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A Workplace Study: Follow-Up Research Report

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A Workplace Study: Follow-Up Research Report

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BACKGROUND: THE CHILD WELFARE REFORMS AND THEIR IMPACT ON PRACTICE

The first Workplace Study, occurring in 2001, took place in the context of the sequelae associated with the Child Welfare Reforms of the late 1990s. The Child Welfare Reform agenda was announced in 1997, at a time when the child welfare system, along with many publicly funded services in Ontario, had undergone several years of frozen and then reduced funding. During the freezes and cutbacks of the 1990s, most Children's Aid Societies had been forced to retrench their services back to the core child protection activities of their mandate, namely, investigation, casework and case management with families, and provision of residential care for children unable to remain in their own homes. The abandonment of many creative and effective programs which diversified and refined the agencies' interventions to assist families and children where child protection concerns existed (e.g. parenting programs and support groups, family preservation, parent mutual aid, and others) was universally regarded by the agencies as an unfortunate step backwards.

On the coat-tails of the retrenchment in services had come both a survey of child deaths in Ontario, carried out jointly by the Ontario Coroner's Office, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies and six inquests into the deaths of children who had been receiving services from Children's Aid Societies at the time of their deaths. The inquests and the Child Mortality Survey combined made wide-ranging recommendations for the strengthening of child protection services in Ontario, certain of which formed the basis for the various measures included in the Child Welfare Reform agenda.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Child Welfare Reforms focused on increasing the safety of the system in responding to those children in greatest need. All aspects of the system, from the legal framework, to detection and reporting, to investigation and assessment, to the skill and capacity of staff, Board members, Ministry staff, and foster parents, and to accountability were examined with that goal in mind. The reforms focused exclusively on intrusive child protection measures, without ensuring that they would function within a context that also provided other well-established and indispensable child protection interventions involving community-based supports and capacity-building that had been developed in the previous decade.

For many agencies, the introduction of certain of the Child Welfare Reforms (the Ontario Risk Assessment Measures, the Child and Family Services Act amendments, the Child Protection Standards, and the volume-related Funding Framework) resulted, by intention, in considerably more children being identified

as needing a child protection response. With rapidly rising caseloads, the demand for additional staff was acute. The availability of new qualified staff fell to such levels that some agencies had to mount recruitment drives in other provinces and actively considered recruitment outside of the country.

During the peak periods of growth, agencies were often faced with the situation of unfilled vacancies. While waiting for a new staff person to be hired, the cases to be assigned to the new workers had to be managed by the current staff in addition to their own caseloads. For the existing staff, this was a period of extreme pressure and stress. Andersen and Gobeil (2002) report that all child welfare agencies surveyed in Ontario had identified and begun to address dissatisfaction among workers in an effort to recruit and retain qualified staff. Some Ontario child welfare agencies have attempted, to varying degrees, to resist the minimization of prevention and support programs in favour of protection and some have been successful – also to varying degrees. The struggle has taken a toll on front-line staff, management and the community.

THE WORKPLACE STUDY

The Workplace Study is one of a cluster of studies conducted as part of the Partnerships for Children and Families Project (PCFP) based at the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. The three-year research project (2000-2003) was directed at understanding the lives and experiences of families and children who are served by children's aid societies and children's mental health services in Southwestern Ontario; to this end, it brought together community members, professionals, and academic partners. A central aim of the PCFP was to foster improvements in existing child welfare and children's mental health policies, interventions, and systems.

The objective of the original Workplace Study was to learn about the experiences of employees in child welfare and children's mental health and to give voice to the challenges and gratifications of working in these fields. Agency partners of the PCFP identified a concern around the level of strain their employees experience as they work to provide needed services. The ensuing research had a number of objectives. Our focus in the original study was to understand the complex set of individual and organizational characteristics that contribute to staff turnover, to other indicators of organizational health, and to the overall quality of the helping environment for service participants and providers. Using the workplace survey results and the comments of both survey respondents and focus group members, we looked in particular at what might predict or be related to an employee's intention to leave their agency, to experience high levels of burnout or emotional exhaustion, and to be satisfied with her or his job.

As expected, the Workplace Study of child welfare workers found that a substantial proportion of employees of Child and Family Services reported being highly emotionally exhausted, as measured by the standardized instruments used. An unanticipated finding was that some of these same workers were also highly satisfied with their jobs. Of 232 DSWs (192 women and 40 men), 41% (41% of the women and 40% of the men) were highly satisfied with their jobs overall; 49% were moderately satisfied (51% of the women and 45% of the men); only 8% of the women and 15% of the men were low on overall job satisfaction. We were surprised by these high levels of job satisfaction (JS), especially in view of the relatively high levels of emotional exhaustion (EE). We were even more surprised that 20 participants (9%), of whom 95% were women, scored high on EE and high on JS simultaneously (Stalker, Mandell, Harvey, Frensch & Wright, in press).

