

8-26-2004

Social Work Burnout and Supportive Supervision

Kathryn J. Jarl
Augsburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://idun.augsburg.edu/etd>



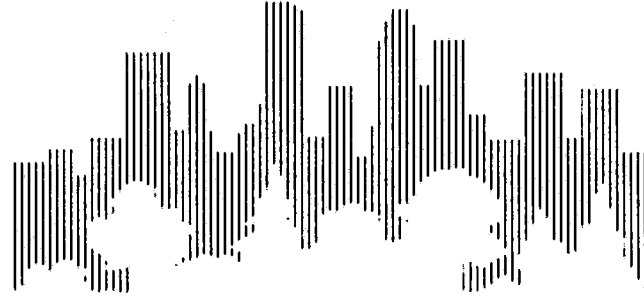
Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jarl, Kathryn J., "Social Work Burnout and Supportive Supervision" (2004). *Theses and Graduate Projects*. 342.
<https://idun.augsburg.edu/etd/342>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Idun. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Graduate Projects by an authorized administrator of Idun. For more information, please contact bloomber@augsb.org.

AUGSBURG



C • O • L • L • E • G • E

**MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK
THESIS**

Kathryn L. Jarl

Social Work Burnout and Supportive Supervision

2004

Social Work Burnout and Supportive Supervision

Kathryn L. Jarl

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the degree of

Master of Social Work

Augsburg College

Minneapolis, Minnesota

2004

**Augsburg College
Lindell Library
Minneapolis, MN 55454**

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK
AUGSBURG COLLEGE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Master's Thesis of:

Kathryn L. Jarl

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Master of Social Work Degree.

Date of Oral Presentation: August 26, 2004

Thesis Committee:

Laura Boisen

Thesis Advisor: Laura Boisen, PhD

Lois A. Bosch

Thesis Reader: Lois Bosch, PhD

Michael Schock

Thesis Reader: Michael Schock, PhD

Abstract: It is widely agreed that social work has an emotional and stressful load that can lead to social worker burnout. Burnout needs to be clearly defined and the different variables causing stress leading to burnout need to be fully understood in order to implement appropriate preventative strategies. Burnout is defined as the emotional depletion felt from a continuous drain on one's personal reserves. Burnout has three different components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. The findings suggest that the type of supervision has an impact on social worker burnout. Supervision is divided into its three functions: administrative, educational, and supportive. Social workers receiving supportive supervision experience lower levels of burnout. A mailed survey was distributed to 165 Minnesota NASW Metropolitan area members. Questions were asked regarding respondents current experience of any burnout symptoms and their experience with receiving adequate supervision. The items were both quantitative and qualitative. The response rate was fairly good (60, or 36%, of the 165 surveys were returned). Results of those who completed and returned the surveys found that supportive supervision is a preventative measure against social worker burnout. Additional findings suggest that all areas of supervision provide social workers with necessary resources that can protect social workers from burnout. This study adds to the burnout body of research addressing the relationship between adequate supervision and the prevention of burnout.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	vii
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Research Question.....	2
Defining Supervision.....	2
Summary.....	2
Chapter II: Literature Review.....	3
Defining Burnout.....	3
Causes of Burnout.....	5
The Macro Level: Organizational Factors.....	6
Work Overload.....	7
Lack of Control.....	7
Insufficient Reward.....	8
Breakdown of Community.....	9
Absence of Fairness.....	10
Conflicting Values.....	10
Other Organizational Findings.....	10
The Meso Level: Supervision Factors.....	12
Administrative Function.....	12
Educational Function.....	14
Supportive Supervision.....	14
The Micro Level: Social Worker Factors.....	16
Self-concept.....	17

Sense of Purpose and Belonging.....	17
Autonomy and Control.....	18
Emotional Stress.....	19
Individual Coping Mechanisms for Stress.....	20
Parallel Process and Supervision.....	21
Client Factors.....	23
Other Concepts in Burnout.....	25
Solutions To Burnout.....	25
Summary.....	28
Chapter III: Theoretical Framework.....	31
Description of Theory.....	31
Principles of Theory and Burnout/Supervision.....	31
Summary.....	32
Chapter IV: Methodology.....	33
Research Question.....	33
Concepts and Variables.....	33
Research Design.....	34
The Sample.....	35
Data Collection.....	35
Data Analysis.....	37
Reliability & Validity.....	38
Limitations of the Study.....	40
Chapter V: Findings.....	41

Significant Findings.....	41
Other Findings.....	46
Qualitative Responses.....	50
Summary.....	52
Chapter VI: Discussion and Implications.....	55
Implications for Social Work Practice.....	56
Implications for Policy.....	59
Implications for Further Research.....	60
Strengths of this Study.....	61
Conclusion.....	63
References.....	64
Appendix A.....	67
Appendix B.....	74

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my deepest appreciation to my sisters, Vicki and Susan. I would not have been able to do it without their love, support, encouragement, and faith in my ability.

I would like to acknowledge my mentors, Jan and Tim Tillotson. Their faith in me and their example of integrity, compassion, and commitment as social workers inspired my dream.

I would like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Laura Boisen. Her patience, guidance, and continued encouragement are deeply appreciated.

I am also grateful to Dr. Michael Schock and Dr. Lois Bosch for their assistance and encouragement.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Burnout is a topic of much concern and debate within the helping professions. For purposes of simplicity, the focus here will apply the concept of burnout to the social work profession. According to Maslach (1982) “the constant expenditure of energy on behalf of others creates a pattern of emotional overload that results in emotional and physical exhaustion of the care provider,” cited by Courage & Williams (1987, p. 8). Energy is a significant concept to be studied in order to understand the nature of burnout. *The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (1989) defines energy as “effort, capacity for performing work, usable power, [and] the resources for producing such power” (p.251). In expanding on Maslach’s view of energy expenditure there seems to be many variables that could contribute to this energy exchange and expenditure. One could hypothesize that when energy expended is greater than energy received consistently over time, a resulting depletion of energy resources will ultimately create exhaustion. For purposes of this research the focus will remain on identifying one of several possible variables, the relationship between social worker and his/her supervisor.

Social work burnout has a negative effect on both the social worker and the quality of services he/she provides to the client. The main purpose of this research is to study the impact supportive supervision has on the prevention of social worker burnout, support current and future research on this phenomenon, and ultimately, contribute to intervention and prevention techniques to reduce social work burnout.

Research Question

The cause of social worker burnout is complex with several variables. The question this research intends to answer is whether supportive supervision is a protective factor for social worker burnout.

Defining Supervision

To correlate supervision with the prevention of burnout, it is important to first define supportive supervision. The functions of supervision defined by Kadushin (1992) are “an administration and an educational process,” plus “an additional and distinctly different responsibility, ... the expressive-supportive leadership function” (p.19). In terms of energy and resources available to the social worker, the supervisor can be a very valuable tool. The three functions of supervision provide the social worker with tools to enhance his/her effectiveness with delivery of services to clients. Each of these three functions provide a different resource for the social worker. The administrative function provides guidelines for “adherence to policy and procedure” (p.20). The educational function provides opportunities for increased knowledge and skill. And, the expressive-supportive function’s “primary goal is to improve morale and job satisfaction“ (p.20).

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this study is to focus on the relationship between social worker and the supervisor, and identify associations between supportive supervision and reduced social worker burnout.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

To present this hypothesis on the association between reduced social worker burnout and supportive supervision for further study, current literature on the topics of burnout and supervision has been reviewed. Literature on social work supervision produced several articles focusing mainly on the administrative and educational aspects of supervision. Several articles define and discuss the parallel process, which identifies similar dynamics that occur in the therapeutic relationship between social worker and client can also be re-enacted in the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Literature on the subject of burnout reports that the research is still quite new, the phenomenon is complex with several variables, and each area of research on this topic has produced several causal factors as well as new questions. The following is a review of some of the current literature on burnout in the helping professions and additional literature on the nature and value of social work supervision.

Defining Burnout

Maslach appears to be one of the forerunners in the research on burnout. In 1976, she defined burnout as “a particular kind of stress response experienced by those working in the helping professions such as social work” (Johnson & Stone, 1987, p.67). LeCroy and Rank (1987) identified social work to be a profession that is inherently endowed with a variety of stresses simply by the characteristics of its work because of the challenges that social workers must face (p.23). Furthermore, social work has the responsibility of value-laden tasks that

may contradict with society's viewpoints (LeCroy & Rank, 1987, p.23-24).

Societal values shift with political and economic changes. Social work, at times, is seen as interfering with family values and individual's privacy. At other times, social work is criticized for lack of adequate involvement. This contradictory demand on social work creates strain on the professional. Social workers also have the responsibility of identifying and "meeting the emotional needs and desires of clients ... [requiring an] emotional investment" (p.24) by the social worker effectuating possible emotional exhaustion of the social worker.

In this framework, several studies have utilized "Maslach and Jackson's (1981) [description of] burnout as a state of emotional exhaustion, increased depersonalization of clients, and decreased feelings of personal accomplishment" (Poulin and Walter, 1993a, p.305). Johnson and Stone (1987) state that "burnout refers to a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from involvement with people in demanding situations" (p.67). This definition further expands the realm of burnout to a variety of interactions between people, thus supporting the possibility of stress in the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Shinn, Rosario, Morch, and Chestnut (1984) report burnout "as psychological strain resulting from the stress of human service work," (p.864) correlating stress with burnout. They further define stress as a "negative feature of the work environment that impinges on the individual" (p.864). Himle, Jayaratne, and Thyness (1989) list "psychological problems, work stressors, lack of personal accomplishment and competency" (p.19) as components of burnout. And finally, in *The Truth About Burnout*, Maslach and Leiter (1997) describe burnout as "a

malady that spreads gradually and continuously over time, putting people into a downward spiral from which it's hard to recover" (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p.17). It seems that most definitions include an emotional component, which one may conclude the reciprocity on an emotional level in the interactions between people is an important connection to stress resulting in burnout.

Causes of Burnout

Burnout is caused from the stress and strain of continuous depletion of worker's resources and the simultaneous lack of supports provided to the worker. These causes of burnout seem to be numerous and complex. From a system's perspective, burnout and its causes may be viewed and studied from three different viewpoints. The macro, meso, and micro levels of the system in which the professional performs social work tasks each have an influence on the social worker. The following is an outline of stress factors that can cause burnout for the social worker.

First, the organizational structure/environment in which the social worker practices provides policy and procedures requiring adherence to rules that may be both explicit and implicit. Explicit rules may state in writing or expressed verbally procedures for providing services. There may be proven procedures that provide guidance, and at the same time prevent creativity of autonomous practice. Implicit rules tend to be less clearly defined and usually are learned through trial and error. The worker may learn from experience that the system accepts input from its workers, or the system may resist change even when adequate provision of services is affected. In other words, the organizational, or the macro level

context in which the social worker is required to work within can provide both support and constraints for the social workers efforts.

