

AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELEVANT FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH
CASEWORKER BURNOUT

By

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(Under the Direction of Linda Campbell)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to determine the relevant demographic and personality factors associated with burnout in caseworkers engaged in public social services agencies. Caseworkers engaged in social services work have long been identified as having increased risk for burnout, which has been known to have detrimental effects on the individual as well as the clients and the system that they serve.

Demographic factors (i.e., age, years of service, level of education, departmental affiliation) and personality factors (adjustment, ambition, interpersonal sensitivity, role orientation, stress tolerance, and reliability) were examined for their relationship to burnout as measured by the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS). Results found that those caseworkers sampled were experiencing significantly higher burnout rates than those caseworkers sampled in the norming of the instrument, indicating a greatly elevated level of burnout within the sampled population. Correlations were found between caseworkers' age and years of service as well as interpersonal sensitivity and perceived sense of personal accomplishment. However, no relationships were found between burnout and the other demographic (years of service, level of education, departmental affiliation) and personality variables (adjustment, ambition, role orientation, stress tolerance, and reliability) examined.

INDEX WORDS: Burnout, Social Services, Case Worker, Personality Factors

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For Justin, for everything.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Study

Counseling Psychology as a profession has roots deeply planted in the understanding of the process of career decision-making (Sharf, 2005). The knowledge and practice of career counseling has been noted as not only a core identity of counseling psychology, but also one of the most differential strengths in the profession (Anderson, 1998). This central tenant of the profession dates back to the work of Frank Parsons who is credited with the founding of the career counseling specialization, as well as vocational psychology and counseling psychology (Aubrey, 1977; Salomone, 1988; Whiteley, 1984). Some have noted that over the past thirty years graduate education in counseling psychology has moved away from developing vocational counseling skills. This has run concurrent to the development of the global economy, as well as rapid changes in all professions, therefore increasing the need for understanding of vocational choices (Herr, 1989; Slaney & Mackinnon-Slaney, 1990). This has placed counseling psychology within a precarious position.

Traditionally, counseling psychology has identified itself by a series of tenants developed through conferences. This began with the Boulder Conference in 1947 with the adoption of the scientist-practitioner model, and then continued on in the Greystone Conference and the Atlanta Conference. Over time the understanding of career choice and career counseling within the field of counseling psychology has grown dramatically. Gati and Ram (2000) noted that career decisions are some of the most important and complex decisions which individuals make within

their lifetime. Because these decisions are complex and confusing, many individuals choose to engage in counseling at these critical junctures (Walsh & Osipow, 1988). These junctures may be the result of natural growth points, (i.e., the transition between high school and college), they may also be the result of individual change due to a life transition or other individual factors, such as disinterest in particular job tasks (Gati & Ram, 2000).

Over the last thirty years, we have seen the phenomena of burnout develop into a syndrome which is detrimentally impacting employees and agencies alike, particularly those engaged in social services work (Soderfelt, Soderfelt, & Warg, 1995). It is because of this that the field of counseling psychology in particular is called to examine the relevant factors which may be linked to burnout for this particular population.

The Place of this Research within Multiculturalism and Social Justice

Part of the identity of a counseling psychologist is the adherence to the ideals of the profession, which includes multiculturalism and the commitment towards social justice (APA, 2003). As defined in the guidelines, multiculturalism, “recognizes the broad scope of dimensions of race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender, age, disability, class status, education, religious/spiritual orientation, and other cultural dimensions” (APA, 2003). It is noted that these dimensions are not static, but dynamic and interact on every level in order to form identity. Social justice differs in that it reflects the value of fairness and equity in resources, rights, and treatment for marginalized individuals and groups of people who do not share equal power in society because of their immigration, racial, ethnic, age, socioeconomic, religious heritage, physical ability, or sexual orientation status groups (Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997).

For many years counseling psychology has been concerned with individuals' mental health and the relationship between that and the social environments in which they live (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007). In recent years, the recognition of the negative impacts of oppression in the lives of people of color has shifted the focus toward interventions which may be able to more broadly impact social change (Hage, 2003; Vera & Speight, 2003).

“The Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists” (APA, 2003) reflects the knowledge and skills needed for the effective and competent practice of psychology in all of its many facets. Specifically, practice, research, and training are three of the areas in which the knowledge, awareness, and skills of multiculturalism are essential. These practice guidelines speak to the many areas in which psychology must seek to move multiculturalism forward. Most of the existing literature focuses on social justice at the micro-level (e.g., one-one-one counseling and advocacy) which is inherently limited in its impact on overall society (Helms, 2003). More recent writings have shifted the focus onto the impact that broader research and interventions may have in progressing towards social justice (Blustein, Elman, & Gerstein, 2001; Eriksen, 1999; Fox, 2003; Jackson, 2000; Lee, 1997; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003; Vera & Speight, 2003).

This research is seen as a first step toward impacting organizational change within the area of social services, as highlighted in the sixth guideline: “Psychologists are encouraged to use organizational change processes to support culturally informed organizational (policy) development and practices” (APA, 2003). Examining the factors relevant to social services case worker burnout will provide essential information towards developing culturally informed interventions which then may impact the organization as a whole. While traditionally, employees within social services agencies have traditionally been Caucasian women, the workforce itself

with social services is rapidly shifting. It is becoming more diverse and managers at agencies are trying to be more responsive of the needs of the workforce by including training on awareness, hiring and retention plans, and improving outreach to diverse populations (Ferguson; Fong & Gibbs, 1995; Hyde, 1998; Iglehart & Becerra, 1995). Hyde (2004) suggested with the rapidly shifting cultural makeup of the workforce within social services, that without adequate understanding of the problems that caseworkers are facing, including burnout, that appropriate interventions are not able to be implemented fast enough that caseworkers are then able to adequately serve the needs of their clients.

It would therefore be essential for counseling psychology to develop an understanding of burnout as it relates to the workforce with social services, such that we may begin to develop culturally appropriate interventions for caseworkers, with the hope of impacting the organization and advancing the goals of social justice. Social services case workers have a particular and unique opportunity to interact with individuals who are inherently disadvantaged or oppressed within society (Reeser and Epstein, 1987). The traditional definition of social work has centered around improving the lives of those in poverty (Baggett, 1994; Spect and Courtney, 1994; Williams, 1990). More recent research indicates that social work has two equally important goals: to provide assistance at the individual level through direct intervention and to improve social conditions through advocacy and policy reform (Bogo, Michalsk, Raphael, and Roberts, 1995; Courtney, 1994). With these goals in mind, case workers engage in a range of helping behaviors on individual, organizational, and societal levels. By developing research which seeks to understand the relevant factors in burnout, we simultaneously have the ability to advance knowledge in the areas of career counseling, multiculturalism, and with the hope of advancing the goals of social justice.

Constantine et. al, (2007) outlined nine specific social justice competencies which they consider important for counseling psychologists to consider as they work with increasingly diverse populations. These competencies deal with counseling psychologists building awareness about various social inequities that are manifested on individual, group, organizational, and macrosystemic levels. They also call on counseling psychologists to critically evaluate themselves on individual, professional and systemic levels to evaluate the impact of the interventions that we utilize. They further suggest that counseling psychologists reach beyond traditional boundaries and collaborate with other agencies and with communities to “promote trust, minimize perceived power differentials, and provide culturally relevant services to identified groups” (Constantine et al., 2007, 26). This research is an attempt to reach beyond the traditional boundaries of research and to extend our understanding of the relevant factors in burnout so that we may utilize the knowledge generated by this research to form culturally relevant interventions.

Purpose of the Study

This study will attempt to synthesize the current knowledge of career counseling to identify the relevant factors associated with caseworker burnout in social services agencies. Previous research has clearly demonstrated that caseworkers employed in social services agencies have an increased risk of burnout; although there are still surprisingly few studies which examine the role of contributing factors to burnout (Soderfelt, Soderfelt, and Warg, 1995).

The concept of burnout itself is somewhat unclear. Initially, it emanated from the 1960's and referred to the effects of overuse of drugs. Freudenberger (1974) appropriated this word into the professional lexicon to describe an individual who has negative reactions to work. The subject was popularized when Freudenberger brought the concept of burnout to individuals

working in the human services industry. His model of burnout focused on the individual experience of his or her own work as adverse. Maslach (1982) furthered the concept in the field and developed a model which emphasized burnout as the result of a relationship between the individual and the environment. It was this transformation from an individual level to a social psychology perspective that forms the basis of understanding of burnout which psychology utilized today.

Early research found many definitions for burnout itself. For the purposes of this study the researcher will examine it as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism....a key aspect of the burnout syndrome is the increased feeling of emotional exhaustion” (Maslach and Jackson, 1981 p.99). Theoretically, burnout has been equated with a coping mechanism towards stress and opposingly has been viewed as a response to a stressful work environment (Freudenberger, 1983; Farber, 1983). Recent research has found that emotional exhaustion can be predicted by some organizational variables such as workload, role conflict, role ambiguity, and variables related to agency change (Jayarante et al., 1991; Bhana and Haffejee, 1996).

Further, research has also demonstrated that typically there is an inverse relationship between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993; Leiter and Harvie 1996 and Lee and Ashforth, 1996). However, there are very few studies which examine the influences of other factors as they relate to burnout. Specifically, the influence of personality factors as a risk or protective factor has been a neglected area of research. Interestingly, some studies have indicated that there is a small but meaningful sample of case workers and child protective service employees who simultaneously report high levels of emotional exhaustion and high levels of job satisfaction (Stalker, Mandell, Frensch, Harvey, and Wright, 2007). These studies have primarily found that individual factors such as commitment to the mandate of child

welfare, belief that one is “making a difference”, and finding the work personally rewarding have mitigated the negative effects of emotional exhaustion. Several studies have also found that social and organizational support is a moderating factor in emotional exhaustion (Koeske and Kelly, 1995; Martin and Schinke, 1998; Um and Harrison, 1998; Acker, 1999).

Theoretical Framework

This study will examine the phenomena of burnout from an existential and systems theory perspective. Previous literature has identified that systems theory has been useful as a framework for examining career theory as well as career development (McMahon, 2005). It has also been important in developing and understanding of individuals working within an agency, and in turn that agency interacting with the public. Through the view of systemic thinking in agency environments we view individual needs, expectations, rewards, and attributes as elements of a system (or subsystem) which then influence the overall system itself. In this way we value social services, case workers, and clients for the dynamic and shaping influences which they exude on each other (Bittel & Bittel, 1978). Compher (1987) also identified systems theory’s particular usefulness when examining not only the relationship between the social services client and the agency, but also the relationships within the agency, and then between the agency and the larger systems of government and the world. The utilization of this theoretical framework allows the research to account for the dynamic nature of the relationships between client and caseworker, caseworker and agency, client and agency, and agency and government. Previous utilization of systems theory in social work has identified four primary types of relationship between client and agency. While these four descriptions were primarily seen as applying to the client within the agency, there are parallels that can be made to the caseworker within the

agency. Compher (1987) went on to detail the networks as follows: The “blind service network” is comprised of dispersed service entities and allows the client to control the flow of information, and therefore the flow of services. This can be difficult for the case workers because of the decentralization of case planning as well as the disconnection from others who are working with the same client or within the same environment. The “conflicted service network” exists as one major entity with two or more ideological battles taking place such that there is not a coherent message from agency to case worker, or from case worker to client. Participants within a conflicted service network may feel themselves triangulated into uncomfortable positions within the agency. The “rejecting service systems” value the performance of the agency, or the workers within the agency, more than the delivery of services or clients. This creates a disparity where a client may feel or be rejected because of adherence to a policy over the valuing of an individual. This same dilemma may be true for a worker within the system. Finally, the “underdeveloped system” refers to a family or system which has experienced relative isolation and now requires the integration of services or information from another source.

This study is deeply rooted in the understanding of career development, and as such, it is important to examine the many theories associated with it. Herr and Cramer (1988) identified three primary theories associated with career selection: a. trait factor, b. developmental, or c. decision making. Trait factor theories assume that the choice of a profession is an expression of a personality, while developmental and decision making models assume a series of experiences and choices based on gains and losses, and understanding of ourselves (Herr & Cramer, 1988). While these theories have lent much research toward career selection, the examination of the relevant factors associated with burnout are somewhat different. There has been much research associated with the existential theory as a model for understanding burnout (Pines & Yanai,

2001). This particular theory offers that an individual may enter into burnout when their existential needs of fulfillment and identification with the goals of their work are no longer being met.

