Caucasian/Euro American, 1(2.1%) Bi-racial and 1(2.1%) Asian American/Pacific Islander. There were 44(91.7%) respondents with MSW education level, 2(4.2%) with PHD and 2(4.2%) with other. All 48(100%) of respondents are licensed at the LICSW level. The average number of years a respondent has worked as a social worker is 19 years.

Discussion

Examining the results from this quantitative study illustrates the significance of looking into the reduction of burnout in the social work profession. Results showed that of the 48 social workers polled, 25(52%) indicated that they have already experienced

burnout in some form while working at their current agency. There was a wide range of feelings about what specifically a social work agency can do to help reduce this emotional burden on its workers. Respondents felt that the single most important factor in reducing burnout in social workers involved the support they received from their agency regarding their work/life balance. Among the other factors that respondents felt were most significant in reducing burnout included the network of support amongst coworkers, opportunities to be involved in decision-making and the impact that the caseload size has on meeting client interaction expectations. Respondents indicated that among the factors mentioned in this survey the least important factor in reducing burnout in social workers is the opportunity for promotion.

This study also indicated several statistically significant correlations between factors that can reduce burnout in social workers. Some of the most significant correlations between variables included: a correlation between the quality of supervision they received and the diversity of their workload, as well as between the support for their work/life balance and their support system amongst coworkers.

Many of the results gathered in completing this research support previous research that has focused on burnout in social workers. This begins with the significance of burnout in the social work profession. Curtis, Moriarty & Netten (2012) pointed out that the expected working life of a social worker is shorter than that of many other professions and that this is many times the result of burnout. Research collected in this study indicated that over fifty percent of respondents had already experienced burnout. Many of the factors included in this study have been associated with contributing to burnout in social workers in previous research. Support from coworkers was mentioned

as one of the most significant factors in reducing burnout. Maslach & Jackson (1985)

agreed that emotional support from coworkers helps to reduce burnout of social workers.

Peterson, Bergström, Samuelsson, Asberg, & Nygren (2008) also agreed that a support

system built into the workplace is significant, pointing out that providing the opportunity

to talk to others in a similar situation gives workers knowledge, a sense of belonging,

self-confidence, structure, and the opportunity for positive change.

Another significant finding from this research that is backed up by previous

research includes the subject of encouraging a balance between work and life outside of

work. Bell, Kulkami & Dalton (2003) pointed out that an organization that would be

willing to allow workers to vary their caseloads and work activities, take time off for

vacations, participate in continuing education and make self-care activities more of a

priority would reduce the load on their workers. This was supported in this current study

as the highest mean score of the questions asked indicated that respondents felt that

support for a work/life balance in their employees is the most significant indicator of

reduction of burnout in its workers.

There were also several factors that previous research has indicated are significant

indicators of burnout that respondents of this survey were neutral on. Pearlman &

Saakvitne (1995) pointed out that a diverse caseload can help the social worker keep the

difficult material in perspective and prevent the formation of more pessimistic views of

clients. 'Diversity of caseload' was not viewed as a major factor in preventing burnout in

this study. Bell, Kulkami & Dalton (2003) argued that consistent, quality supervision can

create an environment in which the social worker feels more comfortable in expressing

concerns. The 'quality of supervision' was not seen a major factor in preventing burnout in this study.

Significance to Social Work

Findings from this study point to specific areas social work agencies should be focusing their attention when working to reduce the level of burnout in its workers. Making improvements in these key areas can lead to reduce turnover of staff, more productivity and healthier workers. More specifically, creating a work environment where conversation and support between coworkers is encouraged and recommended, understanding the significance of workers taking time for their home lives and diversifying workloads can enhance the work experience for social workers and improve the quality of services clients receive.

It is also significant to look at the high number of social workers who reported that they have already experienced burnout. This speaks to the urgency that needs to be shown by social work agencies to improve the industry. Social workers are leaving the profession due to burnout at an alarming rate. Preventative steps need to be taken by agencies to keep their best workers from leaving their employers. More awareness needs to be shown regarding what can be done to keep experienced social workers helping the clients that need their support. Social workers are going to experience a certain amount of job related stress no matter what the situation is. One of the most important priorities of the agencies that employ social workers is to have supports built into the system to enable employees to complete their jobs at the best of their ability. Failing to effectively reduce the level of stress that workers experience in their jobs also leaves agencies dealing with the consequences. Some of these consequences would include having to