Next, the meso level is that of middle managers or supervisors providing direction, guidance, information, education and support to the social worker. Depending on the match between supervisor and supervisee, and the amounts and types of support provided to the social worker determines whether this relationship can create stress leading to burnout. In this supervisory relationship there is the social worker, as well, who may contribute to their own burnout. Ego strength and other personal factors may cause an individual to be more vulnerable to the environmental stressors leading to the debilitating effects of burnout.

And finally, on the micro level, the client as a stressor for the social worker is determined by various factors, such as, the subjective weight of difficulty of identified problems the client brings to the interactions and the objective weight of caseload size required by the organization. Again, the social worker is the common denominator of all three levels, and is the one most overtly affected by burnout. However, “a person’s behavior in the workplace can only be understood when it is examined within the social context of that workplace” (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p.70). The following is a discussion in further depth of these variables based on the findings in current literature regarding the phenomenon burnout.

The Macro Level: Organizational Factors

The structuring, procedures, and values of an organization seem to be the most significant cause of stress on the social worker leading them to experience

burnout. In *The Truth About Burnout*, Maslach and Leiter (1997) found, “the causes lie more in the job environment than in the individual” (p.38). They further define these causes from the job environment as “work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, breakdown in community, absence of fairness, and conflicting values” (p.38). These causes are further supported by other research on burnout.

Work Overload: Maslach and Leiter (1997) explain work overload “... hurts quality, disrupts collegial relationships, kills innovation,” (p.11) and leads to burnout. “A large case size contributes to work overload, thereby taxing the resources of the care provider and thus potentiating burnout” (Courage and Williams, 1987, p.9). Jayaratne and Chess (1984) reported “child welfare workers ... considered their caseloads to be too high” (p.452). Caseloads that overtax the worker can inhibit the quality of services to the client and may leave the social worker feeling a loss of control over what they produce or create.

Lack of Control: Maslach and Leiter (1997) describe lack of control as not having “the opportunity to make choices and decisions, use the ability to think and solve problems, and have some input ... [regarding] the outcomes for which they will be held accountable” (p.11). If the worker lacks control in their work, the end result is demeaning and sets a clear message regarding an organization’s perception of its employee’s competency. Jayartne and Chess (1984) identify environmental factors, such as, “role ambiguity ... [and] promotional opportunities” (p.448) as stressors leading to burnout. Role ambiguity creates confusion and undermines a worker’s sense of being in control. Their study also

included the variables “physical comfort ... [and] challenge” (p.448). Their findings suggest “because the stresses inherent in the job are hard enough, the agency should do its utmost to define the job clearly and to increase comfort in the physical environment” (p.450).

In Maslach’s (1987) critique of burnout research, she found “higher levels of experienced burnout were associated with more negative ratings of certain aspects of the work environment, [such as,] autonomy, comfort, challenge, client contact, and coworker support” (p.97). Autonomy in one’s work allows the worker to have a certain amount of control in their work and the outcomes of that work. The worker’s voice is given validity and power in the decision-making process.

In a study on Gerontological social work, Poulin and Walter (1993a) found “the three strongest predictors of emotional exhaustion are perceived job stress (23.5 percent), self-esteem (6.5 percent), and job autonomy (3.8 percent)” (p.308 - 309). The results also suggest “organizational factors play a significant role in burnout ... [and identified factors such as] worker autonomy and job stress [as] ... significant predictors” (p.309). Worker autonomy is closely related to rewards. It is the reward one receives for feeling they personally have contributed something of importance, and that the contribution is appreciated by others.

Insufficient Reward: Maslach and Leiter (1997) report that a lack of external rewards or “recognition, both the work we do and ourselves as workers are devalued” (p.13). In addition, they state, “most devastating for workers ... is the loss of the internal reward that comes when a person takes pride in doing

something of importance and value to others” (p.13). Jayartne and Chess (1984) also identified financial rewards to be one variable affecting the worker’s perception of job satisfaction (p.450). They also found “financial rewards emerged as the only significant predictor of intent to change jobs among child welfare workers and community mental health workers” (p.452). Hecker (1996) reported out of 31 major fields of study, bachelor level social worker wages ranked in the lowest 20% (p.17).

Both internal and external rewards are lacking in work environments where the worker’s ideas, views, and contributions are discounted or ignored. When this happens people shut down and distance themselves from full participation.

Breakdown of Community: The lack of rewards and the resulting damage to the worker’s sense of personal accomplishment and self-worth also causes the breakdown in community of the workplace. Maslach and Leiter (1997) explain, “people thrive in community, and they function best when praise, comfort, happiness, and humor are shared with others they like and respect” (p.14). Physical isolation, heavy workloads preventing connection with peers, or controls by the organization on what may or may not be said amongst peers creates an atmosphere where “people lose a positive connection with others in the workplace” (p.14). “Mutual respect among people who work together is at the heart of any sense of community” (p.15). Maslach (1987) also found in her critique that the lack of “coworker support ... [correlated with] higher levels of experienced burnout” (p.97). Courage and Williams (1987) report that “the

structure of the human service organization determines the relationship between workers and the type of interaction between care recipients, care providers, and supervisors” (p15). The organizational structure has the power to either support or destroy community.

Absence of Fairness: Organizations that allow and encourage input from their workers create an atmosphere of fairness. In an atmosphere where mutual respect is absent, a lack of fairness is experienced, trust is lost, individuals feel they are not respected, and their self-worth denied. “Lack of fairness . . . [is found in the] inequity of workload or pay, . . . [and] organizational policies that send the message that money takes precedence over employees causes mutual respect and shared values to erode” (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p.15-16). When frontline employees are required to make concessions, such as, increased workloads and forego pay increases in times of budget cuts, while management sacrifices very little, any sense of fairness disappears. The message becomes clear regarding what and who is valued within the organization.

Conflicting Values: If the worker is required to perform tasks or provide services to clients based more on budgetary considerations than human need, “a value conflict occurs” (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p.16). Value conflicts create stress as workers are required to put forth effort towards goals in which they disagree. This undermines the very qualities required for workers to put forth their best efforts. “People do their best when they believe in what they are doing and when they can maintain their pride, integrity, and self-respect” (p.17).

Other Organizational Findings: Shinn, Rosario, Morch, and Chestnut

(1984) suggest that “social workers accept the unique forms of stress they are subject to as part of their professional role but react with alienation, dissatisfaction, and psychological symptoms to administrative stressors, which they regard as more avoidable” (p.874). In their study, they looked at the following job stressors: degree of difficulty related to clients, the individual worker’s unrealistic professional expectations, inadequate supervision, and the lack of agency support. Their findings significantly report “stress associated with ... inadequate or incompetent supervision and lack of agency recognition or support ... figured predominantly [over client problems and professional expectations] in the prediction of strain” (p.874). Results of the study point towards the agency as the source of job stress, thus implying “that agencies should take actions to reduce stress and improve supervision” (p.875).

Poulin and Walter (1993b) studied “four organizational variables: job stress, supervisor support, job autonomy, and organizational resources” (p.7) in a longitudinal study from 1989 to 1990. Their findings report “the strongest predictor of burnout is the level of perceived job stress in 1989” (p.7). This suggests the progressive nature of burnout due to prolonged stress to the social worker rather than burnout being a weakness of the social worker. Additional findings “significantly ... [correlated] supervisor support and organizational resources ... with burnout” (Poulin & Walter, 1993b, p.8). Courage and Williams (1987) correlated “the extent that the organizational structure lacks the flexibility to meet human needs, the care provider is at risk for burnout” (p.15). Shinn, Rosario, Morch, and Chestnut (1984) state their results are “consistent with

[earlier studies] with Berkeley Planning Associates [in 1977] and Shapiro [in 1982],” (p.874) which both correlated a negative relationship between adequate supervision and burnout. The organizational policies and procedures influence the presence and availability of supervision for social workers. The supervisor is another source within the organizational framework that can offer support or stress to the social worker.

The Meso Level: Supervision Factors

Kadushin(1992) identifies “supervisor ... as an in-between functionary, [being] a member of both management and the work group, he acts as a bridge between them” (Kadushin, 1992, p.21). Literature on the relationship between supportive supervision and burnout is limited. Most connections are identified under factors such as the organization and social support. As stated earlier, the supervisor has three distinct, yet overlapping functions; administrative, educational, and expressive-supportive. As a part of management the supervisor is responsible for a social worker’s adherence to policy and procedure, and continued acquisition of skills, education, and knowledge needed to complete the tasks. The expressive-supportive function seems to be more of a responsibility within the work group, the social worker side of the bridge.

Administrative Function: The administrative function of supervision is embedded in their position as part of management. The supervisor’s administrative responsibilities include the implementation of policy and procedures. Broken down into tasks, they include the following: “assigning, directing, reviewing, coordinating, and evaluating work; making personnel

decisions regarding hiring, promoting, termination; program planning and budget development; intra- and interagency communication of policy; and handling complaints” (Kadushin, 1992, p.23). It is the supervisor who communicates from upper management to front line workers, and also receives information from workers to pass onto management. The supervisor is the gatekeeper between the social worker and the agency in which they work. When “upper management mandates cost-cutting, middle management is often left powerless to support front line staff” (Jenkins, 2003, p.2).

Jenkins (2003) goes on to say that supervisors are probably just as likely to experience burnout, but social workers “fail to recognize burnout in . . . supervisors as quickly as [they] recognize it in . . . same level peers” (p.3). Jenkins further states, “when we find ourselves poorly treated by a social work supervisor, it seems to have an especially biting sting because it happens at the hands of ‘one of our own’” (p.3). Social workers need to know their supervisor is a source of support. In their research, Poulin and Walter (1993b) identified two important factors in decreasing burnout, the presence of “supervisor support and availability of organizational resources” (p.10). When supervisors are required to be a part of management, they are also seen as part of the problem when policies dictate that “human values place a distant second behind economic ones” (Maslach and Leiter, 1997, p.9-10). Supervisors need to advocate for their workers. Kadushin (1992) writes that “supervisors . . . who related to administrators in an independent manner and who regularly backed their subordinates commanded high loyalty from their supervisees” (p.70).

Educational Function: The education function of supervision is “concerned with teaching the knowledge, skills, attitudes necessary for the performance of social work tasks through the detailed analysis of the worker’s interaction with the client” (Kadushin, 1992, p.135). Himle, Jayaratne, and Thyness (1989) found “higher levels of stress related to role ambiguity”(p. 21). They found that “instrumental and informational support offered by supervisors may reduce psychological strains and in turn lessen burnout and job dissatisfaction” (p. 30). They also reported that “supervisory support, . . . namely informational and instrumental support [are] both designed to improve performance and problem solving” (Himle, Jayaratne, & Thyness, 1989, p.30). In the article, their findings are supported by a 1983 report from Harrison that acknowledged “competence was associated with decreased burnout and related psychological stress, when the effective support from supervisors was a type to increase worker competence” (p.31).

Supportive Supervision: This expressive-supportive function of supervision tends to be given the least amount of importance in the supervisor’s role. Kadushin (1992) states this last function’s primary goal is to “improve morale and job satisfaction” (p.20). Several studies have correlated job satisfaction and burnout. LeCroy and Rank (1987) report “the more satisfied an individual feels in his or her job setting, the less likely s/he is to experience burnout” (p.33). Arches (1991) defines job satisfaction “as an affective state describing feelings about one’s work” (p.202). She identifies the following variables as measures for job satisfaction: “the workplace in general, ... pay,

promotions, coworkers, and supervisors” (p.202). Furthermore, she reports that “burnout and job satisfaction often are used interchangeably” in the burnout literature (p.202).