Almost half of all the employees who had worked in their agency more than ten years were highly satisfied; 76% were highly satisfied with the intellectual challenge of their jobs; over 60% did not feel highly emotionally exhausted, and only 3% intended to leave their agency. Even when we looked at Direct Service Workers with 10 or more years tenure, we found that 34% were highly satisfied

with their jobs overall, 58% were not highly emotionally exhausted, and only 6% were thinking a lot about leaving the agency. Clearly, something was going well for these individuals. They had apparently found the fit that eluded others. The focus group data showed this too; we noted that many employees found the work worthwhile and gratifying. We believed we could learn as much from these positive experiences as from the more negative ones. We conducted a follow-up study to learn more about this phenomenon.

METHODOLOGY

Participant Recruitment

Potential participants were recruited for interviews from a sample of 229 employees who returned a completed questionnaire across four Children's Aid Societies participating in the Partnerships for Children and Families Project's follow up workplace study in 2004. In addition to receiving the questionnaire, survey participants also received two consent forms, one requesting consent to be contacted by a researcher for an interview (Appendix A-1), and a second requesting consent to have individuals' scores from the first survey linked to their scores from the second survey (Appendix A-2).

Out of the 229 people who returned surveys, 87 were eligible for an interview according to our criteria classifying survey respondents into three categories of interest based on the scores on two survey scales: Emotional Exhaustion and Job Satisfaction (see Table 1.0). Only 69 of these 87 survey respondents had returned a consent form with their completed survey indicating that they were open to being contacted by a researcher.

Priority sampling was given to potential participants who had completed the survey in both 2001 (Time 1) and 2004 (Time 2) and, at each time, could be classified into one of the three categories of interest; these were: High EE & High JS, High EE & Low JS and Low EE & High JS. Of the 69 potential interview participants, 16 survey respondents fit these criteria. Another 9 survey respondents had data from both surveys; however, at Time 1 they did not fall into a category of interest. Finally, there were 44 respondents who did not complete a survey at Time 1. Our target number of interviews was 30 interviews: 10 interviews from each of the three categories of interest.

Table 1.0 provides an overview of the inclusion criteria, number of potential interview participants, and number of interviews completed in each category.

Table 1.0

Category	Criteria for Inclusion ¹	Number of survey respondents in each category	Number of interviews in each category
#1 High EE & High JS	EE scores greater than or equal to 28 and JS scores greater than or equal to 2.48	21	10
#2 High EE & Low JS	EE scores greater than or equal to 28 and JS scores less than or equal to 1.73	13	5
#3 Low EE & High JS	EE scores less than or equal to 16 and JS scores greater than or equal to 2.48	53	10

Interview Procedure

Potential participants were contacted by telephone or by email using the information that they provided on the initial consent form allowing researchers to contact them. See Appendix B for the contact script used by researchers to recruit participants. Interviews took place at a location chosen by participants. Most participants chose to be interviewed at their place of employment; some wanted to be interviewed at home and at least one chose to come to the university. Interviews were approximately 1 ½ hours long and were audio taped. Audio tapes were then transcribed.

Interview participants were told which of the three categories of interest they were placed in based on their survey responses. Participants were asked to comment on how this fit with their employment realities at the time of completing the survey. Using a series of open-ended qualitative probe questions, participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences of emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction at the time of the survey. Please see Appendix C-1 for the interview questions used with participants who had completed the survey at both Time 1 and Time 2. A slightly different interview protocol was used with participants who completed the survey at Time 2 only (See Appendix C-2).

¹ Cut off scores for categories of EE and JS are from the literature on research with social service employees.

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT AND SURVEY SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Overall, 25 survey respondents participated in an interview. The following series of tables provides an overview of interview participant characteristics (such as sex, age, education, and length of service) as well as an overview of the total survey sample characteristics.

Sex

The proportion of females and males in our sample of interview participants reflects the same distribution found in the larger sample of survey respondents.

Interview Participants

Category	Females	Males	Total
High EE & High JS	9 (90%)	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
High EE & Low JS	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	4 (100%)
Low EE & High JS	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	10 (100%)
Totals	20 (84%)	4 (16%)	24 (100%)

Survey Respondents

Category	Females	Males	Total
High EE & High JS	19 (91%)	2 (9%)	21 (100%)
High EE & Low JS	9 (75%)	3 (25%)	12 (100%)
Low EE & High JS	44 (83%)	9 (17%)	53 (100%)
Totals	72 (83%)	14 (17%)	86 (100%)

Age (in years)

Across all categories our interview participants were predominantly from the 31-39 and 40-49 year old age groups. This was not true of the larger survey respondent sample. Those who were in Category # 3 scoring Low on EE and High on JS tended as a group to be older in both samples.