Systems theory framework offers much rich literature and perspective on the complicated issues involved with clients, caseworkers, and agencies. However, it would be remiss if this research was also not examined with a multicultural theoretical perspective. As is clearly evidenced by the research, both the caseworkers and the clients who they serve are incredibly diverse (Ferguson; Fong & Gibbs, 1995; Hyde, 1998; Hyde, 2004; Iglehart & Becerra, 1995). It is therefore essential that all elements of this study be critically examined within the multicultural framework, as is suggested by the Guidelines (APA, 2003). (The Council on Social Work (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) are the professional organizations associated with the social services field. These organizations recognize that the highest priority must be placed on social work multicultural competence. As a component of this, the field of social services has sought to advance the ideal of social justice as a part of their work (Courtney, 1994). Researchers within the social work field have aptly identified that those operating within the field who have deficiencies in the area of multicultural competent are at risk for causing harm to clients (Gallegos, 1984; McMahon & Allen-Mears, 1992).

Definition of Terms

Social Services – For the purposes of this study, social services will be defined as any work associated with a public social services agency. This type of work may include advocacy, direct client service via interventions, and/or treatment planning. As defined earlier, the goal of social services work is two-fold: to provide assistance at the individual level through direct intervention

and to improve social conditions through advocacy and policy reform (Bogo, Michalsk, Raphael, and Roberts, 1995; Courtney, 1994). Social services will also refer to the general field which delivers these services. Therefore, within the confines of this study, a caseworker is an individual who engages in some form of social service, and the work can be defined either as a function of the profession, or as a general reference to the profession itself through literature and previous research.

Social Services Agency – Within this study, a social services agency will be defined as a government agency which provides services to the public which are aimed at improving social conditions. These services are typically targeted at underserved or traditionally marginalized populations; however, some services, such as child protective services, are targeted toward solving the individual and societal impact of child neglect and abuse, and is not particularly targeted toward traditionally marginalized populations.

Caseworker - For the purposes of this study, a caseworker will refer to an individual who is currently engaged in some form of direct service to clients within a social work agency. These workers may reflect a variety of backgrounds, education, training experiences, and positions within the agency. Some caseworkers may also have managerial positions within the agency acting as supervisors to other case workers. Caseworker will be utilized as a blanket term, and as needed more specific identifiers may be used (i.e., case worker employed in child protective services vs. case worker employed in economic support services).

Burnout - The concept of worker burnout has been defined differently in a variety of literature, beginning in the 1970s (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). For the purposes of this study, we will use the generally agreed upon definition of an “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism...a key aspect of the burnout syndrome is the increased feeling of emotional exhaustion” (Maslach and Jackson, 1981 p.99) recognizing the three essential elements of burnout: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy.

Statement of the Problem

The high turnover rate of employees in child welfare and social service agencies are a serious concern (Barak, Nissy, & Levin, 2001). The high turnover rate within public agencies poses a significant challenge to social services agencies and the field of social services in general (Drake and Yadama 1996; Knapp, Harissis, and Missiakoulis 1981; Jayaratne and Chess 1983, 1984; Drolen and Atherton 1993; Koeske and Kirk 1995). Past research has identified that high employee turnover has diminished the quality, consistency, as well as the stability of child welfare and social services (Barak, Nissy, & Levin, 2001). High turnover rates have been correlated with increased stress on clients as well as other workers within social services agencies when positions are then filled by less experienced personnel (Powell & York, 1992). They have also been correlated with increased client distrust of the system (Todd and Deery-Schmitt, 1996; Geurts et al., 1998). Counseling psychology has its roots deeply planted in the understanding of the challenges and course of career development of the individual (Sharf, 2005). It is for this reason that counseling psychology has a particular stake in understanding this problem as well as attempting to develop appropriate interventions to address it.

In recent years, much research has demonstrated that caseworkers engaged in social services are at an increased risk for job burnout, even over other fields (Soderfelt, Soderfelt, & Warg, 1995). The primary evidence of burnout is seen through exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy, all of which have ramifications for the individual, as well as for the system that they work within and the clientele whom they serve (Maslach, 2008). Therefore, it is essential to begin to develop an understanding for the relevant factors which may contribute to caseworker burnout. Past research has suggested that several factors may interplay in order to facilitate burnout including demographic characteristics, personality variables, and organizational variables (Limb and Organista, 2004). The relevant factors contributing to caseworker burnout must be examined before appropriate interventions may be designed with the overall goal of impacting the organization and benefitting clients.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. *Are there relationships between level of burnout as measured by the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) and caseworker demographic characteristics?*

a. *Is age correlated with any one of the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS)?*

Hypothesis: It is predicted that there will be a significant negative correlation between an individual's age and level of burnout as measured by any one of the three the three subscales (emotional exhaustion,

depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) on the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS).

- b. *Are years of service in the identified public service agency correlated with burnout as measured by any one of the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS)?*

Hypothesis: It is predicted that there will be a significant negative correlation between years of service and level of burnout endorsed on the MBI-HSS.

- c. *Is the level of education correlated with burnout as measured by any one of the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and burnout) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS)?*

Hypothesis: Level of education will be significantly negatively correlated with burnout. As caseworker's level of education increases, it is predicted that the level of burnout endorsed on the MBI-HSS will decrease.

- d. *Is there a difference in the level of burnout as measured by any one of the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) between child protective services caseworkers and employment services caseworkers?*

Hypothesis: It is predicted that there will be a significant difference between the level of burnout endorsed by caseworkers engaged in child

protective services versus caseworkers engaged in economic support services, as measured by the MBI-HSS.

2. *Are there relationships between level of burnout and caseworker personality variables as measured by the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) and level of burnout as measured by the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS)?*

a. *Are there negative correlations between the personality variables of adjustment, ambition, and interpersonal sensitivity, as measured by the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) and caseworker burnout as measured by any one of the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS)?*

Hypothesis: It is predicted that there will be a significant inverse correlation between an individual caseworker's score on adjustment, ambition, and interpersonal sensitivity, as measured by the HPI, and their endorsement of burnout, as measured by the MBI-HSS.

b. *Are there negative correlations between the personality variables of adjustment, ambition, and interpersonal sensitivity, as measured by the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) and caseworker burnout as measured by any one of the three subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment)?*

Hypothesis: It is predicted that there will be significant negative correlations between an individual's scores on the occupational subscales of orientation, stress tolerance, and reliability, as measured by the HPI, and their endorsement of burnout as measured by the MBI-HSS.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Career Theory in Counseling Psychology

Counseling psychology has been unique throughout its history for a number of reasons (Whiteley, 1984). Chief among these is the adherence to the scientist-practitioner model, the emphasis on the strengths of individual, and the valuing of career development and the role of work within the human experience (Greystone Conference, 1964). Kagan et al, (1988) address this last point by stating that all counseling psychologists hold several common values including “the necessity of understanding development across the life span, with special emphasis on the importance of career development and the role of work” (350). The study of career development over the life span has occurred through practice and research (Sharf, 2005).

Career theory has developed over the last century into a number of theoretical frameworks which have varying focus and research associated with them (Arthur, Hall and Lawrence, 1989). Currently, the many theories can be categorized into three major groups: a. trait factor, b. developmental, and c. decision making (Herr and Cramer, 1988). Trait and factor theory supposes that the selection of a particular career is an expression of the personality, and a fit between the characteristics of that personality and the requirements and tasks associated with that job. Developmental models suggest that career selection is a process which gradually solidifies over time and is influenced by phase of life, individual needs, and personal experiences. Finally, decision making theories emphasize the selection of a career as a choice to minimize or maximize social and economic gains and losses (Sharf, 2005). These theories suppose that a career is a systematic series of choices. This theory generally ignores those whose

career choices are constrained by outside forces and those whose career experiences are erratic (Herr and Cramer, 1988).

Partially because it developed out of the work of Frank Parsons, trait factor approaches to career counseling have traditionally been one of the most researched and best understood models (Campbell and Ungar, 2004). Savickas (1993) says, "In work-role counseling, we followed Parson's lead in applying the scientific model to fostering career choice. While scientists were objectifying the world, counselors objectified interests, values, and abilities and used these inventories to guide people to where they fit in organizations" (p. 206). This assumes, however, that individual's values, traits, interests, and abilities remain relatively static over the lifespan. While we know that individuals change and life experiences occur which shift and shape all of these qualities, there remains a significant amount of evidence to suggest that the trait factor theories of career development are useful. Based on this theory a number of assessment tools have been developed which have served as both prescriptive and descriptive measures (Cochran, 1997; Savickas, 1993; Furnham, 1994). The Strong Interest Inventory and the Self Directed Search are examples of instruments which draw, at least partially, from trait and factor career theory.

Traditionally, trait and factor theory stands in contrast to systems theory because of the emphasis within systems theory on the whole and parts. Trait and factor theory focused on parts, intending to match some personality variable or ability to a needed quality or ability within a given profession. Systems theory focuses of the whole system (the individual) and intends to match to a career based on a non-linear pattern in which an individual engages (Patton & McMahon, 1999). Systems Theory Framework, applied to career development and career choices, offers the ability for career choices to be influenced by the content and process

components of career theory (McMahon, 2005). Content influences include intrapersonal characteristics (otherwise identified in previous research as traits) and environmental characteristics, such as family influence and job availability. The process component addresses the role of change over time and chance, which otherwise cannot easily be addressed. Systems theory is unique in that it identifies the recursive nature of this process, that content affects process, and in turn the process will affect the content. It is the understanding and accounting for the dynamic interaction which makes systems theory framework unique in analyzing career theory. McMahon (2005) says:

“In terms of systems theory, the individual is a system in its own right, with the intrapersonal influences that are depicted representing its subsystems. However, an individual as a system does not live in isolation, but rather as part of a much larger contextual system. Thus, the individual is both a system and a subsystem.” (p. 31)

Systems theory framework has been recognized in the literature as being particularly sensitive to the needs and values of diverse populations (UNESCO, 2002; Arthur & McMahon, 2005). However, as we enter into the new millennium, we also recognize the existential needs that are met through our profession (Pines & Yanai, 2001). Pines (2000) noted that individuals need to feel that the things that they do – and then themselves – are significant, impactful, and meaningful to others. In the past, finding existential satisfaction through work was the privilege of a few; however, today existential fulfillment is often sought after as a part of professional identity (Pines & Yanai, 2001). They further postulate that if one chooses a career based, at least in part, on existential fulfillment and then discovers through the work that they are not significant

and impactful in the ways that they envisioned they would be, that this can later facilitate burnout (Pines, 2000).

The structure of this study, while clearly examined within a systems framework, relies on some of the basic postulates of trait and factor approaches to career theory. There is a particular emphasis on the personality and demographic factors which may ultimately influence happiness in a career, such as caseworker.

Career Theory as Applied to Caseworkers

There are a number of distinct values, interests and abilities, which would be considered essential to becoming a caseworker in any theoretical model. Pines (1982) noted that the nature of professional tasks often attracts individuals to a certain profession over another. Researchers studying individuals within human services industries often identify “caregivers” within the industry. These individuals are often social oriented, emotional, and thrive on the ability to be helpful to others (Miller, Stiff, & Ellis, 1988). Previous research has suggested that those who enjoy interacting with the public, or those who are particularly social may be best suited to become a caseworker, since those abilities are often called upon. Gockel (1966) indicated that caseworkers often selected the profession specifically because of the opportunity to work with and help others. In addition, interpersonal sensitivity, or the ability to empathize with others, has been designated as an important characteristic (Alcorn and Tourney, 1982). Spect and Courtney (1994) suggested that the desire to work in social work is often a “calling” and that having this inherent investment can compensate for low pay and other disadvantages of the work environment. Golden, Pines, and Jones (1972) found that individuals’ belief that social work made a valuable contribution to society was an influential factor in the decision to enter the profession.

Indeed, this has been validated by others' work, with specific regard to investment and perceived emotional reward for hard work (Leippen-Christensen, 2005). This also echoes the work of Pines and Yanai (2001) who noted the existential need for fulfillment through professional roles.

More recent research on job successfulness has examined a number of individual factors, building on the French, Rogers, and Cobb (1974) model of job-person "fit". This fit is described as a congruency between the individual's perception of what the job should look like and the individual's idea that he or she will succeed in that environment (Stevens and O'Neill, 1983). Examples of fit can include "the demands of the job exceeding the individual's capacity to cope or the person's efforts are not reciprocated with equitable rewards" (Maslach and Leiter, 2008). Over time, some key variables: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values have been identified as associating to fit and burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 2008). The general assumption of the model is that an individual's "fit" with a particular work environment will predict better adjustment and less strain. Interestingly, the most predictive factor is the individual's perception of his or her own "fit" (Maslach and Leiter, 1997). For example, it may be important for an individual to believe that he or she is a good fit rather than for there to be a clear demonstration of a fit through traits, skills, and abilities.