A fundamental component in the working relationship between social worker and supervisor is trust. “If there is little faith or trust,” in this helping relationship, the worker will avoid admission of difficulties (Maslach, 1982, p.47). If the worker is unable to seek and receive help from the supervisor, he/she loses “a potential source of support against the onset of burnout” (p.48). The supervisor is another human connection for the social worker to experience emotional energy, which ultimately may cause stress. Whereas involvement with clients and peers can cause emotional stress for the worker, the supervisory relationship is somewhat different. “A supervisor occupies a position of authority over the [worker] . . . and has the power to shape and influence” (Maslach, 1982, p.45) the worker’s relationship with clients. Also, the supervisor is in the position to provide inspiration for the worker’s continued professional growth or to be an additional source of frustration undermining a worker’s sense of professional competency and self-esteem. Ideally, a supervisor provides regular feedback to the worker to enhance the worker’s performance. If “negative feedback predominates, while positive feedback is minimal or nonexistent,” (p.47) the message the worker receives is they are incompetent. This “can only make you feel deflated and depressed rather than inspired to try harder,” (p.47) and simply another drain on the worker’s emotional resources. Maslach (1982) states there are two important reasons for feedback from supervisors. Feedback “tells the

[worker] how well they are doing on the job (and how they might improve), and it lets them know that their work is appreciated and valued” (p.46-47). The teaching relationship between supervisor and supervisee is influenced by the rapport and emotional components that determine the level of trust afforded to the supervisor. It is the responsibility of the supervisor in their position of higher authority to initiate an atmosphere of mutual respect. It is then the responsibility of the worker to enter into this relationship equally invested in their own professional development in order to provide quality services for their clients.

The Micro Level: Social Worker Factors

Up to this point, the factors discussed have been external components leading to burnout for the social worker. External factors may play greater roles in burnout due to the power they have over a social worker’s job environment and the limited or lack of control the social worker has in changing them. But external factors are not the whole picture. “What a person brings to a situation is just as critical as what the situation brings out of (or puts into) him or her” (Maslach, 1982, p.57). It is the internal qualities that a person brings to the situation which will determine how they experience external factors. These internal qualities include: “motivations, needs, values, self-esteem, emotional expressiveness and control, and personal style” (Maslach, 1982, p.57). The personality profile most susceptible to burnout is the individual who is less assertive, “submissive, anxious, and fearful of involvement” (p.62). Maslach further describes this individual as someone who continually acquiesces and seeks self-worth through acceptance and approval of others. This type of person, due to

the lack of self-confidence and resulting inability to be assertive in situations of disagreement and obstacles “will get easily angered and frustrated, ... [and] is likely to project these feelings onto clients and to treat them in more depersonalized and derogatory ways” (p.62-63).

Self-concept: Self-concept of the social worker will influence how he/she reacts to external factors. “Your own sense of who you are, and your evaluation of that unique being, play an important role in your relations with the people around you” (Maslach, 1982, p.63). Self-concept includes esteem, confidence, and how well one knows their own limits and responsibilities. Esteem requires oneself to like themselves and to have faith in their ability. If one does not have faith in their ability to meet the demands, challenges will feel overwhelming. Having confidence means the individual is assertive and strong in their dealings with obstacles and challenges. Without confidence, the social worker will “have a passive and powerless position instead of an active and autonomous one . . . [resulting in having] a greater chance of being overburdened and emotionally depleted by the helping situation in which ... they work” (Maslach, 1982, p.63).

A clear self-concept also allows the social worker to know their limits. Maslach (1982) says, if the social worker does not know their own limits, they “are more likely to exceed them,” (p.65) taking on more responsibility than they are able to handle. This tendency towards over-responsibility is usually a result of having too high expectations, leading to feeling overwhelmed and resulting in feelings of failure.

Sense of Purpose and Belonging: The need to be appreciated and to have

a sense of purpose and belonging are basic psychological needs for all humans. To the degree a social worker is dependent on externals to have these personal needs met, they are also vulnerable to disappointment and frustrations of less-than-supportive work environments leading to burnout. When the need for approval and affection have not been met in their personal life, “the need to be liked by the people at work will become excessive” (Maslach, 1982, p.65). Achievement then becomes more for personal emotional needs than for clearly defined goals. This fuels unrealistically high expectations that “... [set oneself] up for failure” (Maslach, 1982, p.66). This dependency undermines self-esteem and confidence.

Autonomy and Control: Maslach (1982) expresses “the need to be independent and self-determining” (p.66) are crucial elements in autonomy and control. These are elements of personal growth and maturity. It is also about the need for the individual to have “freedom to choose, and the power to carry out . . . [those] choices, rather than always being told what to do” (p.66). If the social worker feels “helpless, powerless, and trapped (by the demands of other people or by the restrictions of the job), the betting is that they will burn out” (p.66). Personal needs will underscore and influence the motives of the worker.

A social worker needs to have a clear self-concept to also understand his/her personal motives. Some motives are self-less and some are self-serving. Both can be damaging to the professional. Being too self-less can actually be motivated by self-serving needs. The continually giving individual is “held up as [having] noble ideals and are strongly applauded” (Maslach, 1982, p.67).

However, the real motive may be the social workers “strong need for approval and affection” (p.67). It is important to understand one’s personal motives because there are some real dangers in using the helping relationship to obtain personal gratification. “Not only can it interfere with the quality of the care that is provided, but it can be a source of great emotional stress and subsequent burnout” (p.68).

Emotional Stress: Emotional stress resulting from the emotional quality of social work is another area of vulnerability for the worker’s susceptibility towards burning out. The intensity of emotions expressed in the helping relationship and the social worker’s ability to maintain emotional control will influence burnout. Negative emotions arise in the helping relationship from both the worker and the client. It is the responsibility of the social worker to maintain emotional control. Due to the content of difficult emotions, the helping process can be difficult where “frustrations and failures are more apt to be common than rare” (Maslach, 1982, p.69). And too often empathy is misunderstood as needing to feel what the client is feeling. The worker becomes exhausted when overloaded with intense emotions on a regular basis.

Maslach (1982) makes a clear distinction between emotional empathy and cognitive empathy, which “may have important implications for burnout” (p.70). Cognitive empathy is “understanding someone’s problem and seeing things from his or her point of view . . . [to] enhance ... [the workers] ability to provide good service or care” (p.70). Emotional empathy is actually feeling what the other is feeling. It is “really a sort of weakness or vulnerability, rather than a strength”

(p.70). This weakness can be a result of the social worker's own issues which he/she has not fully worked through. It is because of this that it is important for the social worker to have a clear self-concept, fairly developed self-esteem and self-confidence, and "have a well-developed private life in which personal needs are so well satisfied that the . . . [social worker] will not be tempted to use the . . . [client] relationship for this purpose" (p.68).

In summary, the individual social worker plays a critical role in their susceptibility to burnout, the prevention of burnout, and ultimately, the recovery from any degree of burnout. It is the social worker's responsibility to herself/himself for their own professional well-being, because it is the social worker who ultimately will experience the debilitating effect of burnout. "To know thyself and like thyself is critical for giving of thyself unto others" (Maslach, 1982, p.63)

Individual Coping Mechanisms for Stress

Shinn, Rosario, Morch, and Chestnut (1984) studied coping mechanisms used by human service workers to combat job stress and burnout. They report workers tend to develop individual coping skills, such as, "activities outside the job and cognitive or emotional strategies ... [in] reaction to high levels of job stress and strain" (p.874). Their findings also suggest the ineffectiveness of these individual efforts to reduce job strain. Individual efforts may reduce feelings of stress when the worker is outside of the job, but addressing the causes of stress within the work context with the supervisor can strengthen the social worker. Many times the same dynamics that a social worker experiences in the macro

(organizational) level or the micro (individual and client) level of their work environment may also be reenacted in the supervisory relationship, the meso level. This phenomenon is called parallel process. Understanding the dynamics of this process can promote professional and personal growth for the social worker through the supervisory relationship.

Parallel Process and Supervision

Social work is a profession with its focus on the social or human aspects of life. Rather than being a function of producing inanimate products, the product social workers attempt to produce is an improved quality of life for their clients. The human experience is felt, rather than simply observed through cognitive functioning. It is the emotional aspects of human interaction that give meaning and purpose to the experience. "The most important ingredients in building a therapeutic alliance include the client liking and trusting her or his therapist. And these feelings are directly related to the degree which the therapist utilizes and expresses empathy and compassion" (Figley, 2003). A social worker is better able to understand the subjective reality of their client if s/he is clear in her/his own self-concept and be able to have empathy regarding the client's experience.

In order to be sensitive to the feelings of others, one must also be aware of their own emotional life. The social worker will ultimately have an emotional response to the client, and at times this response may be due to experiences from the social worker's past, which is called countertransference. These feelings may again surface between social worker and supervisor as the social workers transference unto the supervisor reflecting unresolved historical emotional

experiences of the social worker. Williams (1997) discusses this phenomenon called the parallel process as “the simultaneous emergence of emotional difficulties in the relationship between social worker and supervisor that are similar to the emotional difficulties in the social worker-client relationship” (p.426). This process can also work in the opposite direction beginning in the supervisor and supervisee relationship and then transferred into the “supervisee’s relationship with the client” (p.428). Williams further states that both the therapeutic relationship and the supervisory relationship have similar goals with “an emphasis on learning, personal growth, and empathy” (p.429).

The supervisory relationship is characterized by the imparting of knowledge from an experienced professional to the less experienced social worker. The supervisor is the guide for the supervisee through difficult experiences in the client-social worker relationship. Due to the inherent emotional aspect of relationships between individuals and the tendency of parallel process occurring, “the supervisory relationship requires [both] the supervisee’s [and] supervisor’s involvement of the self” (Williams, 1997, p.429).

Involvement of the self requires self-disclosure. As the guide, the supervisor role models by their own example and encourages the social worker to be “open to self-disclosure” (Williams, 1997, p.429). “Emotional support may be offered but not accepted by workers because it requires too much self-disclosure for workers for it to be used effectively” (Himle, Jayaratne, & Thyness, 1989, p.31). The parallel process exemplifies that just as the client may be resistant to self-disclosure, the social worker may also resist opening themselves to the

scrutiny of their supervisor.

Gutierrez, GlenMaye, and DeLois (1995) “suggest the importance of the supervisor-worker relationship to the overall effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship” (p.256). This process would imply the necessity of the supervisor’s ability to know and understand their own process as well as the dynamics of parallel process, transference, and countertransference. This also implies the greater burden of responsibility to create a supportive environment for learning is placed on the supervisor. “In . . . supervision . . . an effort is made to provide a nonjudgmental setting within which it is safe to show ignorance, make mistakes, and try out new behavior” (Kahn, 1997, p.520). Professionals with a clearer sense of themselves are better able to be open to scrutiny and constructive feedback, as well as, deal with the problems and challenges clients bring to the helping relationship.