Interview Participants

Category	18-24	25-30	31-39	40-49	50-59	Total
High EE & High JS	0	3 (30%)	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	0	10 (100%)
High EE & Low JS	0	1 (20%)	3 (60%)	1 (20%)	0	5 (100%)
Low EE & High JS	0	0	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	10 (100%)
Totals	0	4 (16%)	9 (36%)	9 (36%)	3 (12%)	25 (100%)

Survey Respondents

Category	18-24	25-30	31-39	40-49	50-59	Total
High EE & High JS	0	7 (33%)	8 (38%)	6 (29%)	0	21 (100%)
High EE & Low JS	0	3 (23%)	5 (38.5%)	5 (38.5%)	0	13 (100%)
Low EE & High JS	1 (2%)	7 (13%)	9 (17%)	18 (34%)	18 (34%)	53 (100%)
Totals	1 (1%)	17 (20%)	22 (25%)	29 (33%)	18 (21%)	87 (100%)

Education

In general, interview participants' education levels parallel those of the larger survey sample. It is interesting that the proportion of interview participants with Masters level degrees is much higher in category 2 (High EE & Low JS) than in the other two categories, but the n for this category is very small.

Interview Participants

Category	High School	College Diploma	Bachelor Degree	Masters Degree	Other	Total
High EE & High JS	0	1 (10%)	6 (60%)	3 (30%)	0	10 (100%)
High EE & Low JS	0	0	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	0	4 (100%)
Low EE & High JS	0	2 (20%)	5 (50%)	3 (30%)	0	10 (100%)
Totals	0	3 (13%)	12 (50%)	9 (37%)	0	24 (100%)

Survey Respondents

Category	High School	College Diploma	Bachelor Degree	Masters Degree	Other	Total
High EE & High JS	0	4 (19%)	11 (52%)	5 (24%)	1 (5%)	21 (100%)
High EE & Low JS	0	0	7 (58%)	5 (42%)	0	12 (100%)
Low EE & High JS	1 (2%)	4 (8%)	23 (43%)	23 (43%)	2 (4%)	53 (100%)
Totals	1 (1%)	8 (9%)	41 (48%)	33 (38%)	3 (4%)	24 (100%)

Position within the Organization

For the next set of tables, interview participants and survey respondents were classified as either a Direct Service Worker or a Manager/Supervisor. The proportion of direct service workers in the interview sample reflects the proportion in the larger survey respondent sample.

Interview Participants

Category	Direct Service Worker	Manager/ Supervisor	Total
High EE & High JS	7 (70%)	3 (30%)	10 (100%)
High EE & Low JS	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	5 (100%)
Low EE & High JS	5 (50%)	5 (50%)	10 (100%)
Totals	16 (64%)	9 (36%)	25 (100%)

Survey Respondents

Category	Direct Service Worker	Manager/ Supervisor	Total
High EE & High JS	14 (67%)	7 (33%)	21 (100%)
High EE & Low JS	12 (92%)	1 (7%)	13 (100%)
Low EE & High JS	31 (59%)	22 (41%)	53 (100%)
Totals	57 (66%)	30 (34%)	87 (100%)

Tenure (in Average Number of Years)

Those with Low EE & High JS (Category 3) are longer tenured in both the interview participant and survey respondent samples. And they are also on average older than participants in the other two categories, as noted earlier.

Interview Participants

Category	Tenure in Organization (in years)	Tenure in Position (in years)	Tenure in Profession (in years)
High EE & High JS (N=10)	4.46	2.62	8.66
High EE & Low JS (N=5)	4.18	2.12	11.94
Low EE & High JS (N=10)	9.95	3.98	18.28

Survey Respondents

Category	Tenure in Organization (in years)	Tenure in Position (in years)	Tenure in Profession (in years)
High EE & High JS (N=21)	3.93	2.57	7.46
High EE & Low JS (N=13)	5.93	2.67	10.53
Low EE & High JS (N=53)	9.07 (N=53)	4.67 (N=51)	16.31 (N=52)

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Several key questions were formulated to guide the analysis of the interviews. These were:

- What are the elements employees identify as being associated with Emotional Exhaustion and with Job Satisfaction?
- What are the personal qualities, workplace/organizational context and coping skills that employees identify as being involved in their experiences of EE and JS?
- How do employees understand the relationship between EE and JS?
- What are the relationships among personal qualities, workplace context and coping strategies that help to understand the differing experiences of employees?
- How are various theories about emotional exhaustion reflected in the ways employees talk about their work?

