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Emotional Exhaustion Among Child Welfare Social Workers in Southern California: A Qualitative Study

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EMOTIONAL EXAUSTION AMONG CHILD WELFARE SOCIAL WORKERS IN

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

in

Master of Social Work

_____

by

Irma Mondragón

December 2021

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Approved by:

Dr. Rigaud Joseph, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Dr. Carolyn McAllister, MSW, Research Coordinator

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore emotional exhaustion among child welfare social workers in Southern California. Most of the research studies on this area have been conducted outside the southern region of the Golden State. Through semi-structured interviews with 12 current and former child welfare social workers, this study found three major themes: (1) child welfare social workers suffer from a multifaceted form of emotional exhaustion; (2) child welfare social workers believe that the benefits of child welfare ultimately outweigh its costs, and (3) child welfare social workers use a variety of ways to cope with work-related emotional exhaustion. Implications of these findings for child welfare are discussed.

Keywords: emotional exhaustion, child welfare, social work, qualitative research methodology

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

Este proyecto está dedicado muy especialmente a mis Padres Crisostomo Mondragón y Robertina Mondragón. Gracias apá por haberme dado un buen ejemplo y enseñado a no darme por vencida para lograr mis metas. De tí aprendí a luchar en la vida y enfrentar mis desafíos. Como tú siempre dices, "yo soy un humilde campesino", ahora yo te digo que la persona que yo admiro como mi padre y quien me enseño luchar y no darse por vencida hasta lograr mis metas y mis sueños. Amá, este logro te lo dedico con mucho cariño y te doy gracias por tu apoyo incondicional y por haberme enseñado a luchar y cumplir mis objetivos, a desarrollar mis habilidades de ser madre y mujer emprendedora. Eres un gran ejemplo de madre una gran guerrera en mi vida. Gracias.

I also dedicate this project to my children Alyssa Ruiz and Joel A. Mondragón Figueroa. Alyssa, my life forever changed when I embraced you in my arms when you were born. That was one of the most incredible days and foremost challenges of my life. My son Jolie, you have fulfilled my dreams and expectations as my son. You both are my Inspiration and foundation in my life. Chulo, my dog I forever love you. Lastly, I dedicate this project to my little brother Alfredo Mondragón. Freddy, I love you for the little boy you once were, a determined college student and hardworking husband that you are today, and for the loving father you will always be.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM FORMULATION

In the child welfare social work profession, burnout is a common issue and one of the many causes of job dissatisfaction and turnover. Burnout is defined as the experience of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion that can emerge from long-term collaboration in occupational situations that are emotionally demanding (McFadden et al, 2014). Furthermore, burnout encompasses the concepts of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al, 1996). Studies have found that numerous harmful consequences to occupation dissatisfaction, loyal dedication to management, employment departure and understaffing are linked to burnout (Maslach & Leith, [37], p. 499).

Child welfare workers are also subject to greater stress and encountered with dangerous situations, that other health professionals, one of which is child removal. According to Riverside County Department of Social Services Fact Sheet (2018), reasons for child removal are allegations of child abuse and neglect such as: caretaker absence/incapacity, severe neglect, general neglect, corporal abuse or neglect, sexual abuse, disability or handicap on a child, emotional abuse, exploitation, law violation, relinquishment, safely surrendered baby and status offense. Child removal situations can often be distressing as

child welfare social workers as they are faced with parents or caretakers who are physically and verbally hostile.

Moreover, child welfare social workers have higher caseloads, poor management, and inadequate or no self-care. As a result, they experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion, which can lead to poor customer service to their clients, inadequate intake case investigation, inconsistent case monitoring, and turnover (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). Additionally, child welfare social workers are facing increased legal issues due to negligence with children and families under their supervision.

High caseloads lead to an increase in staff turnover and increased costs and decrease in quality of delivery of services. Furthermore, child welfare case workers are often underfunded and manage high caseloads (Rochelle & Buonanno, 2018). According to Killian (2008) extreme caseloads may increase inability to serve their clients with compassion as well as difficulty concentrating and memory challenges. In addition, child social work continuous leave has become a major issue for the human service field. Moreover, the quality of client services, stability and trust are compromised (Mor et al., 2001). Child social work turnover also causes psychological distress in remaining staff members who do not have the experience of knowledge to take over vacant positions and responsibilities (Powell & York, 1992).

<u>Purpose of the Study</u>

The purpose of the study is to explore emotional exhaustion associated with workload among child welfare social workers in Southern California. As seen earlier, there is a rapid turnover of employees across child welfare services divisions in California due to the emotional exhaustion and lack of resources. This study answered the following two questions:

1. Do child welfare social workers in Southern California experience emotional exhaustion associated with workload? If so, how do these workers cope with this issue?