Client Factors

Some researchers have correlated types of clients and client problems with care provider burnout. Courage and Williams (1987) report that “Maslach’s description of burnout assumes an association between burnout and the direct contact with clients having constant and intensive needs” (p.8). They also found in a 1987 study that “burnout has been positively correlated with multiproblem clients and worker caseloads that include a substantial proportion of clients who have more chronic and complex problems” (Poulin & Walter, 1993b, p.6). Kurland and Salmon (1992) state, “the problems of their clients, in turn, create problems for the social workers” (p.241). They further claim that social workers

are unable to deal with these problems constantly, which then leads to burnout. In a critique on burnout research, “the pattern of reported results [consistently found] higher levels of experienced burnout ... associated with more negative ratings of certain aspects of ... client contact” (Maslach, 1987, p.97).

In a study by Jayaratne and Chess (1984) the notion of client-contact as a factor causing burnout is challenged. Their initial literature review found child welfare workers “toiling under conditions of extreme stress and suffering from its consequences” (p.448). In the study, they measured the following stress variables: “role ambiguity, role conflict, ... work load, ... value conflict, ... physical comfort, challenge, financial rewards, and promotional opportunities” (p.448). This study compared “job perceptions of family service workers, community mental health workers, and child welfare ... workers” (p.448). They had expected to find “child welfare workers to report significantly higher levels of burnout, ... but did not report greater burnout than did their colleagues in the other two groups” (Jayaratne and Chess, 1984, p.451). However, what they did find is there “may be qualitative differences ... in ... [client’s] presenting problems, and the subjective weight that is attributed to them independent of absolute work load and caseload” (p.451). This suggests the necessity for organizations to factor in variables such as the subjective weight of client problems and the ability of the individual social worker when assigning caseloads. These findings point more towards the organizational factors leading to burnout than the actual client problems as a cause.

Other Concepts in Burnout

Figley (2003) reports other forms of burnout termed as compassion fatigue, secondary victimization, secondary traumatic stress, secondary survivor, or vicarious traumatization. He says, “those who work with the suffering suffer themselves because of the work” (2003). “With the increased incidence of violence in our society, helping professionals will continue to be called upon to process emotionally stressful events” (Thompson, 2003, p.3). Thompson further contends, “helping professionals in all therapeutic settings are especially vulnerable to ‘compassion fatigue’” (2003, p.3). Compassion fatigue is described as “the emotional residue of exposure to working with the suffering, particularly those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events” (2003, p.4).

Compassion fatigue, like burnout, is associated with human costs. “Job performance goes down, mistakes go up. Morale drops and personal relationships are affected - peoples home lives start to deteriorate, personality deteriorates and eventually it can lead to overall decline in general health” (Ace-Network). Symptoms of compassion fatigue resemble symptoms of burnout. “Compassion fatigue is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion, where one feels depleted, chronically tired, helpless, hopeless, and bad, even cynical about oneself, work, life, and the state of the world” (Thompson, 2003, p.8). And like burnout, Thompson (2003) identifies the importance of support for caregivers working in trauma situations. She states, “it is a responsibility to take care of the caregivers as well as caregivers taking care of survivors” 2003, p.3).

Solutions To Burnout

Maslach and Leiter (1999) identified in their research “solutions to the six most important sources of job burnout ... as workload management or reduction; increasing one’s control over the job; enhancing the reward structure of the workplace; creating a team spirit; attacking issues of fairness; attaching values to one’s perceptions of the workplace; and ways to approach management” (p.1). In a study on social workers, LeCroy and Rank (1987) found “ a social service agency will obtain higher worker effectiveness and less worker exhaustion by recognizing the need for worker independence, self-esteem, acceptance, and support” (p.37). And Arches (1991) concluded, “workers are most satisfied when they have autonomy, are not limited by demands of funding sources, and are not stifled by bureaucracy” (p.206). These findings suggest the important role organizations play in both the causes and prevention of burnout. “Organizations need to create work environments and cultures that support and reward the workers who deliver their services” (Poulin & Walter, 1993a, p.309).

The supervisor, as a source of support, needs “ to be aware of the importance of workers’ feelings about themselves, [and] efforts must be made to promote workers’ sense of worth and competence” (Poulin & Walter, 1993a, p.309). Poulin and Walter (1993b) in another study identified the “two significant variables . . . in decreasing burnout . . . are supervisor support and availability of organizational resources” (p.10). They further contended “it may be that when supervisors provide social worker with support and positive feedback, this promotes an increased sense of well-being and self-esteem” (p.10).

Abramson (1996) discusses in her essay the necessity for “ethical self-

knowledge” of the practitioner (p.195). Although her focus is on the practitioner in relation to his/her working with the client, the concept of parallel process supports transferring her guidelines to the supervisory relationship. Abramson states “the first step in ethical assessment is to challenge people to understand their own world view before deciding what they ought to believe” (p.196). She goes on to say that we are “influenced by our personal and cultural history, [which in turn] shape our thoughts and actions” (p.196). She correlates the relationship between self-knowledge and the ability for social workers to “respond more empathetically to client’s value and ethical issues” (p.196).

Maslach (1982) supports the idea of the importance for social workers to have the “ability to introspect and understand . . . [themselves as being] critical for coping with burnout” (p.98). Self-assessment by the supervisor will better enable him/her to role model empathy towards the supervisee, which ultimately will provide supportive supervision and a tool to prevent social worker burnout.

Social workers deal with clients who are faced with significant challenges and who depend on the social worker to provide quality assistance. “The role of supervision is to help the supervisee work with patients” (Itzhaky & Itzhaky, 1996, p.80). Kadushin (1992) says the supervisor’s role is to “help the worker grow and develop professionally . . . [with the] ultimate objective [being] efficient and effective social work services to clients” (p.20). Clients present with a variety of problems. “Qualitative differences that exist in the nature of presenting problems, and the subjective weight that is attributed to them independent of absolute work load and caseload” (Jayaratne & Chess, 1984, p.451) need to be

considered in assigning caseloads.

Shinn, Rosario, Morch, and Chestnut (1984) reported “building competence, primarily by attending workshops and conferences . . . [as a significant tool] to combat job stress and burnout.” (p.869). LeCroy and Rank (1987) support the necessity of taking measures to improve worker self-esteem. They found “workers who report greater job autonomy and professional self-esteem are likely to have greater job competency” (p.33)

Due to the many variables defined in the literature affecting social work burnout, it seems “that a universal ‘shotgun’ approach aimed at reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction will be inefficient and possibly of minimal value” (Jayaratne & Chess, 1984, p.452). “Organizations need to adopt models that allow workers to have more control over their jobs and expand their roles in decision making” (Poulin & Walter, 1993a, p.309. Himle, Jayaratne, and Thyness (1989) suggest “redesigning the worker’s job, considering such factors as role conflict, role ambiguity, financial reward, working conditions, and promotional opportunities, is perhaps the most powerful ways of reducing stress” (p.31).

Summary

The study of burnout has included many variables that may have an impact and cause social work burnout. The many different stresses experienced by the social worker that can lead to burnout operate on every level of the social work practice. From a systems perspective, the macro, meso and micro levels all have areas and degrees of influence affecting the work that a social worker does.

The agency is part of the macro level of influence regarding social work

burnout. The agency provides the resources for the social worker to do their job. Resources include policy and procedures that provide guidelines. When policies are clearly stated, the social worker has a better understanding of their role as a social worker. However, many times policies and procedures are not clear, and sometimes can conflict with social work ethics. Sometimes agencies lack enough resources to provide social workers with adequate supervision, or due to lack of resources, large caseloads can cause stress on social workers leading to decline in quality of services. A social worker feeling ineffective can feel inadequate and lose any sense of purpose leading to job dissatisfaction and burnout. The structure of an organization also influences the interactions within levels of the system and interactions between levels.

The meso level of social work practice includes the social worker and the supervisor. The relationship between the social worker and supervisor is as likely a source of stress for the social worker as the relationship between social worker and client. The supervisor is a source of direction, guidance, and support for the social worker. Both the social worker and the supervisor will bring their own strengths and weaknesses to this relationship. Whereas a significant factor in successful social work being rapport developed between client and worker, the same applies between supervisor and social worker.

The supervisor is the social worker's connection to the agency as a whole. In this connection lies access to resources for the social worker to more effectively do his/her job. To the extent that resources and support are lacking, this will add additional stress to the social worker leading to the depletion of

energy within the social worker. Ultimately, if the lack of support and resources becomes too great the social worker becomes vulnerable to burnout.

The micro level includes both the social worker and the client. The social worker brings to the relationship characteristics and coping mechanisms that can ultimately hinder or enhance the quality of the working relationship, which determines some of the stress the social worker subjectively experiences. Some research has correlated inadequate coping mechanisms and weak ego strength to be the social worker's greater vulnerability to burnout. Other research has identified the types of problems clients present to be another factor causing more stress, including the client's level of participation in the relationship and their motivation to change. Clients with more severe problems and less desire to change can cause greater stress for the social worker than those clients who are more motivated with less severe problems.

The many levels that affect social work practice can also have an impact in the cause and prevention of social work burnout. Current literature suggests the burnout interventions that focus on change within the organizational structure are more effective than interventions aimed at the individual as the change agent. Maslach (1982) states, "the institution must strive actively to do all in its power to enhance each worker's sense of personal accomplishment and the feeling that 'I work at this job because it is what I want to do, and not because I have to'" (p.147). The purpose of this study is to look at the role of supportive supervision associated to burnout reduction, and the possibility of it being a buffer against other stressors causing burnout.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Description of Theory

General Systems Theory has been defined as “any entity maintained by the mutual interaction of its parts, . . . [and] can be composed of smaller systems . . . [as well as], part of a larger system” (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998, p.112-113). “Depending on the observer’s focus of interest, ... the same organized entity can be regarded as either a system or subsystem” (p.113). General Systems Theory also states that the system is more than the sum of its parts. Each part brings an unique contribution that influences other parts, and in turn, influences the whole. It is in the interaction of the parts that create the whole, and a change in one part affects change in another part of the system. If a part of a system is out of balance, other parts of the system will exert influence to bring the system back to balance. An organization seen as a system includes the subsystems between groups, between individuals, and within individuals. The individual is also a system of parts that includes values and beliefs, and strengths and weaknesses that influence their interactions with other parts of the organizational system.

Principles of Theory and Burnout/Supervision

The supervisory relationship represents a subsystem of the organization. This relationship is influenced by other parts of the greater system and other subsystems. The relationship between supervisor and supervisee is more than the two together, but includes the quality of relationship between the two people and any influences from other parts of the organizational system, the client system,

and the individual systems of social worker and supervisor. A change in either one will affect the other for either good or bad. Stress causing burnout in the social worker will have an impact on how he/she interacts with the supervisor. Supports or constraints of the organization will have an impact on resources the supervisor may have or may not have to offer the social worker. Burnout symptoms may be seen more obviously within the social worker, but all parts of the system will be effected. The dynamic of looking at the subsystem of supervisor and social worker in the context of supportive supervision buffering burnout is identifying the nature of systems mutual influence on one another.