In further applying systemic theory framework to career decision making for caseworkers in social service, we examine the role of the individual as a system unto themselves as well as an active subsystem within a larger system (McMahon, 2005). In this way we lend credibility to the fact that as caseworkers progress within the field, they are influenced by the system in which they exist, and as they change, their needs change, thereby affecting the overall relationship an individual has with the system in which they work.

Vocational Personality Assessment

Personality assessment as a tool in career and vocational selection has been utilized in psychology since World War I. The development of the Personal Data Sheet by Woodworth (DuBois, 1970) served as the first official personality assessment which was utilized for vocational or employment purposes. The Personal Data sheet was developed in order to identify significant psychopathology in men enlisting in the armed services and disqualify them from service. The Armed Services in the United States continued to be the largest users of vocational personality inventories to identify participants within the Armed Services for specialized types of jobs either primarily through their personality (Anastasi, 1988). Vocational personality assessment grew dramatically after World War II, and has grown and changed over time (Hogan, 2005). The goal of any personality test is to measure the difference between individuals, and vocational personality tests are no different. The difference between traditional personality assessment and vocational personality assessment has to do often with item construction referring to work. In many ways they are based on the same personality constructs as traditional personality assessment, but are utilized in the vocational applied settings. The attempt to assess personality is furthered by trying to measure the difference between individuals with the thought of selecting the most appropriate person for the job based on their differential strengths in relationship to the job requirements (Hogan, 2005).

Any discussion of vocational personality assessment would be remiss without the acknowledgment of the subfield of Industrial and Organizational Psychology within the larger field of psychology as a whole. Industrial and Organizational Psychology (I/O Psychology) has its roots in social psychology, or the study of groups, the field defined itself in 1965 as “the scientific study of the relationship between man and the world of work” (Guion, 1965).

According to the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, APA Division 14, the subfield itself is defined by the “scientific study of the workplace” which includes the understanding of employees and their personalities, but is not exclusively or primarily focused on them. Often they can focus on other aspects of the workplace such as managerial styles, motivation, and efficiency as a part of overall workplace functioning with optimal productivity (Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 2009). While this subfield within psychology, and its use of personality assessments, is important to acknowledge and understand, the view of this research is attempting to understand some of these concepts within a counseling psychology framework, where the emphasis is on the function of the individual, not the workplace.

Personality measures are increasingly utilized in personnel selection (Hough & Schneider, 1996). In fact, over the last twenty years, the United States in particular has seen a sharp rise in the use of personality tests in a broad spectrum of vocational settings (Ones & Anderson, 2002). The use among employers for hiring purposes in particular has dramatically increased (Hodgkinson & Payne, 1998; Ryan, McFarland, Baron & Page, 1999; Shackelton & Newell, 1994). This dramatic increase of personality testing followed a period of significant downturn in the use of instruments in vocational settings after some studies showed overutilization and troubles with usefulness in the 1960s and 1970s (Guion & Gottier, 1966). These negative views of objective personality assessment instruments in vocational settings had a significant impact until the re-evaluations of Banick & Mount (1991) and several others paved the way for the reintroduction of objective measurements and their particular usefulness (Hough, Eaton, Dunnette, Kamp, & McCloy, 1990; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993).

Studies have shown that one of the previous problems with personality assessments in vocational settings in the past is the use of clinical populations or deviance-based assessment (Hogan, 1994). Hogan (1994) made a significant argument that for vocational personality assessment and testing to endure and be beneficial, the focus would need to shift away from deviance, and seek out norms established within the general, rather than the clinical, population. Hogan (1994) also found that service-oriented personality tests (such as those used in most vocational settings where employees are asked to interact with the public) are valid as predictors for later service behaviors. This research helps provide support for the notion that quality service and pro-organizational behaviors may be due in part to personality characteristics, which can then be selected in applicants before employment and training begin (Bowen, Siehl, & Schneider, 1989). The implied impact of selecting such individuals would be evident at levels throughout the organization. Ideally, employees will be more efficient, consumers would be happier, and organizations would be more productive as a whole (Baydoun, Rose, and Empernado (2001).

Vocational personality assessment has a number of personality assessments which are widely used within the field, with most drawing their construction from the Big Five personality traits. A number of meta-analyses (Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001; Hogan & Holland, 2003; Judge, Bono, Ilies & Gerhardt, 2002) have established the scientific validation of the relationship between the Big Five traits and job performance. Most significantly, conscientiousness, emotional stability in particular, generalize in the prediction of overall performance. These traits drawn upon an individual's willingness to follow rules and to exert effort (conscientiousness) and the ability to allocate resources to accomplish job tasks (emotional stability). Barrick and Mount (2005) described these as the "will do" motivational components of work, and distinguish

them from general mental ability, which also affects work performance and is seen as the “can do” component of job capability. Vocational personality assessments measure a number of “will do” components as well as some elements that an individual reports that they particularly enjoy doing.

The other three traits of the Big Five: Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Openness to Experience have also been validated scientifically as predictors of performance (Barrick and Mount, 2005), but only in specific placements. For example, Extraversion has been found to be a significant predictor when the job requires large amounts of interaction with others, particularly when the focus is on influencing (Barrick et al, 2001). Agreeableness has also been validated as important in jobs which require significant social interaction, but in this case it’s only predictive when the social interaction mostly involves helping, nurturing, and cooperating, such as the job skills required by teachers, therapists, and caseworker (Mount et al., 1998). Openness to Experience has been found to be related to creativity and influences the ability to adapt to change (Georga & Zhou, 2001; LePine, Colquitt, & Erez, 2000). Vocational Personality Assessments which are based on the Big Five traits also benefit from the studies which show small to nonexistent mean score differences between racial and ethnic groups (Hough, Oswald & Plovhart, 2001; Mount & Barrick, 1995). These measurements are then more appropriate for use within a diverse workforce because of the applicability of the model.

The Current State of Social Services

As previously noted, social services work and its mission is rapidly changing (White, 2004). In part, caseworkers must attempt to serve a population which is growing numerically, in diversity, and complexity. The increase in diverse populations, including people of color, elderly

people, and people with disabilities, as well as the widening income gap and the decrease in funding towards public welfare initiatives are influencing client needs (Bocage, Homonoff, & Riley, 1995; Ferguson, 1996; Gutierrez & Nagda, 1996; Hasenfeld, 1996). Functionally, this often means that caseworkers who are coming out of training programs are frequently not adequately prepared for the needs of their clients, given the significant gap between training and practice.

The model in which social work interventions are implemented is also shifting towards a medical model of empirically supported interventions as the treatment plan of choice for caseworkers (Institute of Medicine, 2001). Empirically supported treatments can involve manualized treatment and de-emphasize the discretion of the caseworker, or the relationship between the caseworker and client. Theoretically, this could create some dissonance between those caseworkers who had come into the field desiring individual relationships with their clients, and also those who wanted to further develop their own personalized interventions. This shift towards a medical model of empirically supported interventions has some workers within the field very concerned (White, 2004). Lewis (2003) noted that continuing knowledge development, at least in part through research, is the responsibility of everyone working within the social work field at every level. However, others were quick to argue that those typically conducting the research which aims to develop empirically supported interventions are often researchers within academic settings who rarely call upon practitioners within the field to critically examine evidence based results (Wheeler & Goodman, 2007).

A secondary problem is that of the generation of data for the tracking of results and accountability within agencies. Johnson and Sawbridge (2004) indicate that the data of this kind tends to be focused on outputs (i.e., how many clients are we serving at this moment?) as

opposed to outcomes (i.e., how many clients have we served who will now no longer need our services in the future because we have met short and long term goals?). And that this output focused data tends to be more useful in investigating problems than helping to solve them.

In addition, the workforce in social services itself is becoming more diverse and managers themselves are trying to be more responsive of the needs of the workforce by including training on awareness, hiring and retention plans, and improving outreach to diverse populations (Ferguson; Fong & Gibbs, 1995; Hyde, 1998; Iglehart & Becerra, 1995). Some researchers have proposed that, with the rapid shifts within the social work environment, the research is not being generated fast enough, nor interventions implemented quickly enough, to adequately address the needs of the clients or the workers (Hyde, 2004).

While the face of social services and the needs of clients have changed, the values of those engaged in social services have also changed. Reeser and Epstein (1987) noted the those engaged in social services work had drifted away from what had previously been seen as the “traditional mission” of helping to serve the poor and into realms of private practice and psychotherapy. This shift in values may also reflect a growing discouragement of caseworkers whose ability to intervene in meaningful ways and to access resources has been compromised by the need to track information and produce a tangible product in terms of a reduction in the number of individuals receiving services (Parker-Oliver & Demitrius, 2006). It is in this way that we see the recursiveness of the larger system influencing the subsystems of individuals. Those who originally were committed to the field of social services end up turning away because of the dynamic interaction between themselves and the larger system, often taking with them negative impressions of the larger agency as well as the clientele which they serve. Cryns (1977) illustrated this point when his study was able to demonstrate that students in graduate social

work programs were more likely to attribute poverty to individual flaws rather than societal problems, and that they were more likely to attribute in this way than their undergraduate counterparts. This directly reflects the disillusionment that seemingly occurs between the completion of undergraduate work, some element of professional experience, and the return to graduate school.

Similar studies have shown that of those returning to graduate school to pursue social work, more students returned to increase the opportunity for entering into private practice rather than for return to public service (Butler 1990; Bogo, Raphael, and Roberts, 1993). The existing research clearly demonstrates a gap which has been recognized within the field, that those who are more highly educated often leave the public service in favor of working in private practice, therefore leaving jobs vacant that may be filled by less educated and less experienced professionals. Spect (1991) noted that when individuals leave public service to engage in private practice they further distance themselves from the problems, clients, and agencies which they were meant to serve. Others argued against this prospective, instead choosing to support the notion that those who enter into private practice are expressing a need for greater autonomy and control over themselves and their workplace (Barker, 1991). While there have been many explanations for high turnover rates, one of the primary reasons cited is “burnout”.

Burnout

As previously noted, the concept of burnout emerged as a concept from the 1960s which referred to the effects of excessive drug use on the individual. These effects commonly included lethargy, inattentiveness, and lack of motivation. As this concept has been appropriated into the professional lexicon by Freudenberger (1974), it has grown in popularity in professional and

academic research circles (Maslach & Leiter, 2005; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Initial research on burnout regarded it as a psychological syndrome which is a response to chronic interpersonal stress on the job (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). However, not everyone has agreed with the concept of burnout as it has evolved over time. Johnson (1988), a physician, noted that he believed that burnout did not exist and had become a socially appropriate and acceptable way of saying “I give up” or avoiding responsibility of work. He surmised that if burnout was a legitimate syndrome, it would likely have a correlation with known stress hormones. He noted that there were two studies in which the concept of burnout had been dismissed because the condition was reported in individuals but was not substantiated by the presence of catecholamines in the urine of those who reported the burnout. He concluded that because the stress hormones had not been detected, the individuals were not experiencing true burnout. In searching for an explanation for his results, he generated the idea of blaming burnout as a socially appropriate way of avoiding responsibility. However, despite his conclusions, research on burnout continued and generally has been accepted as a valid experience and psychological syndrome (Maslach and Leiter, 2008). On an interesting note, other researchers have been able to attribute patterns of illness and other physiological symptoms to burnout. Leiter and Maslach (2000) were able to demonstrate that those who experienced burnout showed a pattern of health problems such as headaches, gastrointestinal disorders, hypertension, increased incidents of cold/flu and sleep problems.

Although we are currently working to understand the exact ways in which burnout affects individuals, research has been able to identify its basic components. Early research identified three basic components to burnout: exhaustion, cynicism (depersonalization) and inefficacy (reduced personal accomplishment). Exhaustion, which has both emotional and physical

indicators, is the most commonly reported symptom, as well as the most commonly studied component of burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 2008). It refers to the experience of being emotionally and physically depleted of resources. Exhaustion is also considered the basic individual experience of burnout. Individual who experience emotional exhaustion often describe that they feel “tired” and/or “wiped out”. They may also display other symptoms associated with depression such as social withdrawal and increased sadness. Conversely, cynicism, or depersonalization represents the interpersonal nature of the burnout. It refers to the negative, callous, or excessively detached response to various aspects of the job. For example, a nurse who was experiencing a high degree of cynicism may say to a coworker, “Why can’t that patient just shut up about her pain?”, displaying a significantly detached view of the patient’s experience. Inefficacy or reduced accomplishment refers to a self evaluation dimension of burnout and contains feelings of lack of accomplishment and incompetence (Maslach and Jackson, 1981; Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter, 1996). This is a common aspect which is referred to in social work research, the concept that an individual is working hard, but experiences no sense of personal or professional accomplishment (Leippen-Christensen, 2005). It is the inefficacy which is then continually less reinforcing, on an existential level, for the individual completing the work (Pines & Yanai, 2001).