Initial coding of the transcribed interviews identified specific elements of the workers' narratives about their experience of their jobs. Within each of the employee categories, the codes were compiled across interviews, yielding an initial composite picture for each category. We then looked for differences across categories.

Dominant Themes

Ten predominant themes emerged from the analysis of the data as we pursued the research sub-questions above. These themes were: nature of child welfare, relationships with clients, factors contributing to high levels of stress, impact of EE on the worker, gender, degree of fit, personal characteristics, balance, boundaries, and making a difference. By comparing the specific content of these themes across the three categories of interest, we developed a composite profile of 'what it takes' to manage the work successfully, cope with the multiple stresses and feel good about the job. This profile helps to understand the co-existence of high EE and high JS. We were also able to look at how the themes differed across categories noting what might account for the three different combinations of EE and JS scores.

What does a Successful Direct Service Worker Look Like?

Whatever category they were in, there was broad consensus among our interviewees about what constitutes a successful child welfare worker. The composite profile – which workers sometimes acknowledged did not include them – indicates that workers seem better able to derive satisfaction from their work, regardless of challenges, to the extent that they are able to:

- maintain firm but flexible boundaries
- return at least periodically to a balance between energy devoted to work and attention paid to personal restoration
- feel they are making a difference (i.e. a valuable contribution to individuals and/or to society) in spite of the limitations/challenges
- not feel personally vulnerable
- draw on personal and/or professional support

Profile of Direct Service Workers by Category

In this report, we focus on Direct Service Workers in order to ensure the relevance of our interpretations for the group of employees who appear to be most at risk for emotional exhaustion. At the broadest level, there are some discernible differences in the profiles of Direct Service Workers in the three categories of interest. In general, those in Category 3 (low EE, high JS) do not appear to be struggling. They seem to have a stable comfort level in terms of perceptions of challenge, ability to derive gratification, and to disengage appropriately in the service of self-care. Those in Category 2 (high EE, low JS) convey a sense of defeat in the face of the job's challenges; Category 1 workers, however (high EE, high JS) – while acutely aware of the specific challenges – actively seek ways to cope with the challenges and find positive meaning in the work. They are aware of contradictions, remain hopeful and are conscious of what is required to stay afloat. When those in Category 2 indicate this latter consciousness, it is usually in the context of feeling they are incapable of these survival techniques.

Category 2: High EE, Low JS

The workers in this category appear to feel overwhelmed, defeated, or to have run out of steam: they recognize many of the things that would help ameliorate emotional exhaustion but don't seem to have those available to them for one reason or another. One participant in Category 2 articulated this by saying:

There was a sense of 'I cannot keep doing this. I cannot meet the response times that's necessary.' And a big part for me, for this job, is the, constant intake, it's the constant -- it's like a wheel. And it just goes and it goes and it goes, and there's no stopping it. I find the job to be extremely narrow. The skills that are required are very narrow. The scope of the job is very narrow. And it just keeps going and going and going.

While workers in all three categories recognize what constitutes the "right fit" between an individual and the work of child welfare, those in Category 2 perceive themselves as not having what is required for this good fit.

Lack of time for their own lives seems to be a major concern. They experience multiple physical effects but relatively fewer of the satisfactions that the others describe. Like Category 1 participants, they mention barriers to the desire to make a difference in the system – which reflects a belief that the system needs changing – so they are aware of the difficulties inherent in the job. They appear to be less reflective than the Category 1 participants, and therefore seem to have considerably less awareness of what the 'points of entry' into a coping strategy might be; for example, they have almost nothing to say about the importance and challenges of boundaries in child welfare. One participant said:

Well in this work it never gets done. You can work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and you'll barely put a dint in it, never mind get anything- uh, get it all done. ... so it was alarming to me to see that [I was] putting in way more [overtime] than others... What's that all about?...I said 'forget it, I'm not going to be continuing to do this.' ...I've just stopped. And it's meant that whole lotta stuff on my desk is piling up. But I'm trying not to put in the long hours and putting time in on the weekend and things like that, just trying to keep ahead of it because, you know what? I didn't get any further ahead than I am now anyways.

Although they cite very appropriate characteristics of a successful worker, one gets the sense that they do not see themselves as possessing these characteristics.

Category 3: Low EE, High JS

These workers articulate objectives that are realistic and achievable. They are committed to the protection of children and to bettering children's lives; at the same time, they are able to appreciate small changes. They identify specific kinds of changes in parents, children or families' lives to which they value making a contribution and seem able to identify and value the small changes that occur. Not coincidentally, they see these changes happening frequently. When they talk about the value of their relationships with clients, Category 3 workers focus on what the relationships mean to the children they work with, not to themselves. They refer to a good fit between themselves and the work, and two of the ten interviewed see a good fit between themselves and the organization as a condition that enables them to find the work satisfying. The others have some criticism of the organization, but this does not appear to get in the way of their satisfaction with their work.