Summary

The relationship between supportive supervision and reduced burnout implies the nature of General Systems Theory. As a subsystem of the organization, the supervisor-supervisee relationship is influenced by the system, the organization and its policies, procedures, and values. The supervisor and the supervisee interact with each other with both having influence on the other. Power needs to be mentioned regarding the supervisors position of greater authority over the supervisee, which implies the supervisor also having greater influence. To the degree that supervision is adequate for the social worker's needs determines the effect supervision will have on buffering the potential for burnout in the social worker. This research attempts to correlate the influence supportive supervision on preventing burnout in the social worker.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Research Question

The research question for this study is as follows: Is supportive supervision associated with fewer social workers reporting work-related burnout?

Concepts and Variables

The following are important concepts and variables for this evaluation:

- * Social work burnout is defined as emotional and mental exhaustion characterized by physical symptoms (conceptual definition), and the degree to which the social worker experiences these symptoms (dependent variable).
- * Supportive supervision (conceptual definition) is the independent variable.
- * Dependent variable = quantity of symptoms.
- * Independent variable = presence (or absence) of supportive supervision.
- * Supportive supervision is defined as how the social worker perceives and feels about support received from their supervisor to improve the quality of the work environment (conceptual definition). Administrative supervision is defined as the supervisory function responsible for the explanation of, and the adherence to policy and procedure in the agency. Educational supervision is defined as the supervisory responsibility for the continued learning and skill development of the social worker in the work context.

This study operationalizes the concept of social work burnout by identifying the number of burnout symptoms experienced by social workers. The symptoms of burnout are defined as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lack of personal accomplishment. Physical symptoms associated with burnout are also defined. The study also operationalizes the concept of supportive supervision for the social worker by identifying the number and percentages of social workers who agree or disagree that their supervisor is supportive. The goal of supportive supervision is to improve morale and job satisfaction. Adequate supervision has been earlier identified into three distinct functions of supervision. The administrative and educational functions of supervision have been operationalized to identify what number and percentages of social workers agree or disagree with receiving these aspects of supervision and if they affect burnout. From the data obtained, the researcher was seeking to determine social work burnout, supportive supervision's effect on social work burnout, administrative and educational effects on burnout, and similarities in perceptions of respondents.

Research Design

This was a research study using survey questionnaires which obtained quantitative and qualitative data. The sample was taken from an interval sample of metropolitan area members of the NASW, Minnesota chapter. Procedures for data collection were as follows:

A list of the 1650 metropolitan area NASW-Minnesota members was obtained from the NASW. An interval sample of 10%, or 165 were selected by choosing every 10th member on the list. Questionnaires, complete with an

instructional consent letter and a self-addressed, stamped return envelope were mailed to NASW members on April 12, 2004. Respondents were given instructions to read consent letter and keep for their records. Respondents were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and all responses were to remain anonymous. The estimated time to complete the survey was approximately 15 minutes. Respondents were instructed to complete the questionnaire and to return it to the researcher by April 30, 2004 in the enclosed self-addressed return envelope. The researcher retrieved the returned surveys from a local post office mail box up until May 7, 2004.

The Sample

The sample in this research were members of the NASW. The researcher received a list of the 1650 members of NASW in the metropolitan area of Minnesota. An interval sample of 10% of the members was taken by selecting every 10th member on the list beginning with the 10th member for a total of 165.

Respondents chosen from the interval sample were recruited by mail-in surveys with an attached consent letter. They were informed the purpose of the survey, that their participation was voluntary, and that all responses would remain anonymous.

Data Collection

The survey was a mailed questionnaire to social workers who were members of the NASW for their responses on burnout and supervision. The questionnaire was not pre-tested due to time constraints.

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire using both

qualitative and quantitative questions (see Appendix A). The researcher developed the questions based on “Maslach and Jackson’s (1981) [description of] burnout as a state of emotional exhaustion, increased depersonalization of clients, and decreased feelings of personal accomplishment,” as cited in Poulin and Walter (1993a, p.305). Four questions with yes/no responses were asked to determine emotional exhaustion. Four questions with yes/no responses were asked to determine depersonalization. Six questions with yes/no responses were asked to determine lack of personal accomplishment. One question with a listing of 9 possible physical symptoms of burnout was asked to determine how many physical symptoms respondents experienced associated with burnout. These sets of questions were to determine degrees of burnout that the social worker may be experiencing. An additional qualitative question was posed to determine different types of personal coping individuals may use to relieve symptoms.

The next section of questions focused on the three areas of supervision, the administration function, the educational function, and the supportive function. Supervisory questions were developed by the researcher using Kadushins (1992) definition of the functions of supervision. Specific questions were asked in each area to differentiate the supervisory functions to determine how much the supportive function is associated with fewer reports of burnout by social workers compared to the other two functions. Six questions were asked related to the administrative function. Two questions were asked related to the educational function. And, six questions were asked related to the supportive function. One question asked if respondents received supervision focused on work with their

clients. In addition to the quantitative questions regarding supportive supervision, two questions asked for further explanations, and one qualitative question inquired about types of feedback received from supervisors.

The last section asked questions of the following demographics: gender, age, years of social work experience, level of social work degree, and type of social work setting (primary or host) they were employed.

The data were collected through mail-in anonymous surveys from respondents volunteering to participate in this study. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire and to return by mail in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope by April 30, 2004. Of the 165 mailed surveys, 4 were returned unopened due to wrong addresses, 3 returned unanswered due to members being retired or unemployed, and 60 returned completed. Of the 60 completed, 3 were thrown out due to skipped questions. Some respondents wrote in an additional response category of “sometimes.” The questions were geared towards a response of an overall feeling or experience with a specific yes/no response requirement. A rule was established that a “sometimes” response indicated a “no.” The remaining 57 questionnaires were entered into a spreadsheet for analysis for a return rate of 35%.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this research was to identify whether the independent variable, supportive supervision, is associated with fewer social workers reporting work-related burnout, the dependent variable. Two other independent variables were also studied, the functions of administrative and educational supervision and

their affect on social work burnout. The three components of burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment were identified to determine the presence of burnout. Both positive and negative questions were included in the questionnaire. The questions were coded with a response supporting the presence of burnout symptoms or the absence of supervision functions to be given a score of 2, and the absence of burnout symptoms and presence of supervision functions a score of 1. Lower burnout scores indicated lower degrees of burnout and lower scores in areas of supervision indicated the social worker received adequate supervision. The study also identified the following demographics: gender, age, years of social work experience, highest level of degree, and whether the respondents work setting was a primary or a host social work setting. A significance level was predetermined at .05; any probability equal to or less than .05 was deemed statistically significant.

Reliability & Validity

The reliability of this research study is fairly high. First, internal consistency reliability was established by asking a number of interrelated questions in each of the categories for both the independent variables (administrative, educational and supportive supervision) and the dependent variable of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment). Question number 33 was thrown out due to lack of responses which would have distorted scores, ultimately, the mean. Question 26 was also thrown out because it asked whether the respondent received supervision regarding their clients. Respondents that replied "no" to receiving supervision

related to their clients responded to questions relating to supportive supervision. Some respondents identified they received supervision or consultation regarding their clients. Based on qualitative answers, the ones who denied receiving supervision focused on their work with their clients received some type of administrative supervision. These surveys were included in the overall study, because the supervision they received in their agency was identified even though the respondents failed to claim supervision. This had a direct impact on their attitudes of feeling supported or not. Incomplete questionnaires were thrown due to their impact on distorting results. In addition, both negative and positive statements were included in the questionnaire to insure reliability in responses.

An interval selection of voluntary respondents from an established listing of NASW member social workers reduced sampling bias and established a representation of social workers to increase reliability.. Further testing of this instrument in a larger population of social workers with similar results could possibly further confirm reliability.

This study also proves fairly high in its validity. Face validity was established and measurement bias was reduced by using a measurement tool with questions developed from established theories. The theory of burnout has been tested by Maslach and Leiter (Burnout: The Cost of Caring, 1982, and The Truth About Burnout, 1997) and others (Poulin & Walter, 1993) for years. Kadushin (1992) in Supervision in Social Work identifies and defines the three functions of social work supervision. These established theories support the measurement tool and insure face validity.

Content validity was established. The measurement tool (questionnaire) measured what it intended to measure, the relationship between supportive supervision and reduced levels of burnout. The examination of qualitative open-ended follow-up questions increased the validity of quantitative results. Respondents supported their responses by expressing their personal experiences of supervision. Content validity was increased by the use of concepts in the measuring instrument that represented concepts of burnout and supervision with the objective of determining either their presence or absence in the social worker's experience.

Limitations of the Study

As discussed in the validity and reliability of this study, there is some limitations to the study's findings. To begin with the amount of respondents was fairly low (55 analyzed responses out of a possible 165). Second, the measurement tool was not pre-tested for reliability. It is likely, based on statistical analysis, that supportive supervision is associated with fewer social workers reporting work-related burnout, but cannot at this time be generalized to all social workers. Another limitation of a small sample size is that other statistical analysis could not be achieved to determine the relationships between the other two functions of supervision and burnout levels. Additional statistical analysis would greatly reduce probability and credibility of the findings this study has produced. Overall, the limitations do not outweigh the benefits determined from statistical findings that invite further study.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

Significant Findings

Respondents were asked 16 questions about emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. Using an interval level of measurement, a response denying burnout was assigned a score of one, and a response in support of burnout was assigned a score of two. The following is a list of questions requiring a yes or no response indicating burnout.

Emotional Exhaustion:

- After a day at work, I feel drained.
- I am unable to unwind and recover from one day to the next.
- I feel rested when I wake in the morning.
- I lack energy to face another project.

Depersonalization:

- I feel connected and involved in my work.
- I feel connected and involved with my co-workers.
- I feel connected and involved with my clients.
- I have a negative viewpoint of clients and their problems.

Lack of Personal Accomplishment:

- I no longer put forth the same amount of effort I once did.
- I am unable to feel positive about the future in terms of my work.
- I feel a growing sense of inadequacy.
- Any new task feels overwhelming.
- My professional accomplishments are important to me.
- I feel I am able to make a difference.
- I put forth only the bare minimum required to maintain my work.
- I take pride in my work.

Administrative Supervision: Most of the respondents indicated favorably to receiving administrative supervision. Of the 55 usable surveys, 67% reported receiving adequate direction and information on policy and procedures. Those who reported receiving adequate administrative supervision also had lower

Table 1 (Descriptive Analysis)

Means	Receiving Supervision		
	Administrative	Educational	Supportive
Burnout Scores	17.41 n=37 (67%)	17.83 n=42 (76%)	17.71 n=49 (89%)
Means	Not Receiving Supervision		
	Administrative	Educational	Supportive
Burnout Scores	18.83 n=18 (33%)	18.00 n=13 (24%)	19.80 n=6 (11%)

burnout scores than the 33% who reported not receiving adequate administrative supervision (see Table 1).