Maslach (1993) brought these concepts together within a three dimensional model which places the individual experience within the social context of the workplace and reflects the evaluation of both self and others. Again, this view is based, at least somewhat, in a systemic perspective, accounting for the dynamic and recursive relationship between the individual and the larger system. Current research suggests that there is a continuum of experiences as individuals interact with their jobs. This continuum extends from engagement (on the positive

end) to burnout (on the negative end). Within the continuum there are three interrelated dimensions of exhaustion-energy, cynicism-involvement, and inefficacy-efficacy (Maslach and Leiter, 2008). Newly generated research is attempting to identify some of the emotional precursors to burnout, which may include frustration (Lewinowsky, 2003).

Current research is now attempting to define the complex relationships and relevant factors associated with burnout in many career fields, particularly within social services. A meta-analysis of 25 studies by Barak, Nissy, and Levin (2001) studied “intention to quit/leave” among child welfare, social welfare, and human services workers. They found that there were statistically significant relationships between demographic factors, professional perceptions, and organizational factors and turnover within these fields. Burnout was found to be one of the single best predictors of turnover. It therefore becomes essential to discover the relevant factors which may be associated with burnout in order to impact turnover within the social services field.

Organizational Variables and Burnout

The major sources of burnout have previously been identified in three major categories (a) individual variables (b) involvement with people and (c) organizational variables (Cherniss, 1980, Maslach, 1982). Individual variables refer to demographic or personality characteristics that the individual brings into the job which affects how they will cope with stress. At the individual level, interventions for burnout often involve therapy or increased training. Jobs requiring lots of social interaction have also been found to be associated with burnout. It is often difficult or impossible to intervene in this area because the nature of the job involves client contact. Some interventions can include increasing job diversity or role rotation so that client

contact is alternated with other aspects of a given position. However, to remove the element of client contact would incidentally remove the fundamental purpose of entering into a helping profession. Organizational variables are seen as those functions of the employer or setting which may contribute to burnout.

By far the best studied elements surrounding burnout, are the systemic or organizational variables which influence an individual's course. Overall, the role ambiguity, lack of institutional support, and unrealistic or overwhelming workloads have all been clearly associated with an increase in burnout and job turnover (Barak, Nissy, & Levin, 2001; Jayaratne and Chess 1984; Jolma 1990; Siefert et al. 1991; Schaefer and Moos 1996; Blankertz and Robinson 1997). Lack of institutional support and overwhelming workloads can have an intersection with budgetary issues within the organization (Eaton, 2002). Institutional support often has not only to do with the emotional support which is available from supervisors and administrators, but also with their ability to support caseworkers through access to resources and training. Additional training and support activities such as luncheons can be seen as "frivolous" when budgets need to be cut. Workloads often increase during times of budgetary crisis as well, either because of hiring freezes or layoffs. While not always directly related, budgetary problems and increasing need for access to social services can be correlated the economic situation in a city, state, or nation (Zedlewski, 2008).

Organizational variables are seen as incredibly impactful because policies developed and implemented by the institution affect all members of the organization (Perlman & Hartman, 1982). Role conflict and role ambiguity have already been found to be impactful organizational variables in burnout (Cherniss, 1980). Role conflict is described as role demands that are inconsistent with either the helper's abilities, goals, values and/or beliefs. Examples of this can

include caseworkers being asked to find ways to reduce or terminate client benefits, which may stand in contrast to their values of wanting to maximize the benefits that clients are able to access. Role ambiguity occurs when the employee lacks the information necessary to adequately perform the job. For example, a caseworker may not recognize community resources, or be properly trained to help clients access those resources, and yet an essential part of the job might be making those connections. The caseworker may remain confused about his or her role in those particular situations, whether the job requires or supports having caseworkers make those connections. These two aspects have been described together as “role stress” (Halliway & Wallinga, 1990).

In a study by Holloway and Wallinga (1990) found that the organizational variables of perceived adequacy of salary in relationship to stress on the job was a significant predictor of burnout in child life workers. They noted that even though the majority of salaries were neither extremely high nor extremely low, the perceived adequacy or inadequacy was predictive. Therefore implying that the stress endured may need to be in balance with the financial compensation. They also found that the individuals’ perception of his or her ability to meet the demands of the job was predictive of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment (Holloway & Wallinga, 1990).

In addition, other factors which have been associated with a high degree of burnout in social services occupations include: conflict with coworkers and supervisors, value conflict between the individual and the organization, lack of clarity, and budgetary problems (Eaton, 2002; Decker & Borgen, 1993; Siefert, Jayaratne, Davis-Sacks & Chess, 1991; Snapp, 1992). Gomez (1995) found that caseworkers also tend to become frustrated when there is more time spent with paperwork than with clients.

Studies have found that those who remain engaged in public social service have significantly higher levels of support from peers, coworkers, and supervisors (Jayarante & Chess, 1984; Koeske & Kirk, 1995). Lum et al. (1998) found that when employees believe that the organization's policies and procedures are fair and just, they are more likely to stay committed to the job itself and less likely to report burnout. It is also important to note that pay itself does not appear to be a directly predictive factor; however, pay adequacy has been found to be important. It still seems most influential that workers feeling their intrinsic value of their job tasks has consistently been identified as important (Blandertz & Robinson).

Age, Years of Service, and Burnout

Research has indicated that across several professions there is a significant negative correlation between age and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, as measured by the MBI (Randal, 2007; Rutledge & Francis, 2004). These results have been generated across several fields of study including the clergy, teachers, public servants, law enforcement, and those working in public welfare (Bartz & Maloney, 1986; Jackson, Barnett, Stajich, & Murphy, 1993; Lee & Ashforth, 1991; Price & Spence, 1994). As of yet, no relationship between age and personal accomplishment has been identified (Rutledge & Francis, 2004). This is to say that those who are older tend to report lower amounts of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, as compared to their younger colleagues.

Some of the theories generated to explain this phenomena state that those who experience emotional exhaustion and depersonalization at a younger age tend to leave their profession in search of another job. Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) call this “survival bias”—“... those who burn out early in their careers are likely to quit their jobs, thus selecting for older

respondent[s] with lower levels of burnout”’. (p. 410). The more time an individual spends in a people-oriented emotionally demanding profession, the more likely they are to develop appropriate coping strategies which help them effectively handle the stress and divert burnout. Other theories suggest that those who are older are better able to pace themselves and handle difficult and ambiguous roles, as well as balance their own needs against the needs of a profession simply by virtue of having a greater perspective and life experience (Randal, 2004).

Both age and gender have been associated with workplace frustration and burnout. However, inadequate skills and lack of experience may explain the age differences in levels of burnout, as younger workers are more likely to be inexperienced (Koeske & Kirk, 1995; Rowe 2000). Female workers compose a large percentage of the person-centered working population and may present their own particular problems because they are socialized to be “other focused” (Worrell and Remer, 1998). It is this socialization which is harmful to a woman’s ability to communicate needs for support, in particular (Davidson & Forester, 1995; Gilligan, 1982). Therefore, in examining this phenomena it may be important to implement interventions which are sensitive to the gender and sex-role identity expectations which are in place within our society.

Similarly to age and burnout, there is evidence to suggest that years of service is also negatively correlated with burnout (Randal, 2007; Courdes & Dougherty, 1993; Loo, 1994). Studies by Randal (2007) and Prout (1996) found this phenomena to be particularly true among members of the clergy. Fewer years of service was discovered to be significantly correlated to burnout. However, in a national sample of caseworkers engaged in social service work, it was found that there was an inverse correlation between age and years of service and burnout only in those caseworkers who were engaged in social services within the private sector. Those

caseworkers employed within public social service did not see the evidence of the same inverse correlation (Schwartz, Taimayiu, & Dwyer, 2007). It should be noted that relatively few studies separate the dimensions of age and years of service, instead primarily choosing to measure age and inappropriately utilizing that as a measure of years of service (Randal, 2007).

Education and Burnout

The research on education's correlation with burnout is widely variable. Education has been found to be a somewhat protective factor against burnout in several professions. A study by Soars, Grossi, and Sundin (2007) found that women with high burnout rates tended to be younger, less educated, more financially strained, with greater somatic and health complaints, working more "blue collar" jobs in which their environment was higher demand and lower control, as compared to women who were experiencing relatively low burnout. Some of the variables identified by this study are particularly confounding because individuals with higher education tend to be able to obtain better paying jobs, thereby making them more financially stable. Education is also associated with prestige and control, offering women with more education opportunities to work in environments which offer the women more control over their job. This study is limited given that it was only conducted on women, but has some inherent validity in that it replicates findings from other studies (Hallsten & Bracken, 1995; Hallsten et al, 2002; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998; Soares & Grossi, 1999).

However, there is some differential research which suggests that those who are younger and more highly educated may in fact turnover earlier than their counterparts (Kiyak et al., 1997; Manlove & Guzell). Todd and Deery-Schmidt (1996) found that education was predictive of burnout and job turnover among child care workers. They found that those individuals who were

more highly educated and less trained within the job itself were more likely to burnout and consider leaving than their less educated colleagues. It is because of these widely varying results that we generate research specific to the field of social services which measures demographic factors such as age, years of service, and education as it is associated with job burnout.

Child Protective Services, Economic Support Services and Burnout

The questions as to the impact of child protective services work versus other types of social services work on burnout as yet remains unexamined (Barak, Nissy, and Levin, 2001). Several pieces of research have specifically examined the role of child protective services work in burnout, but none has yet to directly compare it to other types of social services work (Drake & Yadama, 1996; Stalker, Harvey, Frensch, Mandell, & Adams, 2007). However, it is common within literature to assume that those working within child protective services have a more inherently stressful job and are therefore at higher risk for burnout. A quote from the Handbook for Child Protection Practice (2001) illustrates the point, “The front line caseworker has undoubtedly the most challenging job of all of the professionals involved”. (p. 681). It is true that those working within child protective services are at a higher risk for developing vicarious or secondary trauma (Perron & Hiltz, 2006). Because of this, a “veteran” child protective services worker is one who is considered to have worked in the field for more than two years (Coleman & Clark, 2003). However, it also must be noted that there are studies which document the phenomena of child protective services workers who are simultaneously reporting several symptoms of burnout in addition to a high degree of job satisfaction (Stalker, Mandell, Frensch, Harvey, and Wright, 2007). This is generally attributed to a high degree of commitment to the profession as well as a heightened sense of personal accomplishment (Stalker, Mandell, Frensch,

Harvey, & Wright, 2007). In a study by Reagh (1994), it was found that those who continued specifically in the work of child protective services referenced feeling “called” into the profession or exhibited other evidence of existential fulfillment which was essential to their ability to guard against burnout.

While some of these same studies have been replicated with samples including caseworkers engaged in other types of social service, they have yet to be directly compared to examine the effect of burnout on child protective service caseworkers versus economic support service caseworkers.

Personality Variables in Caseworkers and Burnout

While many have suggested that those who are highly social and empathetic are inherently well matched within social services work, some have suggested that those same characteristics leave individuals vulnerable to burnout (Miller, Stiff, & Ellis, 1988). Empathy has to do with the ability to appropriately understand and react to the emotional needs of another person; however, empathy can also be highly associated with emotional contagion, which is the development of a parallel emotional state to the individual to which you are attempting to be empathetic (Coke et al., 1978; Still et al., 1988). In order for empathy to remain prosocial and not emotionally exhaustive, one must remain at least somewhat compassionately detached (Leif & Fox, 1963). Maslach (1982) describes the particular quandry of empathy as such:

“Understanding someone’s problems and seeing things from his or her point of view should enhance your ability to provide good service or care. However, the vicarious experience of that person’s emotional turmoil will increase your susceptibility to emotional exhaustion. Emotional empathy is really a sort of weakness or vulnerability rather than a strength. The person whose feelings are easily aroused (but not

necessarily easily controlled) is going to have far more difficulty in dealing with emotionally stressful situations” (p. 70).

And therefore, while empathy is almost a necessity for an individual entering into social services, it is also equally important that those individuals develop compassionate detachment or else risk early emotional exhaustion, and possibly early burnout.

There is also research which indicates a significant correlation between burnout and some other personality factors, such as anxiety, depression, and nonsupport, as measured by the Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI), in high stress public service employment such as firefighting (McCall, 2002). Other studies have been quick to point out individual differences, such as locus of control, to be predictive of burnout and turnover (Spector & Michaels, 1986). It was found that those with an internal locus of control tended to have greater commitment to the job, a larger sense of personal accomplishment as measured by the MBI, and therefore a lower level of burnout (Spector & Michaels, 1986).