They experience a supportive work environment and do not talk about the high volume of work as a problem. In the personal domain, they come across as strong individuals with clear personal boundaries and a sense of perspective; they are relatively easy going on a number of levels. Possibly related to the ability to disengage emotionally is the ability to tolerate not being in control. They see themselves as "people persons" who can relate well to clients but they do not take personally the failures, difficult decisions or client anger that they frequently encounter. They do not seem to internalize the frustrations and negative encounters with clients and others that the other workers do. They enjoy the opportunities for personal learning and development that their work affords them.

Workers in this group try to avoid taking cases to court. This may mean that they perceive other viable options and trust their own skills in pursuing these options. They emphasize the importance of not taking an authoritarian stance with parents; they describe themselves as taking the necessary time to listen and negotiate instead. They understand the context of their clients' lives and see the parents as doing the best they can; thus, they refrain from judging, controlling or rescuing them. With fewer court cases, the volume of work, pressure of timelines and associated stresses for these workers would be reduced.

How the meaning of the work and one's role in it get constructed seems to shape one's ability to maintain self-protective boundaries. Category 3 workers clearly articulate the value of being able to disengage emotionally, and "not feeling indispensable" allows them to leave their work at the end of the day and carry on with their own lives:

Too much challenge can be really draining. Yeah. Too much work can be really draining. Um, being very clear about your role- being able to say 'I can't do that.' You know, that's what you have to do in

order for you to just breathe -- you know, to survive -- is to understand your role.

“What doesn’t get done today will get done tomorrow” is an approach quite different from that described by workers in the other two categories, who seem to work endless hours and sometimes relegate their personal lives to the background. What may enable this constructive disengagement is the ability to trust that they have done their very best for the families and to recognize that they are not responsible for the choices families ultimately make.

Because you know, I don't own those clients, and I don't own those kids. And if people make bad decisions, it's not my problem, it's their problem. I'll pick up the pieces, but it's not my fault. I don't take things personally, and now I'm contradicting myself, because I've said, when things go well, I take some credit. [laughter] Ah ha. Can I have it both ways?

We consider it significant that the workers in Category 3 tend to be older than those in the other two categories; this was true both among the interviewees in the follow up study and in the larger sample of the original workplace study. All of them report having supportive partners outside of work and all talked about being able to use the support of co-workers to help them cope with the frustrations of the job. Most of them have a good deal of child welfare experience. This suggests that maturity, life stage and personal support in and outside of the workplace play a role in the ability to manage the challenges of child welfare work. These workers have had the time to hone their skills, develop perspective on their clients and on their own role as child welfare workers.

...I've learned to pace myself better. Um, and I've learned to stand up for myself more, you know, just limit – like, 'No I don't have time to do it.' I've learned the word 'no', which was difficult for me at first.

They express confidence in their ability to make good decisions, likely related to their life and work experience. All are parents themselves and they see this as helping them do the work well.

Category 1: High EE, High JS

Direct Service Workers with high levels of EE and high levels of JS tend to be younger on average than those in the other categories, particularly Category 3. Some have young children and are, therefore, trying to balance the competing demands of family and work is a major challenge.

A major difference between workers in Category 1 and Category 2 as compared to those in Category 3 is that they express much more awareness of the challenges to feeling one actually can make a difference in the lives of client

families. This may be related in part to the fact that Category 1 and 2 workers express goals in broader terms, e.g., making a difference in the child welfare system as a whole, helping people to change their lives. Category 1 workers also emphasize the parallel between themselves as parents (mostly mothers) and their role as child welfare workers. Thus there is a personal investment in and identification with the work that makes it more of a calling than just a job. This personal investment may have a number of effects: It may make it more difficult to disengage emotionally in order to maintain protective boundaries, to not take the failures and public criticism personally, and to derive satisfaction from small instances of clients' progress. On the other hand, it may also be what makes it possible for Category 1 workers to 'hang in' despite the challenges, whereas Category 2 workers, who do not seem to share this sense of mission, express a sense of defeat.

Practically speaking, Category 1 workers see the job as well nigh impossible to get done by virtue of sheer volume and competing demands, and this group was most strikingly vocal about documentation and anxiety related to court preparation. Trying to balance this with the demands of family and social relations is a constant struggle, particularly for female workers who are primary caregivers at home. Leisure time and self care are often minimal as work and family responsibilities take over the worker's life.