Rigorous criteria was pre-established in determining what would constitute high burnout scores requiring a response rate of 75% or higher of supportive events for high burnout, and scores of 74% and lower for low burnout. The same rigorous criteria was set for determining receiving or not receiving adequate administrative supervision. Seventy-five percent and higher indicated not receiving adequate supervision in this area, and 74% and lower indicated receiving adequate supervision. Respondents were asked six yes/no questions with scores of one indicating they adequately received this type of supervision, and a score of two indicating they had not received this type of supervision. Responses indicating support of three or more events indicated they had indeed received adequate administrative supervision. The following are the questions asked to determine adequate administrative supervision.

Administrative Supervision:

The practice in my agency reflects the values of my agency's mission statement.

My role and job expectations are clearly defined in my job description.

I feel that my voice is heard in the decision-making process in my agency.
I am informed of policy and procedural changes in advance of the change.
I am comfortable with the number of cases in my workload.
Is your salary adequate for the work you perform?

Although statistical analysis was not done on this variable, it does suggest that if tested in a larger population, results could possibly find the variable, administrative supervision, to have an association to burnout levels. An important note regarding these findings is that the burnout mean of those receiving adequate administrative supervision ($M=17.41$) was similar to the mean of those who reported receiving supportive supervision ($M=17.71$). However, the mean of not receiving administrative supervision ($M=18.83$) was lower than those who did not receive supportive supervision ($M=19.80$) (see Table 1). This seems to suggest that the independent variable, supportive supervision, is more of a buffer against burnout than the independent variable, administrative supervision. There are many other factors that can affect burnout in social workers.

Educational Supervision: Adequate education also seems to be associated with burnout levels. Most of the respondents indicated they had received adequate education in their supervision. Of the 55 respondents, 76% reported lower levels of burnout and receiving higher levels of educational supervision. The same rigorous criteria was determined in scoring responses in the educational section. The responses were scored the same as the administrative function scores. There were only two questions asked regarding educational supervision. Of the two questions, one or more supporting events met criteria to determine receiving adequate educational supervision. The following are the questions

regarding adequate educational supervision.

Educational Supervision:

Have you received adequate training to perform what is required of you?

Does your agency sponsor regular training related to your work?

Again, the burnout mean of those receiving adequate educational supervision (M=17.83) was similar to the means of those receiving administrative (M=17.41) and supportive supervision (M=17.71). The mean score of the group not receiving educational supervision (M=18.00) (see Table 1). There was no statistical analysis of the association between educational supervision and burnout, but the findings do identify that respondents who reported higher levels of educational supervision generally reported lower levels of burnout. What these findings can suggest is they further support the premise that supervision is associated with fewer social workers reporting work-related burnout, and of the three functions, supportive supervision has the greatest association with social work burnout.

Supportive Supervision. The results of this study show supportive supervision is associated with fewer social workers reporting work-related burnout. The findings report statistical significance that supportive supervision causes lower burnout scores ($t = 2.37$; $p < .05$) (Table 2). Rigorous criteria was pre-established in determining what would constitute high burnout scores requiring a response of 75% or higher (8 of 16 questions) of supportive events for high burnout, and scores of 74% and lower indicated low or no burnout. The same rigorous criteria was set for determining supportive and non-supportive supervision. Seventy-five percent and higher response (3 of 5 questions) scores

determined non-supportive supervision, and 74% and lower determined those who received supportive supervision. A significance level was predetermined at .05; any probability equal to or less than .05 was deemed statistically significant.

Table 2 (Inferential Analysis)

t - Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

	NS	S
Mean	19.8	17.71
Variance	3.7	1.96
Observations	6	49
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	4	
<i>t</i> stat	2.37	
P(T<= <i>t</i>)one-tail	0.04	
<i>t</i> Critical one-tail	2.13	

NS = Non-supportive Supervision
S = Supportive Supervision

Respondents were then asked six questions regarding supportive supervision with the same criteria using interval levels of measurement. Scores of one or two measured respectively, receiving or not receiving, supportive supervision. Criteria to determine receiving supportive supervision required three or more positive responses. One question, number 33 (see Appendix A) was thrown out due to the lack of responses. A “no” response to question number 32 disqualified number 33. The following is a list of questions determining adequate supportive supervision.

Supportive Supervision:

Do you have the opportunity to discuss your cases with your colleagues?

Does your supervisor assist you in problem-solving and skills-building to improve your work?

Do you feel that your work is appreciated by your primary supervisor?

Do you feel supported by your supervisor in your work efforts?
If I am having professional difficulties, my supervisor is available
to me.

Most of the respondents indicated receiving supportive supervision. Of the 55 respondents, 50 (91%) reported a “yes” response to three or more of the five questions. The mean of each group, those receiving supportive supervision and those not receiving supportive supervision, was determined. Next a one-tailed *t* test was conducted to predict statistical probability and significance. The initial test found variances to be too large. In analyzing the data, two outliers with scores significantly higher than the other scores in both groups were found that distorted the results. A rule was determined to take out any scores 30 and higher for burnout scores in the non-supportive group, and any scores 24 and higher for burnout scores in the supportive group. Another *t* test was conducted with the end results stating that 95% of all scores were within a range of + or - of 4 indicating statistical significance of this study. Supportive supervision indeed was associated with lower burnout scores, and it is likely, the same results would be found in a larger population. Due to a small sample size, additional statistical analysis was not conducted.

Other Findings

The three components of burnout differentiate the phases of burnout that an individual may be experiencing. These three components are emotional exhaustion being the initial phase, and depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment being second and third. Findings suggest that most of the respondents were found in the earlier phase of burnout. Of the 55 respondents, 18

(33%) reported high levels of emotional exhaustion. They reported higher scores indicating inadequate supervision in all three supervisory areas with the administrative function providing the least amount of supervisory support. When looking at depersonalization scores, burnout levels remained on the low side of the criteria. Social workers participating in this survey experienced low levels of depersonalization. Only one person reported high levels of burnout related to lacking personal accomplishments, but did not correlate significantly with any of the supervisor factors being a cause. These findings suggest from the sample studied that those who experienced burnout tended to be in the earlier phase, emotional exhaustion. And, those who received adequate supportive supervision were less likely to experience burnout. In summary, supportive supervision is preventative of burnout in social workers, and inadequate administrative supervision seems to be a factor correlated to higher burnout levels.

Physical symptoms: There were no associations found in increases in physical symptoms and an increase in burnout or in scores indicating inadequate supervision. The physical symptoms that at times accompany burnout were also questioned in this study. The symptoms are as follows: headaches, gastrointestinal illness, high blood pressure, muscle tension, chronic fatigue, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and other. Only three respondents reported a high level (6 of 9 possible) of physical symptoms. They reported low levels of burnout, but two reported high scores for inadequate administrative supervision, one reported inadequate educational supervision, and all three reported receiving adequate supportive supervision. These findings suggest these

Table 3

	Years of Social Work Experience							
	(1-5)	(6-10)	(11-15)	(16-20)	(21-25)	(26-30)	(31-35)	(36-40)
Burnout Scores	17.73	18.25	17.83	17.60	18.00	18.00	18.00	16.50
Admin.	8.47	7.58	7.50	7.80	8.17	7.33	8.67	9.00
Education	2.40	2.17	2.33	2.40	2.00	2.33	2.67	9.00
Supportive	5.47	5.25	6.67	5.80	6.00	5.17	7.00	6.00
<u>Mean scores of burnout symptoms and supervision functions</u>								

respondent's physical symptoms may have other causes than work related burnout. This also implies the nature of possible personal factors that can affect stress levels leading to burnout.

Demographics: Age and years of social work experience did not factor in the two groups, those receiving supportive supervision and those not receiving supportive supervision. The average age for both groups was 42 years old. The average years of experience for those receiving supportive supervision was 14.2 yrs., and those not receiving supportive supervision was 14.8 yrs. experience. An interesting finding regarding years of experience suggests no relationship between experience and burnout. The mean scores of burnout scores do not significantly change with years of experience. The reported years of experience were divided into time frames of 5 years (see Table 3). The means for burnout scores were calculated for each group. There was no pattern of decreases in burnout scores as years of experience increased. If anything, the scores increased, and at the last interval of 36 - 40 yrs., it dropped. There is no conclusive evidence correlating experience with burnout.

The most significant demographic difference was those who reported not receiving supportive supervision; they were all females. Males made up only

Table 4

	Gender	
	Females	Males
Burnout	17.87	17.88
Physical Symptoms	2.00	2.80
Administrative	8.04	7.62
Educational	2.30	2.25
Supportive	5.83	5.00

15% of total sample population. The total sample population was divided into the two groups (males and females). The mean scores for both groups were calculated for the total burnout scores, physical symptoms, administrative responses, educational responses, and supportive responses. In all supervisory categories, females reported slightly higher scores indicating less satisfaction with the supervision they received. Males reported higher scores for physical symptoms. Both groups reported similar scores for burnout measures (see Table 4).

A majority of respondents reported having a MSW as their highest level of degree. Of the 55 respondents, 75% had a MSW (n=41), 16% had a BSW (n=9), and the other 9% had a BA, MA or PhD/DSW (n=5). The higher level of degree showed some relationship to an increase in receiving adequate supervision. Of the respondents who reported not receiving supportive supervision, 67% reported having a MSW as their highest level of degree. And of those who reported receiving supportive supervision, 76% reported having a MSW as their highest level of degree. The difference is not significant enough to report level of degree to be associated with burnout levels, but it does suggest those with a higher degree may receive more supportive supervision. And, increased levels of supportive supervision were found to be associated with fewer reports of burnout.

There were no significant associations between adequate supervision and type of setting, primary vs. host. Although, the non-supportive group had a greater percentage of host settings than the supportive group. The non-supportive group reported 83% of the respondents worked in a host setting, whereas, the supportive group reported somewhat less at 67%. This may indicate that primary social work settings understand the importance of adequate supervision, but there are no statistical findings to make this claim at this time.

Qualitative Responses

Although no statistical analysis was conducted on qualitative responses, the information obtained indicates the importance of supervision functions in promoting a positive work environment. The following is some of the comments respondents wrote regarding administrative and supportive supervision functions. In addition, respondents identified individual coping strategies in attempts to reduce the negative affects of stressful situations.

Administrative: Comments received regarding the administrative role were generally negative. Some of the comments are included here. The following statements were in response to their agency's mission. "Public schools do not really care about the emotional well-being of students." "People at my agency have lost sight of our mission. All they care about now is money." "The lack of one solid professional identity makes it possible for some to not be mindful of some common principles." "They say they are open to input and ideas; however, it is a very closed system." "I have my own professional sense of mission."

The next set of comments referred to job role. "Subject to doing what

principal wants.” “Keeps changing.” “Sometimes it changes based on organizational needs.” “Many expectations were not in my job description.”

These comments support the quantitative data that suggests the administrative function is lacking for many social workers as a resource for positive support.