The broad personality construct neuroticism (anxiety) has been continually studied for their association with burnout. Neuroticism, or anxiety, has been established as a trait which can predict a vulnerability to stress and burnout (Endler & Edwards, 1982; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985; Burke & Greenglass, 1996; Brown, Pashantham, & Abbott, 2003). Some studies have found evidence to suggest an inverse correlation between an individual’s level of adjustment and burnout (Pierce et al., 1997). However, these findings have not yet been clearly defined within current research. Holloway and Wallinga (1990) found that child life workers, who often have similar tasks as caseworkers in social services although they operate within a hospital setting, found the personality concept of “rigidity” to be correlated with the intensity of depersonalization toward their clients. That is, those workers who were more rigid tended to

have a greater belief that the clients were to blame for their own problems. The authors postulated that this might have to do with the job often requiring the change of the workers' plans to adapt to the needs of the client on a moments notice. The authors stated the future importance of studying personality factors as they are associated with burnout.

The difficulty with discerning the current research for correlations between personality factors and burnout is that the literature often lumps broad categories of public service or human services work with social services work (Barak, Nissy, & Levin, 2001). Although all of these categories of work have been found to be highly demanding and emotionally taxing, they are still very different in the type of service delivery with varying levels of skills, abilities and education requirements. With this knowledge, we must then begin to extract social services work from the larger "public service" umbrella and examine the profession of social services independently.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Participants

Participants (n = 40) were recruited from the social work agencies within a specific ten county region in a large southeastern state. Caseworkers within this region serve a diverse population, with relatively equal service delivery to majority and minority clients. Participants represented a range of ages, races, ethnicities, cultures, educational backgrounds, training, and positions within the agency (see table 4). Ages ranged from 21 to 59. Participants were also asked to identify the race/ethnicity/or cultural background with which they most closely identify via a write-in section rather than a forced choice selection. Of those participants, 31 identified as Caucasian, three identified as African American, two identified as Latino/a, one identified as biracial, and one participant did not report. Years of service within the agency were similarly reported, with reports ranging from six months of service upwards to 20 years. Educational level was also indicated, with participants indicating a high school diploma, a bachelor's degree, or a graduate degree. Participants were also asked to report their departmental affiliation as primarily with the Office of Financial Independence (OFI) or with Child Protective Services (CPS). OFI and CPS had very similar numbers of participants in the study, with 19 individuals identifying themselves as being affiliated with OFI, and 21 as affiliated with CPS. The intention was to include as broad a cross section of individuals working within the social service agency in direct service and to reflect the growing diversity within the field itself, as has been documented by the literature (Ferguson; Fong & Gibbs, 1995; Hyde, 1998; Iglehart & Becerra, 1995).

Institutional Approval. Prior to the conduct of this research approval was obtained from the county directors of the particular region utilized. The University of Georgia Institutional

Review Board also approved the protocol associated with this study. All members of the research team had been associated with an assessment project which provided low cost psychological evaluations of clients to caseworkers within this social work agency region. All research team members held a Master's Degree in some area of Counseling and were at least second year doctoral students in Counseling Psychology. The educational background and previous training and association with the assessment project assured that all members of the research team were able to respond to inquiries as appropriate and handle any crises as they may arise.

Recruitment. Participants were recruited via the county directors of the social work agency. Participation was entirely voluntary and no compensation or incentives were offered. Participants self selected into the study conditions. Participants represented all areas of public social services work including child protective services and economic support services. Participants also represented all educational levels including high school diploma, two year college education, four year college education, and graduate education. The only criteria for inclusion was employment in the social services arena (e.g., not support or administrative staff) within the county region. This was an attempt to capture those individuals who work in direct service with clients, with an emphasis on those who may most closely interact with clients and those whose education, training, personal characteristics, and attitudes may most directly effect the client through the case worker-client relationship as well as the aspect of treatment planning. While support staff are often called upon to interact with clients (helping them fill out forms, answering general questions, etc.) they are not a part of ongoing case management and treatment planning and therefore may not be interacting with clients in the ways in which burnout would be most impactful for the client experience.

Intervention Conditions.

All participants were administered the assessments after the completion of a regularly scheduled staff meeting. Since the design of the study is correlational in nature, no experimental or comparison groups were needed and random assignment was not used.

Assessment Procedure. All experimental group participants were administered the assessments after a brief introduction to the requirements of the study and informed consent. All participants signed the informed consent form before the distribution of materials or beginning of the study. Those who had other obligations or chose not to participate were able to leave the room. The assessment took approximately 45 minutes and administered in a large training room at the agency location. As needed, participants were given the option of returning to their offices to complete the instruments. Participants were not compensated for their participation. There was no penalty associated with choosing not to participate in the data collection. Those individuals who chose to participate in the research were asked to fill out a consent form acknowledging that their responses were going to be collected for research, as well as noting the anonymous nature of their responses.

Assessment Instruments

Demographic Form. Participants were asked to fill out a demographic data form which included information about age, race/ethnicity/cultural identity, affiliation within the public agency (i.e., child protective services or economic support services), number of years of service within the agency, and level of education. Participants were asked to fill out these responses with free-handed, rather than forced choice responses. Participants were asked not to put any personally identifying information on their responses (i.e., names, office numbers, etc.).

Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) (Hogan and Hogan, 1992). The Hogan Personality Inventory is a 206-question self-report inventory which contains seven primary scales: Adjustment, Ambition, Sociability, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Prudence, Inquisitiveness, and Learning Approaches. It also contains six “occupational scales” which include service orientation, stress tolerance, reliability, clerical potential, sales potential, and managerial potential. The scales are detailed in the Hogan Personality Inventory Manual. The manual states:

“the HPI is designed as a measure of normal personality as observed in the work environment, the HPI is used to facilitate personnel selection, individualized assessment, development, and career-relation decision-making. The HPI provides information regarding what is called the ‘bright side’ of personality – characteristics that appear during social interactions that can facilitate (or inhibit) a person’s ability to get along with other and to achieve his or her goals” (3).

The Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) was designed based on the California Psychological Inventory (CPI; Gough, 1975) and based on the socioanalytic theory of behavior. Briefly, when applied to work relationships, it is suggested that individuals have two very broad goals, to “get along” – as humans are group living animals with culture, and to “get ahead” or achieve status within or above other group members. Socioanalytic theory studies the interpersonal effectiveness of the strategies which individuals use to achieve these goals.

From the basis of the CPI, Hogan developed Homogeneous Item Composites (HICs) or subconcepts of larger factors. For example, on the scale of Adjustment, the HICs of Empathy, Non-anxiousness, Calmness, Trusting, and Good Attachment are all thought to cluster together within Adjustment. Statistical analysis showed that in fact these HICs do load onto the larger scale of Adjustment (Hogan & Hogan, 2007). Items were carefully designed so that the HICs loaded onto only one subscale. An initial factor analysis in 1992 led to the initial seven HPI

scales. A confirmatory factor analysis was performed in 2005 utilizing all 156,614 respondent records available and found that based on the RMSEA of 0.59 (with 90% confidence interval) the authors concluded that “for all practical purposes, the model provided a reasonable fit to the data” (Hogan & Hogan, 2007, p.27).

The examination of individual scales is designed as an integral part of this study, and therefore, the knowledge of what the scales purport to measure is essential. The scale of Adjustment measures composure under pressure, stress tolerance, and optimism. Sample items from this scale include, “Deadlines don’t really bother me” and “I keep calm in a crisis”. Ambition measures the exhibition of self confidence, initiative, competitiveness and persistence. “I want to be a success in life” and “In a group I like to take charge of things” are sample items within this ambition scale. The Sociability scale notes that those who score highly are seen as extraverted, gregarious, and with a need for social interaction. Examples of items in the Sociability scale include, “I like a lot of variety in my life” and “Being a part of a large crowd is exciting”.

In contrast, Interpersonal Sensitivity measures the exhibition of warmth, charm, and the desire and ability to maintain relationships. Items such as “I work well with other people” and “I always try to see other people’s point of view” are examples from this subscale. Prudence is designed to grasp the importance the individual places on self-control, detail orientation, and conscientiousness. Some sample items for this scale measure diligence and perfectionism, ex. “I always practice what I preach” and “I strive for perfection in everything I do”. Those who score highly on Inquisitiveness are seen as exhibiting imagination, curiosity, and creative potential. They are often seen as analytical, and stimulus seeking. Examples of items include “I have taken things apart to see how they work” and “I enjoy solving riddles”. The final scale is learning

approaches, which identifies the degree to which an individual enjoys academic activities, or prefers “hands on learning”. Examples of items include “I can multiply large numbers quickly” and “As a child, school was easy for me”.

The secondary, or occupational scales are designed to evaluate an individual’s interest in performing specific activities within work roles. These occupational scales were designed out of the recognition of overall “job families” or groups of occupations having similarities based on skills, education, training, and work performed. The “job families” were based on the “job classifications” used by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for the United States. Examples of such families include “Technicians & Specialists Job Family” and “Sales & Customer Support”, “Managers and Executives”, etc. (Hogan & Hogan, 2007). Hogan & Hogan began research in 2004 to validate the HPI’s use within job families and establish its validity. Since then, the Hogan Archive has established over 200 criterion-related validity studies assessing the relationship between HPI scores and job performance (Hogan & Hogan, 2007). Validity was then meta-analyzed for particular jobs and corrections were made for sampling error, unreliability of measures, and range restriction.

The occupational scale of Service Orientation is taken from the “Service and Support” job family, which identifies a cluster of jobs where individuals provide protective (e.g., police, firefighters, etc.) and non-protective (food service, professional and personal services) services to others. It identifies an individual’s desire to be attentive and courteous to customers. Stress Tolerance indicates a persons’ ability to handle stress in an even tempered and calm way. Reliability measures honest, integrity, and organizational citizenship. Clerical potential was drawn from the “Administrative & Clerical” job family that identifies those jobs where individuals plan, direct or coordinate supportive services as well as compile documents and

organize accounts and figures. It specifically identifies those individuals who particularly enjoy following directions and paying close attention to detail.

Sales Potential is taken from the “Sales & Customer Support” job family. These jobs require employees to be responsible for selling or supporting products and services through interaction with prospective and actual clients. This subscale attempts to identify those who have high degree of energy, social skills, and problem-solving ability, specifically related to customers. Finally, managerial potential is drawn from the “Managers & Executives” job family and describes leadership ability, enjoyment of planning and decision-making.

Items are endorsed by the participant as either true or false. The HPI is commonly used to evaluate employee-job “fit” as well as increase employee self awareness. The HPI is based on socioanalytic theory and is related to other measurements of the Big Five domains. It is highly correlated to other measures of personality including the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PR-I; Costa and McCrae, 1992) and the California Psychological Inventory (CPI Gough, 1987; Johnson, 2000). The HPI is written on approximately a fourth grade reading level. Scores appear to be stable over time. Test-retest reliability was calculated using Cronbach’s alpha $\alpha = .74$ to $.86$ (Hogan & Hogan, 2007). The Hogan Personality Inventory has been utilized in over 400 studies and has consistent scores in validity (Johnson, 2000). The selection of the HPI was an attempt to measure overall job personality as well as provide information about anticipated “fit” between individual and the job.

Of the 206-items loading on to the seven primary scales, scores at the 65th percentile and above are considered “High”, scores between the 36th and 64th percentiles are considered “Average”, scores at the 35th percentile and below are considered “Low” (Hogan & Hogan, 2007). The scales selected for evaluation within this study: Adjustment, Ambition, and

Interpersonal Sensitivity are selected in particular for their importance with caseworkers in social services agencies. For the interpretation of those who score highly in adjustment, they are often able to adjust to fast-paced environments, or heavy workloads, and stay calm under pressure, and do not react negatively to stress (Hogan & Hogan, 2007). These qualities are important because of the documented nature of the fast-paced, emotionally and physically stressful, and heavy workloads associated with caseworkers in public social service agencies (Hyde, 2004).

Ambition is essential to the understanding of burnout because of its relationship to energy, which is often diminished as a result of the process the emotional exhaustion associated with burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 2008). Those who score in the average range or above with respect to ambition tend to take initiative when it comes to task completion, be seen as “good team players” and thrive on achieving results. This is an interesting personality variable to measure and gather information on in relationship to burnout, because it could be seen as offering the possibility of individuals gathering a sense of accomplishment and therefore motivation by their own sense of serving their clients.

The scale of Interpersonal Sensitivity provides information on the degree to which individuals are socially sensitive and perceptive. Those who score within the average to high range tend to be seen as diplomatic, trustworthy, friendly, warm, considerate, and nurturing in relationships. This measure was selected for its basis within the Five Factor Model of personality, which has been shown to have implications and predictive value in the workplace and for its exceptional validity and reliability within the field of vocational assessment (Hogan, 2004; Hogan & Hogan, 2007).