At the end of the day you have to be driving home and saying 'okay, what are the things I accomplished today?' Because if you're going through your head of all the things that you have to do tomorrow you're gonna be even more tired by the time you get home. But if you're going through your head of all the things that you accomplished today and all the lists that you've checked off today... you're gonna have more satisfaction at the end of the day. But it's understanding that and it's making the concerted effort to do that at the end of the day, rather than go home and think of all the things you have to do. ...I mean, it sounds horrible, horrible to say 'Let work go' but, you know, you do have to say at the end of the day 'Okay, I know what I have to do tomorrow. It's all written down, so let that go. What did I accomplish today?' And reminding yourself of that everyday.

Category 1 workers identify a number of external conditions that ameliorate or prevent EE, none of which showed up in Category 3. In particular, they see the system as inadequate; nevertheless, within the organization they refer to relationships with co-workers, supervisor or administrative staff as a source of job satisfaction. The satisfying aspects of the work itself that they identify relate to positive experiences with client children and families and in a couple of instances, to specific work conditions such as time off and a relatively autonomous position.

Workers who experience both high EE and high JS clearly perform ongoing conscious analyses of their situation in an effort to be satisfied. They indicated awareness of EE fluctuating according to the time of week, time of year, and time off or holidays taken; thus there is a sense of 'it will get better' during difficult times and periods where there is at least a measure of relief. This connotes a level of resilience that is not evident among Category 2 workers.

There's times that ya get really frustrated with the job. There's times that you're satisfied in the job... I don't think you would have really high job satisfaction the same time that you're highly emotionally exhausted. But I think if you're- you're looking at balances, it's kind of over time... you might be exhausted now, you've been exhausted, you still have job satisfaction 'cause it's not always like that- always exhausted. Um, and even when you are exhausted you can still be doing some work that you like to do and... it's maybe interesting or exciting, the thing that's going, on even though you're exhausted.

It is a roller coaster. Um, at times, you know, you wanna get off because it's overwhelming. It's, you know, like I have to draw on all my coping skills to, you know, at times, to be able to function because it's just so -- the workload is just so overwhelming -- along with the emotional impact of some of the things that you see, and some of the things that you're dealing with.

Despite the clarity of Category 3 workers about the importance of boundaries, Category 1 workers are actually more explicit about the nature of boundaries required in order to prevent or manage EE, the reasons that these boundaries are necessary, and difficulties involved in maintaining them. This suggests a conscious struggle to manage challenges that is experienced by Category 1 and 2 workers but not expressed by Category 3 workers. When it comes to relationships with clients, Category 1 workers are again the ones who are most expressive about this aspect of their job. However, their own investment in these relationships is perhaps more dependent on identities as successful helpers being bound up with the identities of successful, appreciative clients.

Category 1 workers share with Category 3 some similar views about personal characteristics that are particularly suited to child welfare. On the whole, though, they do not express the same sense of personal confidence and clear boundaries that the Category 3 workers do, and in fact they alone among the participants made statements about the need to put the job first, and giving a great deal of oneself (being "150%ers").

We speculate that at least some of those in Category 1 may eventually fit the profile of Category 3. Several refer to learning to cope better over time and there are references to gaining strength as workers become experienced. Research on the psychological effects of trauma on mental health workers has indicated that youth and being new in the field is highly correlated with a higher rate of burnout (Ackerley et al., 1988) and the most negative reactions to providing therapy (Rodolfa et al., 1988). However, there is also evidence that some therapists attribute to their work as trauma counselors positive changes in their sense of identity and in their beliefs about self and others (Steed & Downing, 1998). This supports conjecture that over time, the effects of exposure to psychologically challenging work may include personal and professional growth. Research on post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2004) elucidates the potential for positive adaptation. Comprised of *the concepts of positive psychological changes* (Yalom & Lieberman, 1991), *finding benefits* (Affleck & Tennen, 1996), *stress-related growth* (Park, Cohen & March, 1996) and *compassion satisfaction* (Stamm, 1998), this construct suggests that a worker may ultimately derive satisfaction and experience lasting growth through such difficult work. If we apply this concept to our DSW workers, we are led to ask the following questions:

- Does length of time in the job forge the Category 3 worker or does one have to have the 'right fit' from the start?
- Are the workers in Category 2 individuals who were not committed to careers in child welfare to begin with?
- Does the fate of Category 1 people – i.e. ending up in Category 2 or 3 – depend on their personal resilience?
- Will some remain in Category 1 throughout long careers in child welfare and withstand ongoing tension between high EE and high JS?

These issues are pertinent not only to ongoing supervision and support, but to recruitment and training of Child Welfare workers.