Supportive: Comments regarding supportive supervision gives a sense that social workers appreciate and thrive on positive feedback, support, and encouragement. The following comments are both negative and positive. “Only when there’s a problem.” “A yearly review - otherwise only when a problem comes up.” “Only hear of how we don’t measure up to productivity/\$, goals.” “I clean up her messes and do her problem-solving.” “She doesn’t criticize, doesn’t micromanage.” “She appreciates my competence.” “She may also give me feedback in situations I may be unsure how to handle.” “Empathy.” “Positive, constructive, concerned, supportive, challenging.” “My immediate supervisor works closely with me on a daily basis.” These comments indicate the importance of being acknowledged and appreciated. They also indicate the lack of support a social worker may feel if feedback is generally negative or focused only on productivity and financial considerations.

Individual Coping: Respondents reported a variety of personal coping strategies for dealing with the symptoms they reported. The following is a listing of coping strategies reported by respondents: exercise, gardening, time with pets, time with friends or family, talking with peers, nature activities, medication (prescribed and over-the-counter), spirituality, meditation, regular sleep schedules, music, reading, massage, occasional alcohol use, and stress

management techniques. The wide variety of strategies indicate the necessity of having enjoyment and relaxation outside of work, as well as, taking care of oneself.

Summary

Supportive supervision is found to be associated with fewer social workers reporting work-related burnout. Statistical analysis found that the group who reported to receive supportive supervision experienced lower levels of burnout than the group of social workers who reported not receiving supportive supervision. Both administrative and educational functions were also found to play a role in social work burnout, although there were no statistical analyses to support these findings. However, it does imply and support theoretical constructs regarding the role organizations and their policies/procedures play in the prevention of stress-causing factors leading to burnout.

The components of burnout also provide information to the degree of burnout that may be present in the individual. Respondents of this study reported higher degrees of burnout in the emotional exhaustion component, and simultaneously, reported receiving lower levels of adequate supervision in all three areas of supervision. This suggests that respondents feel the burden on an emotional level of not receiving adequate organizational support. They may be aware enough to know the source of their stress is not themselves or their clients.

There was no association found between physical symptoms and burnout symptoms. Individuals with higher physical symptoms reported lower on the burnout measures, higher on administrative stressors, and lower on supportive

scales. There were no significant connections between burnout and physical symptoms. The only significant difference in demographics was gender, but only regarding the relationship between supportive supervision and burnout. The respondents who reported receiving less supportive supervision and higher burnout rates were all females. But when analyzed for specific differences in the male responses versus the female responses, very little difference could be found between the two groups. Supportive supervision with low burnout rates was the only indicator of difference in gender responses.

Age and years of experience showed no effect on burnout rates. There were some differences in levels of degree and reporting to receive supportive supervision. Those who reported having a MSW degree or higher reported to receive more supportive supervision. This may be due to lack the of BSW respondents and the requirements of supervision and licensing at higher levels of social work. There were some differences found in whether the respondent worked in a primary or social work setting. A large majority of those responding to not receiving supportive supervision were employed in a host setting where social work is not the primary profession. This could suggest there may be differences in values and attitudes regarding supportive supervision in non-social work settings that can undermine the core values of the social worker leading to emotional stress.

Overall, social workers who feel their work and efforts are not appreciated and supported by their supervisors will be more vulnerable to the debilitating effects of burnout. Supportive supervision was found to be an important resource

for the social worker and associated with fewer reports of burnout.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Due to small sample size and the lack of true representation of all social workers, this study has limited validity and the results cannot be generalized to the whole population. The research question was: Is supportive supervision associated with fewer social workers reporting work-related burnout? Of the 55 respondents, 49 (89%) reported they had received supportive supervision. These same 49 respondents also reported lower levels of social work burnout. The other 6 (11%) reported not receiving supportive supervision and indicated higher burnout scores. Statistical analysis suggests an association between the variables.

Respondents with a MSW degree or higher were over-represented in this study. Forty-three (78%) of the respondents reported having a Master's degree or higher. The study further suggested a relationship between all functions of supervision and burnout. Both groups reporting to receive administrative and educational supervision also reported lower burnout scores than the groups that reported not receiving adequate administrative and educational supervision. The idea was if social workers received adequate supervision and support in their practice they would be less vulnerable to burnout. The response shows that those receiving support experience lower burnout but does not mean that having supportive supervision will prevent burnout for all social workers.

There are other variables within the context of social worker and their job that may affect burnout. Are individuals who are already vulnerable to burning out attracted to work environments that provide less support? How much of the

individual personality influences the dynamics between social worker and supervisor or any other aspects of the social workers work environment? The context in which social work is performed has several variables. We are all affected by our environments and we also have an affect on those environments. This study emphasized a significant relationship within the bigger system, and it would be further useful to conduct in-depth qualitative research on this one aspect, supervision and social worker burnout.

Implications for Social Work Practice

It appears that this study underscores the necessity in adequate supervision for social workers. The nature of social work is as complex as the human experience. We all bring our own idiosyncrasies and values to every interaction and experience. “What a person brings to a situation is just as critical as what the situation brings out of (or puts into) him or her” (Maslach, 1982, p.57). It is beneficial to have outside feedback that can challenge, support and encourage. A basic human need is to know that one’s contributions are important and that they have value. Supportive supervision is a tool for support and encouragement that acknowledges the worth of our work. LeCroy and Rank (1987) report “the more satisfied an individual feels in his or her job setting, the less likely s/he is to experience burnout” (p.33). Supportive supervision is also a tool towards continued improvement and accountability. This study reinforces the necessity to not only have rules and policy to guide and dictate behavior but also the importance of being appreciated.

Burnout does not only affect the individual social worker experiencing the

symptoms, it affects the quality of their work. Organizations are affected by the reduction of productivity. Maslach (1982) found that “the effects of burnout at the institutional level are reflected in high rates of absenteeism, turnover, and complaints about staff performance” (p.146). In an economy of reduced funding it makes sense to utilize all resources to their best efficiency without depleting these same resources. The human workforce is the most valuable resource of organizations. It is the human element that enables the organization to exist. In the long run, organizations would benefit from reinvesting in their workforce to insure the highest possible quality product. That product is another human, the client, who is also affected by the strains, stresses, and depletion of reserves on the social worker.

Clients suffer when social workers are too exhausted to provide quality services and in turn, treat clients “in a more dehumanized manner” (Maslach, 1982, p.82). Clients are already vulnerable to life’s circumstances. It is a harsher blow when the attack comes from those who promise to help them. Social workers choose this profession because they care, they desire to help others, and they want to change the injustices in the world. How can social workers affect change for their clients when they experience injustice, frustrations, disempowerment, and discouragement in the environments in which they work? How can social workers encourage self-determination and empowerment in their clients if they can not in their own lives? How can social workers advocate for their clients when they are exhausted, cynical, and lack any sense of personal accomplishment? Supportive supervision helps insure clients receive services and

assistance from social workers who are better equipped to deal with their problems, challenges, and needs.

Social workers supported in their efforts carry their caseloads more effectively. “Supervisors are ... [an] important source of help and guidance, [and social workers being able to] turn to others for help and support is critical for beating burnout” (Maslach, 1982, p.126). Burnout in social workers can also place an added strain on peers. Burnout causes reduced productivity and increased illness-related absences. Increased absences places greater workloads on other coworkers. This causes more stress and strain for all. It causes resentment among peers, breaks down the community of support for all, and damages morale. The bottom line is quality in services to clients is jeopardized. Services no longer are “social work,” but rather become impersonal and ineffective services that wear a facade that says services were provided. Workers put in their time with no sense of true accomplishment, and clients deal with the end result of feeling inadequate for not benefiting fully for what they thought they received.

Not only is the work environment the target of the debilitating affects of burnout, but the home environment of the burned-out social worker is denied the full capabilities of their loved one. Burned-out social workers go home feeling depleted. They have nothing left for themselves or for their families, “presumably the most significant and cherished people in [their] life“ (Maslach, 1982, p.82). The stress and frustrations of non-supportive work environments interfere with individual’s ability to unwind after work, which would enable them to pursue

other interests. Eventually, the lack of satisfaction makes the individual dread the next work day making it difficult to “relax or sleep well at night“ (Maslach, 1982, p.73). An overall negative feeling and attitude spirals with a continued sense of dread.

Social work has established a position of professional status. But, has social work achieved a professional position of value? Is social work regarded as a significant contribution to our society? Or, is social work simply viewed as a necessity to deal with the things much of society wants to avoid? For continued support of the social work profession, adequate supervision is necessary beyond the licensing requirements. Supervision and peer support are important resources for all social workers to advocate for the validity of the profession.

Implications for Policy

Social workers advocate for their clients and they work to influence policy for the improved quality of life for clients. Social workers can also advocate for themselves. Social workers need to participate in social work organizations and in influencing public policy. A burned-out social worker has difficulty finding the energy to advocate for themselves. Social workers may see inequalities in the work environment but choose to not do anything about it. Advocacy begins within the individual and is an ethical responsibility of all social workers. Kadushin (1992) identifies “there is an ethical obligation [of the supervisor] ... to implement the functions of supervision conscientiously and responsibly” (p.498-499).

Supervision can assist the individual social worker work through their own empowerment issues. We all have our own strengths. And we all have times in our lives we feel stronger than other times. It is up to each individual to support and encourage one another. Together, social workers can advocate for changes in organizational policies that undermine their work efforts. At a public policy level, social workers need to join forces to voice the concerns of those who are yet unable to speak for themselves. Administrations need to know and be responsible for their employees work environments. Administrations that encourage and welcome participation through all levels of the organization provide an atmosphere that creates loyalty from their employees. Change in an individual can create change in a system.

Implications for Further Research

More studies need to be done to understand the relationship between social worker and the whole environment in which they work to better understand burnout. Although there has been significant research on the topic of burnout, there still seems to be a burnout problem. Further research could analyze in depth the components within the individual and their immediate work environment including supervision. Further study could define clear interventions that would ultimately lead to better services for clients. Improved services for clients could mean meeting the needs of those who need assistance to empower themselves. Empowered individuals contribute to the common good.

Additional studies may look at the impact host settings have on social worker burnout, and how different interventions may be applied to improve

mismatches in professional values. Many times, organizations are difficult to change. It may be beneficial to help identify the factors that may make some more vulnerable than others to burnout. Interventions and resources for social workers created to empower them could reduce vulnerability to burnout. Identifying the significance of supportive supervision in preventing burnout suggests the importance of continued adequate supervision in the profession. It also suggests the necessity of properly trained supervisors who are able to meet the needs of their supervisees.

Strengths of this Study

This study reinforces the importance of supervision and the significance of its role in effective social work. This study was able to identify that supportive supervision is a preventative measure against social worker burnout. Social work is by nature a profession that its functions create emotional drain on the individual social worker. Social workers are constantly giving of their energy to others, and many times the client is unable to give much in return. It is important that social workers have other resources to fulfill their human needs. Appreciation and support are two crucial needs in all of us. This study highlighted how receiving support from one's supervisor can reduce burnout and its negative affect on social workers. It also suggested the importance of positive feedback and support for a sense of well-being in the social worker, especially in environments where negative experience and feelings are so prevalent. Maslach (1997) states, "burnout is not just about the presence of negative emotions. It is also about the absence of positive ones" (p.28). Supportive supervision reduces negative

feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, and incompetence; but more importantly, supportive supervision promotes positive feelings of appreciation, value and respect. The intent of this study was to influence improved quality of supervision, and ultimately to promote enjoyable work environments. The end result would filter down to improved quality of services and client satisfaction.