deal with paying the costs of hiring and training new workers, losing top employees who opt out of the profession and dealing with lowered morale and productivity of workers who do choose to stay.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. There were many other factors that could be attributing to burnout in social workers that were not included in the survey. Some of them include: personality types of the respondents, marital status or supports of the respondents outside of the work environment as well as which theoretical perspective each respondent utilizes most with clients. Another limitation of this study would include the sample size. Since the sample was not adequately representative, it cannot be generalized to a larger population. The results were also limited by the lack of respondents who are licensed as anything other than LICSW. The results of this study are also limited to the state of Minnesota. In addition, the researcher used the list of social workers from the Minnesota Board of Social Work. Those social workers not affiliated with the board were not eligible to be included in the study.

Further Research

It is clear when looking at the significance this issue has on the future of the profession of social work that more research needs to be done. Closer examination of the burnout of social workers needs to be done on a national level. More concrete, specific steps need to be identified to assist social work agencies in setting up and developing plans to reduce the level of stress of their workers. More research is needed when looking at specifically who in the profession is at the greatest risk of experiencing burnout and what can be done early in the education of a future social worker to limit the

probability of them experiencing burnout later in their career. In order to enhance the

level of services clients are receiving more time and research need to be devoted to

keeping the best and brightest social workers in the profession.

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Appendix A

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Ben Widbin and I am a graduate student in the social work program at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University. Due to this program having a clinical focus, one of the requirements for completion is to conduct a clinical research project. You are receiving this letter because I am looking for potential candidates for my research project and am hoping that you would be willing/able to complete a short survey designed to examine social workers' perspectives on agency culture and its impact on burnout. The research questions will revolve around perceived culture of an agency. All responses will be anonymous and will in no way be linked to a specific agency. The answers will only be leveraged to gage specific dynamics of an agency's culture and how they may be linked to burnout.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to fill out a 12-question survey that should take only take a couple of minutes to complete. The survey information will be collected and the data will be analyzed.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The agency you work for will have no knowledge of either your participation or your responses. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will also in no way impact your relationship with either University.   You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and/or you feel uncomfortable answering. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research study, please feel free to contact me: Ben Widbin, a MSW graduate student at the University of St. Thomas and University of St. Catherine at (602) 430-0451.You may also contact the research chairman for this project: Dr. Colin Hollidge at (651) 962-5818 with any questions or concerns.

To participate in this study, please leverage the attached link to fill out the work environment survey:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8GNGT2H
This link will provide you direct access to my survey loaded on the Survey Monkey website, and will ensure that your responses remain anonymous. If you have difficulty opening the attached link, you can copy the address into your web browser.

The completed surveys will then be kept in the Survey Monkey research account once the participants submit the surveys. By submitting the survey at Survey Monkey you are agreeing that you have read this letter and that any questions you may have regarding this survey have been answered. Should you choose to participate in this survey, please submit the completed survey no later than March Thank you for your support in this research project.

Sincerely,

Ben Widbin

Appendix B

<div align="center">Work Environment Survey</div>

The purpose of this short questionnaire is to examine social workers' perspectives on how a work environment impacts their feelings of burnout. When filling out this survey please respond to the questions by examining how each statement would decrease your feeling of burnout in your social work agency.

In the agency you work for how important are the following in preventing burnout?	1 Not at all	2 Somewhat Important	3 Important	4 Very Important	5 Essential
1. Amount of authority to do one's job.					
2. The quality of supervision received.					
3. The clarity of the job guidelines.					
4. Supervisor(s) adequately recognize(s) the work done by employees.					
5. Opportunities for promotion.					
6. Diversity of workload.					
7. Opportunity to be involved in decision-making.					
8. Support for work/life balance.					
9. A network of support amongst coworkers.					
10. The ratio of paperwork to client interaction					
11. The impact of caseload size on meeting client interaction expectations					

12. Have you ever experienced burnout as your current agency? (yes or no)_____

Individual Demographic Data Collection Form

1. Gender:

_____Male
_____Female

2. Age: _____

3. What is your race? Please check only one.
_____Caucasian/Euro American
_____African American
_____Latino/Hispanic American
_____Bi-racial
_____Asian American/ Pacific Islander
_____Native American or Alaskan Native
_____Other

4. Education Level (Highest level of education attained)
_____BSW
_____MSW
_____PHD
Other_____

5. Social Work License Level
_____LSW
_____LGSW
_____LISW
_____LICSW
_____No social work license

6. Number of years you have worked as a social worker. _____