Maslach Burnout Inventory- Human Services Survey (MBI - HSS; Maslach and Jackson, 1981). The MBI-HSS is a 25 item survey which asks respondents to respond to questions about

feelings toward work on a 6-point likert scale (i.e., “I feel burned out about my work”) ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (daily). Each question loads onto one of three scales: Emotional Exhaustion, Cynicism, or inefficacy. The nine items of the emotional exhaustion subscale describe feelings of being overwhelmed emotionally and exhausted by work. The five items of the Depersonalization subscale isolate unfeeling or uncaring and callous attitudes towards recipients. For both of these subscales, higher scores mean higher levels of burnout experienced. There is a moderate correlation between the two subscales, as both measure theoretically similar, but distinct aspects of burnout. The personal accomplishment subscale contains eight items that describe feelings of success and competence at work. This subscale has been established independently and does not load negatively onto the other subscales. Burnout is seen as a progressive syndrome, one in which the person progresses through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and finally ending in decreased personal accomplishment. An individual is considered to be “burned out” when they score within the upper third of the scales for emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and in the lower third for personal accomplishment. However, it is important to note that burnout is conceptualized as a continuous variable, not a dichotomous variable which is either present or absent. For the purposes of this study, each subscale will be examined individually, so as to form a complete picture of burnout as experienced by the individual. The selection of a measure of burnout was essential for this study, given that the research on burnout suggests that those who are experiencing the emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy associated with the syndrome may be less impactful within their given job (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Maslach’s previous research has indicated that burnout can lead to deterioration in quality of care provided by staff (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996). Items for the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) were designed to measure theoretical aspects of burnout syndrome.

Qualitative exploratory research was utilized to construct a picture of how burnout typically appears within an individual. In addition to the qualitative research, numerous previously developed and validated scales were utilized.

Items appear in the form of statements about attitudes and individual personalized feelings. Items use the term “recipients” to describe those for whom the participants provide care or treatment. Originally, the scale incorporated two formats to describe individual experience: feelings and intensity. The inventory was refined over time using factor analysis on samples. Validity and reliability measurements on the MBI are sound, with a reported reliability coefficient of .86 (Maslach and Jackson, 1986).

Reliability was estimated using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha ($n = 1,316$). The reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .90$ for Emotional Exhaustion, $\alpha = .79$ for Depersonalization, and $\alpha = .71$ for Personal Accomplishment. Test-retest reliability has been examined throughout several studies in periods ranging from a few weeks to as much as a year. Longitudinal studies have found a high degree of test-retest reliability within each subscale that does not seem to decrease significantly from a period of one month to one year (Jackson, Schwa & Schuler, 1986; Lee and Ashforth, 1993; Leiter 1990; Leiter and Durup, 1996). This stability further advances the notion that this inventory is measuring burnout as an enduring state (Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter, 1996).

Convergent validity was demonstrated correlations between and individual’s score on the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) and behavioral ratings from someone who knew the individual well. Secondly, scores were correlated with the presence of job characteristics that were expected to contribute to the experience of burnout. Finally, MBI-HSS scores were correlated with measures of outcomes (such as intention to leave/quit, physical

symptomology, depression) which have been hypothesized to be related to the experience of burnout (Maslach, Leiter, and Johnson, 1996).

Proposed Analyses

Effect size was calculated using Cohen's (1988) definition of power. The power of a statistical test is the probability that the will will reject a false null hypothesis, and thus will not make a Type II error. As power increases, the chance of Type II error decreases. Utilizing 40 participants, a medium effect size, $r = .3$, power would be low, approximately 50%. For a large effect size, $r = .5$, power would be high, about 95%. Effect sizes in the medium range, where $r = .37$ would provide a power of approximately 70%, and an effect size of $r = .41$ for a power of 80%. Thus, this study should adequately be able to detect a medium or large effect size with the number of participants assembled.

A correlational analysis will be utilized to assess the degree to which age is correlated with burnout (Hypothesis 1.a.), the degree to which years of service is correlated with burnout (Hypothesis 1.b.), and the degree to which level of education is correlated with burnout (Hypothesis 1.c.). A means test will be utilized to determine what relationship, if any, exists between level of burnout and employment as a child protective services caseworker versus employment as a caseworker employed in economic support services (Hypothesis 1.d.).

In order to examine what relationships, if any, exist between the personality variables of adjustment, ambition, and interpersonal sensitivity, as measured by the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI), and burnout, as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) a correlational analysis will be utilized (Hypothesis 2.a.). A correlational analysis will also be used to examine the relationship between burnout as measured by the

Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) and the occupational scales of orientation, stress tolerance, reliability as measured by the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) (Hypothesis 2.b.). As the literature is suggestive, but not clearly predictive of the direction of the association between burnout and any of the demographic or personality factors, 2-tailed tests of significance will be utilized to investigate all hypotheses.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive statistics for the demographic characteristics of the sample were calculated (table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 40)

Characteristic	n	%
Age at the time of survey		
20-29	16	40
30-39	11	27.5
40-49	8	20
50-59	4	10
Unknown	1	2.5
Race/Ethnicity/Cultural Background		
Caucasian	31	77.5
African American	3	7.5
Latino/a	2	5
Biracial	1	2.5
Unknown	3	7.5
Years of Service		
≥ 1 year	15	37.5
2-5 years	14	35
6-10 years	5	12.5
11-15 years	3	7.5
16-20 years	1	2.5

≤ 20 years	1	2.5
Unknown	1	2.5
Highest Degree Obtained		
High School	7	17.5
College Degree	25	62.5
Graduate Degree	5	12.5
Unknown	3	7.5
Department		
Office of Financial Independence	19	47.5
Child Protective Services	21	52.5

Prior to conducting the primary analyses, predictor and outcome variables were examined to assess for deviation from normal distribution. In examination of the subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) it was determined that the sample collected had greatly elevated burnout scores. Scores for the subscales of Emotional Exhaustion ($t = -7.086$; $p < .01$), Depersonalization ($t = -5.965$; $p < .01$) and Personal Accomplishment ($t = -2.657$; $p < .01$) were significantly higher than the norm group (table 1). In the sample set, the mean scores on the Emotional Exhaustion subscale ($m=29.23$) were above the cutoff for the upper third of the norm group for individuals engaged in social services work (cutoff for upper third ≥ 28), indicating that the participants sampled were highly burned out. The same was found on the Depersonalization subscale ($m=12.54$) and (cutoff for upper third ≥ 11), reflecting an equally high level of burnout. Personal Accomplishment was not as highly endorsed, with the mean of the sample group ($m= 36.14$) staying within the middle third or “average” of the norm sample (table 1) (Maslach, Leiter, & Johnson, 1996).

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for the three subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) Sample Group and Norms Group

Subscale	Sample Group		Norm Group	
	M	SD	M	SD
Emotional Exhaustion	33.71**	10.38	21.35	10.51
Depersonalization	12.54**	6.47	7.46	5.11
Personal Accomplishment	36.14 **	6.18	32.75	7.7

**p < .01

In addition to the mean scores, there was also a restricted range in scores (table 3). Of the 40 inventories collected, at least 18 of those examined, or 48% of the sample had scores which reflected a high degree of burnout, as evidenced by scores within the upper third of established norms in Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization, and scores within the lower third of Personal Accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter, 1996). While literature has clearly established that caseworkers are at an increased risk for burnout, a rate of close to 50% of those sampled having a “high” degree of burnout, is quite surprising (Spect, 1991). A restricted range of scores is one of several possibilities that can influence a sample during research. If research in correlations is meant to be an imperfect way of assessing the “true” relationship between variables in a given population by examining that same relationship within a sample population, ideally that sample is a reflection of the true population of interest (i.e., all caseworkers engaged in public service) and ideally distribution is relatively normal (Warner, 2007). Restricted range or non-normal distribution can lead to an over or underestimating a correlation between variables. A restricted range in scores can indicate another influence at work within the collected

sample, or a bias in collection (Warner, 2007). Possibilities accounting for this restricted range in scores will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

The restricted range and the highly elevated scores demonstrate that the scores gathered may be reflective of a ceiling effect, which possibly a problem with instrumentation. In light of this information, the significance of analyses must be carefully examined to determine if and when these results may be able to be generalized.

Table 3

Frequency of Range of Experienced Burnout

	Low (lower third)	Average (middle third)	High (upper third)
Emotional Exhaustion	3	14	18
Depersonalization	6	18	22
Personal Accomplishment	19	12	4

An examination of the percentile scores of the seven primary and six occupational scales of the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) showed a much more normal distribution in scores. Particularly large standard deviations show a large spread in the scores for most scales. For the sample, means for the primary scales of Sociability, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Inquisitiveness, Learning Approaches and the occupational scales of Service Orientation and Reliability were well within the “average range” or the 36th to 64th percentiles. In the collected sample, no means were in the “high” range or above the 64th percentile. The means for the primary scales of Adjustment, Ambition, Prudence and the occupational scales of Stress Tolerance, Clerical and

Managerial were within the “low” range or below the 35th percentile, as compared to the norm groups (table 4).

It is interesting to note that those scales which are involved with the measurement of adaptation to stress, Adjustment and Stress Tolerance had means in the low range $m = 21.13$ and $m = 9.75$ were particularly low. Stress tolerance had the lowest overall mean, as well as the smallest standard deviation, indicating that not only were the overall scores very low, but they were closely clustered around the 9th percentile as compared to the norm group. As was anticipated, Sociability and Interpersonal Sensitivity had the highest means, with the overall sample having a mean in the 50th and 49th percentiles, respectively.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations of the Seven Primary and Six Occupational Scales of the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) N=40

Scale	Mean	Std. Deviation
Adjustment	21.13	15.07
Ambition	23.03	14.56
Sociability	50.75	31.46
Interpersonal Sensitivity	49.40	26.02
Prudence	32.25	24.35
Inquisitive	39.32	25.49
Learning Approach	43.00	24.98
Service Orientation	36.18	25.28
Stress Tolerance	9.73	7.5
Reliability	36.75	28.80

Clerical	20.35	17.05
Managerial	11.60	10.19

Correlations between the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) subscales were examined and compared to established norms. The results were as anticipated, that Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization were significantly positively correlated with each other and both were negative correlated with Personal Accomplishment (table 5).

Table 5

Correlation for the subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS)

Subscale	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal Accomplishment
Emotional Exhaustion	1	.570**	-.407*
Depersonalization	.570**	1	-.179
Personal Accomplishment	-.407*	-.179	1

**Correlation significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

Cronbach's alpha (α) was calculated for the three subscales of the *Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey* (MBI-HSS). Alphas were found to be adequate. For the subscale of emotional exhaustion $\alpha = 0.89$. $\alpha = 0.75$ for depersonalization, and for the subscale of personal accomplishment, $\alpha = 0.75$. These were found to be in close relationship with

established reliability within the norm sample: in which alphas were found to be: .90 for Emotional Exhaustion, .79 for Depersonalization, and .71 for Personal Accomplishment.

Correlational Analyses

The association between caseworker demographics (i.e., age, years of experience, level of education, and departmental affiliation) and level of burnout as measured by the three subscales of the MBI (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) were analyzed for the first hypothesis utilizing bivariate correlations. Bonferroni corrections were used to correct for multiple correlations.

1. Are there relationships between level of burnout as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) and caseworker demographic characteristics?

a. Is age correlated with any one of the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment) as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS)?

It is predicted that there would be a significant negative correlation between caseworker's age and scores on the subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (Hypothesis 1.a.). To test the hypothesis a bivariate correlation was conducted. Consistent with predictions, age was found to be significantly negatively correlated with Depersonalization $r(39) = -.29, p < .05$. Contrary to hypotheses, age was not correlated with level of Emotional Exhaustion or Personal Accomplishment. Thus, caseworkers' age is not

correlated with level of either emotional exhaustion or personal accomplishment, but is correlated with depersonalization. These findings describe some element in which older caseworkers differ from younger ones with regard to their depersonalization of their clients. It should be noted that this decrease in depersonalization does not directly correlate to an increased feeling of accomplishment either. Therefore, as caseworkers age they may be equally vulnerable to emotional exhaustion, and experience the same feelings of success and/or accomplishment, but they are less likely to increase their impersonal or unfeeling responses to clients.

b. Are years of service in the identified public service agency negatively correlated with burnout?