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APPENDIX A-1: Consent to be Contacted for an Interview

Partnerships for Children and Families Project

YOU ARE THE EXPERT ON YOU

We are grateful for the time you are taking to share the thoughts and information sought by this survey. Thank you!

Sometimes statistical findings raise as many questions as they answer and researchers find themselves needing to ask the people who are the experts on their own data (i.e., the respondents/participants) for assistance. We are therefore requesting your consent to allow us to contact you if we need your help to interpret your survey results. This means we would call, mail or email you (your choice) and ask if you would be willing to talk with one of the researchers. This would likely take place sometime within the next six months.

Your name would not be made known to anyone other than the researchers. The agency will be given no information about your identity and will not know that you participated in this survey or that we have contacted you. When contacted, you will be free to say you do not want to talk with a researcher after all.

If you agree to be identified and contacted by the researchers, please read and sign both statements of consent below, and if you agree to be contacted, provide contact information.

I, (print name) _____ have read the above and I give permission to the researchers of the Partnerships for Children and Families Project to contact me for follow-up to this survey. I understand that I may be contacted within the next six months and that the contact will be confidential from my employer. I also understand that I may say no to any further involvement with the research at the time I am contacted, with no negative consequences for me.

Name Date

I prefer to be contacted:
by telephone () _____ Work ___ Home ___

Ok to leave a message? Yes___ No

by email _____

by regular mail _____

APPENDIX A-2: Consent to Link Survey Scores

Partnerships for Children and Families Project

DID YOU FILL OUT THE PREVIOUS SURVEY FOR THIS PROJECT?

You may recall that the Partnerships for Children and Families Project sent a survey to all employees of your agency in 2001. It was similar to this one but longer, and like the current survey, offered a chance to win a getaway at Langdon Hall.

If you completed and submitted that survey, it would be very helpful for us to be able to compare your current survey scores with your previous ones. This would enable us to get an idea of whether people's perceptions and experiences have changed or remained the same over time. In order to make this comparison, we need your permission to compare your current survey responses with your previous ones. Your name would of course continue to be kept confidential from your employer, who would be given no information regarding your participation in either survey

If you agree to allow us to compare your current and previous responses, please read and sign the statement below. If you are giving permission, please be sure that you have also signed at least the first statement on Consent Form A, otherwise we cannot identify you in order to make the comparison.

I completed the previous survey ____

I did not complete the previous survey ____

I am not sure ____

If you would be willing to give permission for comparison, whether or not you are sure about completing the last survey, please sign below.

I, (print name) _____ have read the above and I give permission to the researchers of the Partnerships for Children and Families Project to connect my survey responses with my name and to compare them with my previous results.

Name: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B: Interview Recruitment Telephone Script

Partnerships for Children and Families Project Workplace Study Follow-Up

I am calling for the research team at Wilfrid Laurier University who conducted a survey at your agency in January of this year. At the time that you completed the survey, you consented to be contacted by the research team for an interview. This is that call.

We have analyzed data from two surveys and have found some interesting results that we would like to understand better by talking to individuals about their experience as employees in this agency.

You have been selected for the follow-up interview because your responses to one or both surveys place you within a group of employees whose responses we would like to know more about. Your input is needed to help us accurately interpret our findings.

I would like to assure you that your participation in this study is confidential from your agency and completely voluntary.

If you agree to be interviewed, we will arrange a time and place convenient for you. Your agency has agreed that employees may participate on agency time although the agency will be not know that you have participated.

The interview should take about one to one and a half hours, and will be conducted by one of the researchers.

You will be shown a transcript of your interview before we do analysis of it, and if we would like to quote anything you have said which might potentially identify you, we will ask your permission first.

You will be free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Would you be willing to arrange for an interview?

APPENDIX C-1: Interview Questions (Protocol 1)

Workplace Study: Follow-Up Interview Questions for those who completed T1 & T2

Thank you for your willingness to help us with the research on employee experiences in child welfare agencies. I would like to remind you that your participation in this study is confidential from your agency and completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You will be shown a transcript of this interview before we do analysis of it, and if we would like to quote anything you have said which might potentially identify you, we will check with you first.

Before we begin, I would like to ask if you are you in the same job as identified in our initial survey, which was... _____.

If not, what job are you currently in and how did that change come about?

We have analyzed data from two surveys and have found some interesting results that we would like to understand better by talking to individuals about their experience as employees in this child welfare agency.

We are particularly interested in the way that people experienced what we call Emotional Exhaustion and what we call Job Satisfaction.

1. You are one of a group of employees whose responses on both surveys placed them in the....[indicate appropriate group below]

or for those whose scores were not the same on both surveys:

You are one of a group of employees whose responses on the first survey placed them in the and in the second survey in the

....**High EE High JS group** and we would like your help to learn more about this kind of experience.