Conclusion

Social work supervision is an important factor in the credentialing and licensing of the profession. Supervision provides social workers with direction and skills to complete their job efficiently and effectively. Conflicting values of organizations and social worker goals tend to create stresses in the work environment that affect services to clients. Supportive supervision is a buffer against burnout and a resource for social workers caught between competing demands. Although administrative and educational supervision seem to have an impact on social worker stress, supportive supervision is found to be a preventative measure against burnout. It appears that social workers can deal with administrative obstacles and challenges as part of the job. But, the lack of feeling appreciated and valued in one's work environment from those who hold authority over them is felt on a more personal level. Regardless of one's profession, the worker is always first a person with the same human requirements in their professional life as in other areas of their life. The social worker wants support, guidance, encouragement, appreciation, and to know that who they are and what they contribute is of value to others. In the work environment, the supervisor is the one who "grades" the social worker's efforts, thus making the

supervisor's input carrying the ability to uplift or destroy. "Feedback from supervisors is especially important for two reasons: it tells providers how well they are doing on the job (and how they might improve), and it lets them know that their work is appreciated and valued" (Maslach, 1982, p.46-47).

REFERENCES

- Abramson, M. (1996). Reflections on knowing oneself ethically: Toward a working framework for social work practice. Families in society: The journal of contemporary human services, (1996, April), 195-202.
- Arches, J. (1991). Social structure, burnout, and job satisfaction. Social Work, 36, 202-206.
- What is compassion fatigue? (On-line). Available: www.ace-network.com.
- Courage, M. M., & Williams, D. D. (1987). An approach to the study of burnout in professional care providers in human service organizations. Journal of social service research, 10, 7-21.
- Figley, C. R. (2003). Compassion fatigue: An introduction. (On-line). Available: www.greencross.org.
- Gutierrez, L., GlenMaye, L., & DeLois, K. (1995). The organizational context of empowerment practice: Implications for social work administration. Social work, 40, 249-258.
- Hecker, D. E. (1996). Earnings and major fields of study of college graduates. Occupational Outlook Quarterly, (1996, Summer), 10-21.
- Himle, D. P., Jayaratne, S., & Thyness, P. A. (1989). The buffering effects of four types of supervisory support on work stress. Administration in social work, 13, 19-34.
- Itzhaky, H., & Itzhaky, T. (1996). The therapy-supervision dialectic. Clinical social work journal, 24, 77-88.
- Jayaratne, S., & Chess, W. A. (1984). Job satisfaction, burnout, and turnover: A national study. Social work, (1984, September-October), 448-453.

Jenkins, L. (2003). (Review of the book The truth about burnout). (On-line).

Available: www.friedsocialworker.com/socialworkburnout.htm.

Johnson, M., & Stone, G. L. (1987). Social workers and burnout: A psychological description. Journal of social service research, 10, 67-80.

Kadushin, A. (1992). Supervision in social work (3rd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.

Kahn, E. M. (1979). The parallel process in social work treatment and supervision. Social casework: The journal in contemporary social work, (1979, November), 520-528.

Kurland, R., & Salmon, R. (1992). When problems seem overwhelming: Emphases in teaching, supervision, and consultation. Social work, 37, 241-244.

LeCroy, C. W., & Rank, M. R. (1987). Factors associated with burnout in the social services: An exploratory study. Journal in social service research, 10, 23-39.

Maslach, C. (1982). Burnout: The cost of caring. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Maslach, C. (1987). Burnout research in the social services: A critique. Journal of social service research, 10, 95-105.

Maslach, C. & Leiter, M. (1997). The truth about burnout. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (1999). Take this job and ... love it! (6 ways to beat burnout). Psychology today, 32, 50-54.

Mish, F. C., et al (Eds.). (1989). The new Merriam-Webster dictionary. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc.

Nichols, M. P., & Schwartz, R. C. (1998). The fundamental concepts of family therapy. In J. Fifer, K. Hanson, & S. Hutchinson (Eds.), Family therapy: Concepts and methods (pp. 109-139). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Poulin, J. E., & Walter, C. A. (1993a). Burnout in gerontological social work. Social work, 38, 305-310.

Poulin, J. E., & Walter, C. A. (1993b). Social worker burnout: A longitudinal study. Social work research & abstracts, 29, 5-11.

Shinn, M., Rosario, M., Morch, H., & Chestnut, D. E. (1984). Coping with job stress and burnout in the human services. Journal of personality and social psychology, 46, 864-876.

Thompson, R. (2003). Compassion fatigue: The professional liability for caring too much. (Online). Available: www.riskinstitute.org.

Williams, A. B. (1997). On parallel process in social work supervision. Clinical social work journal, 25, 425-435.

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions about your primary social work environment. Circle your response or write in your answer. Please do not write your name on the survey. All individual responses will be kept confidential. Leave blank any questions you do not wish to answer.

1. After a day at work, I feel drained.

___ Yes

___ No

2. I am unable to unwind and recover from one day to the next.

___ Yes

___ No

3. I feel rested when I wake in the morning.

___ Yes

___ No

4. I lack energy to face another work project.

___ Yes

___ No

5. Please check any of the physical symptoms that you experience on a regular basis:

___ headaches

___ chronic fatigue

___ gastrointestinal illness

___ anxiety

___ high blood pressure

___ depression

___ muscle tension

___ sleep disturbances

___ other: (please identify)

6. How do you cope with these symptoms e.g. medications, alcohol, physical exercise, meditation, stress management techniques?

7. I feel connected and involved in my work.

Yes

No

8. I feel connected and involved with my co-workers.

Yes

No

9. I feel connected and involved with my clients.

Yes

No

10. I have a negative viewpoint of clients and their problems.

Yes

No

11. I no longer put forth the same amount of effort I once did.

Yes

No

12. I am unable to feel positive about the future in terms of my work.

Yes

No

13. I feel a growing sense of inadequacy.

Yes

No

14. Any new task feels overwhelming.

Yes

No

15. My professional accomplishments are important to me.

Yes

No

16. I feel I am able to make a difference.

Yes

No

17. I put forth only the bare minimum required to maintain my work.

Yes

No

18. I take pride in my work.

Yes

No

19. The practice in my agency reflects the values of my agency's mission statement.

Yes

No, please explain:

20. My role and job expectations are clearly defined in my job description.

Yes

No, please explain:

21. I feel that my voice is heard in the decision-making process in my agency.

Yes

No

22. I am informed of policy and procedural changes in advance of the change.

Yes

No

23. I am comfortable with the number of cases in my workload.

Yes

No

24. Have you received adequate training to perform what is required of you?

Yes

No

25. Does your agency sponsor regular training related to your work?

Yes

No

26. Do you receive supervision focused on your work with clients?

___ Yes, how often and how long do you meet?

___ No, what type, if any, of supervision do you receive?

27. Do you have the opportunity to discuss your cases with your colleagues?

___ Yes

___ No

28. Does your supervisor assist you in problem solving and skills building to improve your work?

___ Yes

___ No

29. Is your salary adequate for the work you perform?

___ Yes

___ No

30. Do you feel that your work is appreciated by your primary supervisor?

___ Yes, in what ways?

___ No, if you feel it's not appreciated, how do you know it's not?

31. Do you feel supported by your supervisor in your work efforts?

___ Yes

___ No

32. In this age of declining resources, social workers sometimes are faced with

competing obligations and value conflicts. Have you faced any ethical dilemmas in terms of delivery of services?

___ Yes, go to question 33.

___ No, go to question 34.

33. Was your supervisor supportive when you faced this dilemma?

___ Yes, in what way?

___ No

34. What kind of feedback do you receive from your supervisor about your work?

35. If I am having professional difficulties, my supervisor is available to me.

___ Yes

___ No

Please answer the following questions about yourself (circle your response).

1. What is your gender?

a. female

b. male

2. In what year were you born?

19__ __

3. How many total years of experience do you have in social work?

4. What is your highest level of degree?
 - a. B.A. (non-social work major)
 - b. BSW
 - c. M.A. (non-social work major)
 - d. MSW
 - e. Ph.D/DSW
5. In what type of setting are you employed?
 - a. primary setting (social work is the primary function of the setting)
 - b. host setting (social work is not the primary profession)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return in the self-addressed, stamped envelope.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT LETTER

Consent Letter

The Effects of Adequate Social Work Supervision on the Prevention of Burnout

You are invited to be in a research study of social work burnout regarding the impact of work environmental factors that may lead to burnout. The researcher is Kathryn Jarl, a student in the Master of Social Work program at Augsburg College. You were randomly selected as a possible participant because you are a member of the NASW. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You will remain anonymous, and no one will know whether or not you participated, unless you decide to share that information with others. Your completion and return of the survey is your consent to participate in the study. This study is being conducted by me as part of my master's thesis at Augsburg College.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is assist social workers, their supervisors, and agencies to better understand how to alleviate social work burnout. This study will ask questions related to your work environment and your supervision as well as, any physical and emotional symptoms of burnout you may have experienced. Demographic data, e.g. gender, age, years of social work practice experience will also be collected. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes

Procedures

If you decide to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- 1) Read this consent letter and keep it for your records.
- 2) Complete the attached mail-in survey and return by April 30, 2004 in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The risk involved in participating in this study is that many of the questions are personal and you may feel some emotional discomfort in responding to them. If at any time during this survey you wish to not answer a question or end your participation in the study, you may do so.

In the event that this research causes any discomfort or distress you may contact
Consent Letter page 2

the Crisis Connection, a 24hr. counseling hotline at 612-379-6363 for follow-up support. This follow-up will be provided free of charge. If you choose to seek follow-up support beyond this, you may receive a referral from the hotline. If this is required, payment for any such follow-up must be provided by you or your third party payer, if any, (such as health insurance, Medicare, etc.).

There are no direct benefits (such as payment) for participating in this study.

Indirect benefits to participation are a contribution to the knowledge of social workers and organizations related to burnout.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. All responses are anonymous. I will report the data only in aggregate form. My thesis advisor is Dr. Laura Boisen. Dr. Boisen and I will have access to the raw data. The surveys will not have any identifying information (e.g. name, address, or phone number).

Research records, such as notes and completed surveys, will be kept in a locked file in my home office until my thesis has final approval, at which time the notes will be destroyed. All raw data will be destroyed by March 15, 2005.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

This study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate in the study will not affect your current or future involvements with NASW or Augsburg College. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Kathryn Jarl. The thesis advisor on this project is Dr. Laura Boisen. If you have any questions regarding this research, before you fill out the questionnaire, feel free to contact my thesis advisor Dr. Laura Boisen (W) 612-330-1439. If you have any questions later, you may contact Dr. Boisen at that time.

You may keep this consent letter for your records.

Consent Letter page 3

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked any questions and received answers. By completing and returning the survey questionnaire I consent to participate in the study. I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature of Investigator _____

Date _____