It is predicted that there will be a significant negative correlation between years of service and scores on the subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (Hypothesis 1.b.). Consistent with the prediction, years of service were negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. However, contrary to prediction, that correlation is not statistically significant. The failure to demonstrate significance, as evidenced by this analysis, may be in part due to the elevated scores, or the ceiling effect. Thus, this study is not able to determine whether or not years of service may serve as a protective factor against burnout as has been referenced in previous research (Randall, 2007).

c. Is the level of education negatively correlated with burnout as measured by any one of the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and burnout) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS)?

It is predicted that level of education will be negatively correlated with burnout as evidenced by scores on any one of the subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment) (Hypothesis 1.c.). Contrary to the stated hypothesis, no statistically significant correlation was found between level of education and the subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS). Given the sample taken, this hypothesis was not able to be tested appropriately because of the 37 full profiles available, 7 had high school diplomas, 25 had bachelor’s degrees, and only 5 had Master’s degrees. Therefore, a statistical analysis was not feasible to provide meaningful analysis.

e. Is there a difference in the level of burnout as measured by any one of the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) between child protective services caseworkers and employment services caseworkers?

It was predicted that there would be a statistically significant difference between caseworkers engaged in economic support services versus those engaged in child protective services in regards to their endorsement of the subscales on the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS). A means test was utilized to examine this hypothesis. The examination of the data revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference between the level of burnout endorsed by caseworkers employed in economic support services as opposed to those employed in child protective services. Therefore, the conclusion is that caseworkers employed in economic support services are equally likely to become burned out as compared to those employed in child protective services.

The second research question sought to examine what relationships, if any, exist between the level of burnout as measured by any one of the subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment) and personality variables as measured by the Hogan Personality Inventory (i.e., adjustment, ambition, interpersonal sensitivity, role orientation, reliability, or stress tolerance).

2. *Are there relationships between level of burnout and caseworker personality variables as measured by the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) and level of burnout as measured by the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS)?*

a. *Are there negative correlations between the personality variables of adjustment, ambition, and interpersonal sensitivity, as measured by the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) and caseworker burnout as measured by any one of the three subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment)?*

It is predicted that there will be a significant inverse correlation between an individual caseworker's adjustment, ambition, and interpersonal sensitivity, as measured by the HPI, and their endorsement of burnout, as measured by the three subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment). Adjustment is utilized to measure an individual's ability to be self

confident and remain calm under pressure. Those who score highly on this scale are confident, resilient, and optimistic. Ambition evaluates the degree to which an individual seeks status or meaningful leadership roles and those who score highly tend to advance quickly. Interpersonal sensitivity reflects social skills and the ability to maintain relationships. Those who score highly on this scale tend to be seen as warm and friendly.

A bivariate correlation was utilized to examine what relationships, if any, exist between caseworker personality variables (i.e., Adjustment, Ambition, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Role Orientation, Reliability, and Stress Tolerance) as measured by the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) and any one of the three subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment). The personality factors of adjustment and ambition were not correlated with any one of the three subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, or Personal Accomplishment). However, consistent with the stated hypothesis, interpersonal sensitivity was significantly positively correlated with personal accomplishment $r(35) = .37, p < .05$ (table 6). Therefore, it was determined that as caseworkers' with higher degrees of interpersonal sensitivity also reported high degrees of perceived accomplishment. This is interesting to consider given that the measure of resilience and optimism (adjustment) was not found to be a protective factor against burnout. However, the interpersonal sensitivity may reflect the ability of the individual to gain a sense of accomplishment from the relationship with a client rather than from the ability to help tangibly.

Table 6

Three Subscales of the MBI (Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment) as correlated to Personality Factors as measured by the HPI

Measure	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal Accomplishment
Adjustment	-.080	.010	-.028
Ambition	-.123	-.076	.154
Interpersonal Sensitivity	.101	.073	.373*

b. Are there negative correlations between the occupational scales of service orientation, stress tolerance, and reliability, as measured by the Hogan Personality Inventory and burnout?

Hypothesis: It is predicted that there will be significant negative correlations between an individual's scores on the occupational subscales of service orientation, stress tolerance, and reliability, as measured by the HPI, and their endorsement of burnout as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS). Service orientation refers to the tendency of an individual to enjoy being polite, attentive, and courteous to customers. This is particularly important within the caseworker population because they are often called upon to interact with challenging clients. Stress tolerance is seen as the ability to be calm under duress. Caseworkers are often called upon to interact with people during incredibly difficult times, such as having children removed from the home, being investigated, or during times of extreme financial hardship. These situations are not only stressful for the clients, but also for the caseworkers, because caseworkers often hold a gatekeeper role and act as a liason between the client and services which may be able to help them. Reliability measures an individual's adherence to honesty, integrity, and desire to be a positive contributing member of an organization.

Contrary to the stated hypothesis, there were no significant correlations found between the personality factors of role orientation, stress tolerance, or reliability as compared to the three subscales (Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, or Personal Accomplishment) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory- Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (table 7). Therefore, it cannot be said that as caseworkers who are more oriented to the position, better able to handle stress, and more reliable, are less likely to experience burnout than other caseworkers who may not hold these same personality characteristics.

Table 7

Three Subscales of the MBI (Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment) as correlated to the Occupational Scales of the HPI

Measure	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal Accomplishment
Service orientation	.045	.142	-.032
Stress Tolerance	.702	.039	-.103
Reliability	-.174	-.034	.055

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Results of this study suggest that further study is needed to make conclusive statements about what relationship, if any, exists between demographic and personality factors and burnout in case workers engaged in social services work. A post hoc power analysis was conducted to determine the power present with the given sample and to provide information for future study. The post hoc power analysis showed .35 effect size, which allows for 66% power. The post-hoc analysis shows that given a relatively larger effect size, the existing sample is more than sufficient for the purposes of the statistical tests being performed. Specifically, the power is relatively close to 80%, given a medium/large effect size. However, if one were to increase the sample size, to say approximately 80 students, one could use a much smaller effect size, while still maintaining 80% power.

In large part, correlations would have been difficult to detect given the greatly elevated nature of individual scores. The nature of the scores may be interpreted as a “ceiling effect” (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999). Ceiling effects refer to problems associated with the upper limits of a dependent measure. In essence, reliability is based on the scores derived from the instrument, and not the instrument itself. Reliability is then ultimately restricted to the types of individuals on whom the test was normed (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999).

Although the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey was normed extensively on a number of human services professions including medical services, education, and social services, it may have been difficult to appropriately group and balance the number of participants who were experiencing the various levels of burnout. This is most commonly seen when the instrument developed is highly sensitive to the midrange differences of what it is designed to

measure, but may be insensitive to the upper range. For example, the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) may be more sensitive to the midrange expression of burnout, but may have trouble teasing out the more subtle aspects of high range burnout. Therefore, although there may have been differences between the experience of burnout in individuals, this instrument might not have been able to detect it.

However, this ceiling effect provided substantial qualitative information about the current state of case workers engaged in social services. It appears that the caseworkers sampled for this study were experiencing extraordinarily high levels of burnout as individuals. Given that the levels of burnout reported by individuals were consistent throughout various demographic and personality factors, this may provide evidence that the level to which they are experiencing burnout-inducing variables at the organizational and systemic levels, such as overwhelming work demands or ambiguous role messages, may exceed the ability of individuals to cope. Given the impact of organizational and systemic factors on burnout, which has already been examined in previous literature, it became essential to discuss the recent changes within the organizational and systemic structure which may have been a component of the greatly elevated scores (Barak, Nissy & Levin, 2001). Shortly before this sample was gathered, several changes took place in the structure of the organization, as well as within the economy at large, which may have greatly impacted the experience of caseworkers.

State of the U.S. Economy

Shortly before this sample was gathered, the United States Economy entered into a recession (National Bureau of Economic Research, Dec., 2008). The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) stated in a report released on December 1, 2008 that the United

States had entered into a recession approximately in December of 2007. The NBER did not note reasons for the recession, but examined relevant information about the labor market, payrolls, personal incomes, wholesale, and retail sales as well as gross domestic product (GDP) to make their determinations. Unemployment increased, and with that, the need for services, particularly food stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and other economic support related services (Zedlewski, 2008). Historically, welfare and public assistance caseloads rise as the country enters into economic crisis, either because parents were not eligible for unemployment insurance or because they have exhausted their benefits (Council of Economic Advisers, 1997). Many state and local governments, including the one from which this sample was gathered, made dramatic cuts to the budget. Because of these budget cuts, the case workers sampled were required to take at least one unpaid furlough day per month; however, their workload was not decreased. In effect, caseworkers were required to take a pay cut. So, as work demand increased, pay decreased. This is particularly relevant given the body of literature on the organizational variables associated with burnout. Lack of institutional support, unrealistic and/or overwhelming workloads have all been associated with burnout and turnover (Barak, Nissy, & Levin, 2001; Jayaratne and Chess 1984; Jolma 1990; Siefert et al. 1991; Schaefer and Moos 1996; Blankertz and Robinson 1997). In addition, budgetary problems have also been associated with a high degree of burnout in social services occupations (Eaton, 2002; Decker & Borgen, 1993; Siefert, Jayaratne, Davis-Sacks & Chess, 1991; Snapp, 1992). This body of research may explain the results gathered within this sample. The greatly elevated burnout scores may reflect the current organizational environment. This study supports the existing literature with the demonstration that caseworkers experience burnout at high levels when the organization is experiencing budgetary problems and the individual experiences an overwhelming or unrealistic

workload, such as has been established with furlough day and the increase in client access to services. The economic recession and budget cuts which followed would be termed a history effect. Such effects occur when an unanticipated and uncontrollable situations affect participants in ways which could potentially influence the results gathered. Although this could be interpreted as a threat to the validity of the study as it was originally constructed, it provides an opportunity for discussion about the influence of these organizational and societal variables as it relates to the concept of burnout in caseworkers.

Significant Findings

Even in consideration of the ceiling effect, some initial correlations were found to be significant. Age was found to be inversely correlated to depersonalization, as was predicted and a significant relationship was found between interpersonal sensitivity and personal accomplishment. However, further analysis with multiple regression showed that there was not predictive relationship between age and depersonalization. This particular correlation may be evidence of what has already been demonstrated within the literature. This particular demonstration of decreased depersonalization correlated with caseworkers' age could potentially be reflective of group factors such as generational differences, although that should be substantiated with further research. No significant associations were found between any of the three scales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) and other demographic such as years of experience, educational level, or in job placement (Child Protective Services versus Economic Support Services), as was originally predicted.

The personality trait of interpersonal sensitivity was significantly and positively correlated to sense of personal accomplishment, as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS). A secondary analysis, utilizing multiple regression, found that the relationship held. Interpersonal Sensitivity was found to be predictive of higher degree of personal accomplishment experienced. Furthermore, no significant correlations were found between the subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) and personality factors such as adjustment, ambition, service orientation, stress tolerance, or reliability.

Reflective place of this study within the established Literature

This study adds to the limited body of literature available about the factors associated with caseworker burnout and the results provide interesting findings about the factors which may be correlated to and possibly predictive of or protective against, caseworker burnout. This study was designed to be consistent with the tenants of counseling psychology, namely, that the understanding of careers as an essential role that each individual fulfills within their own life and within society, must be studied and explored (Sharf, 2005, Aubrey, 1977; Salomone, 1988; Whiteley, 1984). Examining burnout became relevant, in particular, because of the impact that burnout has on the individual and the system (Maslach, 2008). Examining burnout in caseworkers engaged in social service within public agencies is essential because of the impact that these workers have on the great effect on the marginalized populations within our society. Past studies have shown that burnout and turnover in caseworkers is associated with diminished quality, consistency, and stability in social services and child protective services as well as a

increased client distrust of the system (Barak, Nissy, & Levin, 2001; Todd and Deery-Schmitt, 1996; Geurts et al., 1998).

The Significance of this Research within Counseling Psychology

The development of knowledge and understanding of careers is an essential value within counseling psychology (Sharf, 2005). For this reason, extending the knowledge through a study which examines burnout in caseworkers, provides vital information about the current state of caseworkers within the sample gathered. The replication of some previous findings, such as age in relation to depersonalization, offers some insight into possible traits which may be beneficial to note when engaging in career counseling. Also, the finding of interpersonal sensitivity being correlated to increased sense of personal accomplishment also adds to the counseling psychology literature, with particular respect to trait and factor theories, which emphasize such personality characteristics as important in career choice and “fit” (McMahon, 2005). However, when viewed through a systemic and multicultural framework, the results gathered truly come to light. McMahon (2005) discussed the systemic theory as applied to career counseling as providing the ability to examine the ways in which career choices are influenced by content (like personality traits) and process (the role of change over time). The results of this study provide an ability to discuss the ways in which the processes, such as the budgetary and work changes which have developed over time, have possibly influenced caseworkers.