....**High EE Low JS** group and we would like your help to learn more about this kind of experience.

....**Low EE High JS** group and we would like your help to learn more about this kind of experience.

What is your initial reaction to hearing that this is how your responses turned out?

Probe if participant gives a brief response:

Can you say more about that response?

2. I'd like to take you back to that time when you completed the first survey and ask you to recall what was going on. (Can you remember back to what work was like then?)

Probes if participant has difficulty recollecting:

This was back in 2001, the month of _____

Can you recall what things were like in the agency at that time?

Can you recall what things were like for you in your job at that time?

a. What do you recall about what you were experiencing at that time?

[Interviewers should be listening for material related to the following concepts from the literature and pursuing them, when they arise, with open-ended probes:

- *worker's attributions (What the cause of the difficulties are) can affect subjective experience of EE)*
- *emotional labour involved in suppressing anger, nervousness & agitation may lead to EE*
- *satisfaction of helping others can make coping easier for some*
- *people with performance (outcome) goals may be likelier to burn out than people with mastery (growth/process) goals.]*
- * *work/family conflict may be involved in emotional exhaustion*

b. Would you say the first set of scores seem to reflect what you were experiencing at the time?

Probe if participant gives a brief response:

Can you say more about that?

3. a. Does the second set of results reflect your experience at the time of the second survey?

Probe: Can you tell me more about that?

b. Does it make sense to you that your results have remained the same/ changed since the time of the first survey?

Probe: What is different that could account for the similar/different outcomes?

4. Did your experience of work at either of these times affect you outside of work?

5. a. For those with Hi EE and Lo JS:

How did (do) you cope with this experience of work?

b. For those with Hi EE and Hi JS:

How did you manage to find satisfaction in your work under the conditions you have described?

6. a. Is there anything about you personally that you think makes you particularly suited/not suited to this work?

Probes: *Note: Not all are likely to be needed!*

Are there any characteristics you identify in yourself that make this job particularly suited to / challenging for you?

What gives you satisfaction in life? in work?

Are there any ways in which you deal with life and work that influence the way you experience your work?

How do you react when the going gets tough?

How do you generally get through tough times?

b. Do you think that being female /being male has any influence on the way you experience your work or manage your work?

APPENDIX C-2: Interview Questions (Protocol 2)

Workplace Study: Follow-Up Interview Questions for those who completed T2 only

Thank you for your willingness to help us with the research on employee experiences in child welfare agencies. I would like to remind you that your participation in this study is confidential from your agency and completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You will be shown a transcript of this interview before we do analysis of it, and if we would like to quote anything you have said which might potentially identify you, we will check with you first.

1. You are one of a group of employees whose responses in the surveys placed them in the.... *[indicate appropriate group below and articulate].*

....**High EE High JS group** and we would like your help to learn more about this kind of experience.

....**High EE Low JS group** and we would like your help to learn more about this kind of experience.

....**Low EE High JS group** and we would like your help to learn more about this kind of experience.

What is your initial reaction to hearing that this is how your responses turned out?

Probes if participant gives a brief response:
Does the score on the survey seem to reflect your experience?
Can you say more about that response?

2. I'd like to take you back to February of this year when you completed the survey and ask you to recall what was going on. (Can you remember back to what work was like at the time?)

Probes if participant has difficulty recollecting:
Can you recall what things were like in the agency?
Can you recall what things were like for you in your job at that time?

a. What do you recall about what you were experiencing at the time?

[Interviewers should be listening for material related to the following concepts from the literature and pursuing them, when they arise, with open-ended probes:

- *worker's attributions (What the cause of the difficulties are) can affect subjective experience of EE)*
 - *emotional labour involved in suppressing anger, nervousness & agitation can lead to EE*
 - *satisfaction of helping others can make coping easier for some*
 - *people with performance (outcome) goals may be likelier to burn out than people with mastery (growth/process) goals.]*
- * work/family conflict may be involved in emotional exhaustion

4. Did your experience of work at that time affect you outside of work?

5. a. For those with Hi EE and Lo JS:

How did (do) you cope with this experience of work?

b. For those with Hi EE and Hi JS:

How did you manage to find satisfaction in your work under the conditions you have described?

6. a. Is there anything about you that you think makes you particularly suited/not suited to this work?

Probes:

Are there any characteristics you identify in yourself that make this job particularly suited to / challenging for you?

What gives you satisfaction in life? in work?

Are there any ways in which you deal with life and work that influence the way you experience your work?

How do you tend to react when the going gets tough?

How do you generally get through tough times?

b. Do you think that being female /being male has any influence on the way you experience your work or manage your work?