Recently, literature in counseling psychology has called for the addition of research which is aimed at advancing the goals of social justice and the equitable division of resources throughout all populations (Blustein, Elman, & Gerstein, 2001; Eriksen, 1999; Fox, 2003; Jackson, 2000; Lee, 1997; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003; Vera & Speight, 2003). We

understand that the field of social services is shifting, not only in the populations they serve, but also in those who provide services. In recognition of this, the development of culturally informed interventions becomes important (Ferguson; Fong & Gibbs, 1995; Hyde, 1998; Iglehart & Becerra, 1995; Hyde, 2004).

This study demonstrates that those caseworkers in this sample were experiencing a very high degree of burnout, which previous research has established, effects the individual, the organization, and the larger system. Marginalized and minority populations utilize social services at increased rates. It is established that burnout and turnover in social services contributes to diminished quality, consistency, and stability (Barak, Nissy, and Levin, 2001). In addition, client distrust of the system and client stress increases when they are interacting within agencies struggling with burnout and turnover in their employees (Powell and York, 1992; Todd and Deery-Schmitt, 1996; Geurts et al., 1998). This study then serves to inform all those who read it that caseworkers could be having negative effects on the clients which they are employed to serve, as an adjunct to their own individual distress. This study, which had identified some of the relevant factors associated with caseworker burnout, as well as establishing the high degree to which burnout is currently being experienced in the population sampled, informs the counseling psychology literature with respect to the values of multiculturalism, social justice, and career understanding. It provides information which is aimed at informing systemic change within the social services system. It also may serve as a call to counseling psychologists to contribute further research, but also to become advocates to improve and intervene with caseworkers experiencing burnout, both for the sake of the individuals, the populations which they serve.

Demographic Characteristics and their correlates to Burnout

Contrary to previous research, no relationship was discovered between years of service or education and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment. Previous research had suggested that years of service would be negatively correlated with burnout (Randal, 2007; Courdes & Dougherty, 1993; Loo, 1994). Interestingly, a study by Schwartz, Taimayiu, and Dwyer (2007) found that this inverse correlation held only for caseworkers who were engaged in social services within the private sector. The authors found that the correlation did not hold for those engaged in public service, such as those sampled for this study. The interesting finding of age as a correlate only in private sector social services agencies may again reflect some of the organizational variables associated with burnout in caseworkers such as overwhelming workload and budgetary problems (Barak, Nissy, & Levin, 2001).

Similarly to age, no statistical relationship was found between burnout as measured by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment and years of service within the field of social services. It should be noted that previous to this study, relatively few studies separate the dimensions of age and years of service. Instead previous research has primarily chosen to measure age and inappropriately utilized that as a measure of years of service (Randal, 2007). Because this study was one of the first to separate the dimensions of age and years of service, the results of this analysis were highly anticipated. The hope was to be able to separate and discriminate between the two variables in ways that previous research had not. Further study is required to determine any possible relationship between years of service and the subscales of burnout and no conclusions should be made at this time.

As previously noted, given the restricted range of scores and inflated scores in individual responses, the responses were difficult to analyze for statistical significance. No relationship could be seen from the analysis of education as it related to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Previous research on the question was widely variable with some suggesting that those who were younger and more highly educated, but had less years of service within the profession, were more likely to become burned out and leave (Kiyak et al., 1997; Manlove & Guzell). Qualitatively, it is interesting to note that within the sample, there were only five participants, or 12% of the sample, who held degrees beyond the bachelor's level. This sample was believed to be equivalent to other counties. This data, while not contributing to the statistical relevance, is telling for the ability to retain caseworkers who hold advanced degrees. Previous research has noted that those who return to graduate school to obtain advanced degrees in social work are often doing so to move their careers away from public service (Butler 1990; Bogo, Raphael, and Roberts, 1993). In fact, within the gathered sample, we may be seeing the effect of this already established phenomenon.

The comparison of the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment between those caseworkers employed in economic support services and those employed in child protective services yielded particularly interesting results. Previous to this study, it had been generally assumed within the literature that case workers in child protective services experienced a higher degree of burnout, although no studies directly tested this assumption (Drake & Yadama, 1996; Stalker, Harvey, Frensch, Mandell, & Adams, 2007). However, the assumption was not supported in the statistical analysis in this study. The relatively equal levels of burnout experienced between child protective services caseworkers and economic support services case workers may again reflect the influence of greater organizational variables

and their association with burnout. Also, the measure utilized Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) may not have been sensitive enough to differentiate between the emotional experiences of burnout between the two groups. For example, previous research has clearly established that those caseworkers employed in child protective services are at greater risk for developing vicarious traumatic responses (Perron & Hiltz, 2006). This susceptibility to vicarious trauma has not been established in economic support case workers. However, economic support case workers are often called upon to carry higher caseloads and have less resources within the community to access as opposed to child protective services case workers. Therefore, it is possible that child protective services case workers and economic support services case workers are experiencing equal levels of burnout, but they are experiencing them in different ways which were not adequately measured within this study.

Personality Characteristics and their correlates to Burnout

Previous research into the relevant factors associated with burnout often lumped together broad categories of human services work together with social services work (Barak, Nissy, & Levin, 2001). Although all human services work can be difficult and taxing, it was important to examine the specifics of social services workers apart from other human services workers who provide different services which require different skills and education. A study suggested the correlates of anxiety, neuroticism, depression, and nonsupport as measured by the PAI to be correlated with burnout (McCall, 2002). Other studies linked burnout and eventual turnover to internal locus of control (Spector & Michaels, 1986). Contrary to previous research, adjustment and ambition were not found to be associated with the subscales of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment). However, interpersonal sensitivity

was significantly correlated with personal accomplishment. Such that while an individual's level of interpersonal sensitivity increased, so did their perceived experience of personal accomplishment. This is particularly interesting given that previous research had suggested that Adjustment, a variable which has to do with optimism and resilience, was found to be correlated with burnout (Pierce et. al, 1997). This study did not confirm the previous finding, and in fact may suggest that interpersonal sensitivity may be more important to examine closely in the future.

The examination of occupational scales as a part of examining personality factors was introduced in this study. Role orientation, stress tolerance, and reliability were all examined for their relationship to the three subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS). No significant correlations were found for any of the variables studied. The scale of service orientation measures the desire and ability of an individual to be attentive, pleasant, and courteous to customers. While this construct is important across many of the human services industries, it is particularly important to measure for those engaged in social services because they are often called upon to deal with interpersonally challenging clients. The fact that no significant correlation was found may indicate that the desire to be attentive and pleasant when interacting with customers may not serve as a factor associated with burnout.

Stress tolerance measures the ability to handle stress and remain calm. Anecdotal evidence would indicate that this is an essential characteristic of all of those in social services to handle various types of stress with relative ease. However, it is interesting to note that ultimately this sample did not determine that the ability to handle stress is protective against burnout. It is possible to suggest that the ability to handle stress calmly does not directly relate to the experience of burnout, because stress tolerance does not directly protect against increased

emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or decreased personal accomplishment. Alternatively, it may be interesting to consider that the level of stress experienced has exceeded the ability of individuals to cope, given the recent constraints and changes within the system, thereby exceeding the coping skills of even those who are highly tolerant of stress, producing insignificant results.

The occupational scale of reliability directly measures the propensity of the individual to have integrity, be honest, and be a positive member of an organizational culture. Again, no statistically significant relationship was discovered between reliability and the three subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment). This result may contribute to the idea that the desire to be a productive and positive member of an organization does not necessarily describe that the individual is then protected from the emotional effects of the job tasks.

Limitations

1. As previously noted, the small sample size was a limitation within this study. Generally speaking, studies with larger sample sizes have a smaller sampling error than those with smaller samples. A larger sample size would have led to greater sensitivity to detect differences with the hypotheses of these studies, with greater statistical power and smaller confidence intervals. This would have been particularly helpful given that there may have been subtle differences present which were not able to be detected given the number of participants used. In addition, a larger sample size could have allowed for an examination of the possible predictive relationship between the variables. The use of a non-experimental design only allowed for the exploration of

a relationship between the variables, not predictions or causation. This inherently limits the generalizability of the study.

2. A second limitation of this study is the use of self-report measures. The use of self-report measures in occupational and/or career research has been widely debated and criticized over the past decade (Kessler, 1987; Frese & Zapf, 1988; Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991). This is in part because as a part of organizational and career research participants are often asked to report on elements of their personality (ex. traits, likes, dislikes), their work environment (ex. workload), as well as their own responses to the environment (ex. Job satisfaction, physical health, mental health). (Razavi, 2001). Self-report measures are sensitive to response bias, and therefore the analysis and interpretation of the data which is gathered from their use must be examined carefully. However, even given the inherent limitations, self report tools maintain their place within research, especially career oriented research because of the recognition and respect for the perceptions and experiences of the individual as the basis for emotional interpretation of, and reaction to, events (Harrison, McLaughlin & Coalter, 1996).

3. While the use of objective measures of burnout and personality were important as a part of the study, much could have been gained from the addition of some qualitative measures, particularly in response to burnout. Qualitative measures may have added significant dimensions to the understanding of the individual experience of burnout. For example, the use of qualitative data to examine burnout differences between child protective services case workers as opposed to economic support services workers may have provided additional information which would have added great depth to the data already gathered.

Future Directions

Future research should be directed at several levels. It is clear that this study confirms that there is a high degree of burnout which is experienced by caseworkers engaged in social services work. The gathering and examination of longitudinal data would be an interesting parameter which would greatly inform the literature as to the impact of burnout over time (i.e., does burnout actually correlate to turnover in social services work?). Secondly, it would be interesting to include a qualitative piece, such as a structured interview, to examine participant thoughts and feelings and to see what patterns, if any, are found. I believe an essential part of examining burnout in social services agencies is to design a study which assesses for the impact on the delivery of client services within this population. For example, a study which examined the level of burnout with case workers and then paired that with perceived alliance as measured by the clients' perceptions would provide a wealth of information about the effects of burnout which extend far beyond the individual who experiences it.

This study was designed to be a first step toward informing and impacting organizational change and public policy for social service agencies. Counseling Psychology has called upon its professionals to establish research which furthers the goals of multiculturalism and social justice (APA, 2003). Given that we know the negative impact which burnout can have on the individuals experiencing it, as well as the clients who they serve who are often marginalized, it becomes essential that we examine the relevant factors associated with burnout in order to develop culturally informed interventions which may serve to protect caseworkers and their clients. Previous research has demonstrated that both the field of social work itself and the clients who they serve are rapidly changing with respect to diversity of age, race, ethnicity, and client needs (White, 2004). Examining the factors relevant to social services case worker

burnout will provide essential information towards developing culturally informed interventions which then may impact the organization as a whole (Blustein, Elman, & Gerstein, 2001; Eriksen, 1999; Fox, 2003; Helms, 2003) Jackson, 2000; Lee, 1997; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003; Vera & Speight, 2003).

Finally, future directions of research must ultimately move into examining the ways in which we can intervene to protect workers from burnout. As research has previously established, organizational variables are incredibly important in protecting workers from burnout. Institutional support in the form of clear role expectations and realistic workloads would serve as protective factors against burnout (Barak, Nissy, & Levin, 2001; Jayaratne and Chess 1984; Jolma 1990; Siefert et al. 1991; Schaefer and Moos 1996; Blankertz and Robinson 1997). This study took the first step to establish what personality factors, if any, may be related with a decreased experience of burnout. Thus far, increased interpersonal sensitivity is correlated with an increased sense of personal accomplishment, and therefore a decrease in one of the components of burnout. Future research should better examine the relevant factors associated with interpersonal sensitivity to best address and promote the characteristics which are protective factors against burnout.

Conclusion

Bearing the limitations in mind, this study poses many interesting findings for the correlates associated with caseworker burnout. While past literature has emphasized the impact of demographic factors such as age and years of service, those were not found to be as impactful in this research. Breaking new ground on personality factors associated with burnout also provided interesting, if not always statistically significant, information. Given the greatly inflated

scores on the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS), statistical conclusions were difficult to reach, but the data painted a very clear picture of the level of emotional distress that case workers in public social services work are under. While this research is unable, at this time, to determine the exact reasons for the inflated scores, it is likely that recent organizational changes and stresses may be contributing, given the established relationship between organizational variables and burnout (Barak, Nissy, & Levin, 2001). This having been said, it becomes essential to develop impactful interventions for the high levels of distress which are being experienced by the caseworkers. It is necessary to continue to examine the particular factors associated with burnout in case workers to eventually design and implement interventions which will impact organizational change which will benefit the workers, the organization, and the clients which they serve.

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