2. How can social service agencies assist child welfare workers in overcoming emotional exhaustion?

Significance of the Project

The proposed study is needed to help child welfare social workers identify the importance of self-care and burnout prevention. This study will serve as an information resource to child welfare organizations, public and private as well as an idea of the social workers life and professional reality. Its findings may open doors for government organizations to read and see how their employees feel and make determinations and get answers as to why employees leave. Furthermore, this study findings may serve as an instrument to make better policies for the care and wellbeing of their employees and clients. Better job satisfaction will lead to better outcomes for family maintenance and family reunification.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the need to improve child welfare workers to overcome unhealthy work environments, excessive workload, and management support, gaps in literature and limitations, and conflict findings. In addition, this chapter presents Carl Rogers's approach on personal power and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as two guiding theories for this research.

Review of the Literature

Improving the needs in emotional exhaustion where burnout is one of the causes, there is also a secondary traumatic stress that contributes to child welfare social workers health decline, mentally and physically. Employees who are overworked and emotionally exhausted may begin to demonstrate changes in job performance and overall team morale. Employers might start noticing failure to meet deadlines, lower commitment to organization, more absences, and high turnover rate. Kahill (1988) explained that burnout is often due to actual working conditions of the social workers within their place of employment rather that the trauma that these workers experience as a result of the job itself. Many factors affect the wellbeing of child welfare workers. These include excessive workload, low wages, working long hours, and lack of management support.

Excessive Workload and Low Wages

According to research studies, workload is known to be a significant stressor in child welfare occupation (Dillenburger, 2004; Ellet et al., 2006; Juby & Scannapieco, 2007; Stalker et al., 2007; Strand and Dore, 2009; Thanm & Meagher, 2009; Van Hok & Rothenberg, 2009). Elevated caseloads, as well as to low wages have been linked to employees confidence. In a high scale quantitative study, It was found that staff that are presented under the circumstances of loss wages and high work volume are under the impression that they are being dehumanized, as well as their wellbeing is not valued or respected by their employer. In addition, the employee's lack of commitment and responsibilities to themselves as well as the people they serve (Strand & Dore, 2019).

Lack of Management Support

Organizational effectiveness relies on the implementation of programs and procedures as well as their environment and culture. Organizations with a positive environment have a higher level of organization commitment and optimistic job satisfaction among employees, better quality of service, as well as more successful results for children (Glisson, 2010; Glisson et al., 2006: Glisson & Green, 2011: Glisson et al., 2012; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998: Glisson & James, 2002). Supervisors have much responsibility in case assignment decisions, as well as fair and equal case assignment distribution. Workers'

satisfaction with their workload management is associated with positive

supervisory support (Juby & Scannpieco, 2007).

The Role of Self-Care

It is believed that self-care can play a crucial role in helping child welfare

workers cope with emotional exhaustion (Mandell et al., 2013; Salloum et al.,

2019). Salloum et al. (2019) conducted a study, "…to examine the relationship of

trauma-informed self-care (TISC) on burnout and secondary trauma, and mental

health functioning among child welfare workers…" The study was comprised of

child welfare workers which answered questions, "…trauma informed self-care,

burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and mental health functioning..." The study

indicated self-care effectively managed the relationships burnout, secondary

trauma, and improved mental health. Salloum noted, organizational resources

may mediate secondary trauma and improved mental health, but does not

effectively manage burnout. In addition, self-care practices that include personal

activities and work-life balance are crucial for social workers' mental health

(Salloum et al., 2019).

Saakvitne (2002) has documented the importance of maintaining,

nurturing, having meaningful personal relationships as a strategy of protection

and self-care in the human service field (Kapoulitsas, 2014). Investing in a

relationship is a protective factor, as well as an outside set of connections from

the work environment is an essential tool to shield against burnout (NASW,

2019). Moreover, practice of self-care such as taking time off at work, exercising,

proper sleep and mediation. Treating people with value can lead to better relationships will build better outcomes within management and better quality of work and in return building a culture of trust within the organization which will encourage protecting mental health and preventing burnout (NASW, 2019).

Studies on Emotional Exhaustion

There is a decent body of literature that examine emotional exhaustion among child welfare social workers. In the United States, Travis et al. (2016) conducted a study on the day-to-day and long-term experiences of job stressors and burnout among employees in child welfare. Using a sample of 362 front line social workers and supervisors in large urban child welfare organizations in the USA. The study was conducted in three six month intervals, and the findings revealed an increasingly rising concern of different impact of job stressors, family conflict, burnout, depersonalization, and work withdrawal were the outcome of burnout among social workers and supervisors (Travis et al., 2016).

Meanwhile, Griffiths et al. (2018) conducted a study on child welfare professional unhealthy habits and behaviors, length of employment, and self-perception of health and stress. Using a qualitative methodology amongst child welfare social workers, Griffiths et al. (2018) found mental and physical health and work-life imbalance issues among these workers due to the stress in their positions in addition to unhealthy habits. Further, the study suggests the further implementation of self-care amongst child welfare social workers to reduce the turnover and improve retention of workers (Griffiths et al., 2018).

In Denmark, Leake et al. (2017) conducted a study on work-related burnout and the association with job dissatisfaction, client-related burnout, and job stress from three different states using the Copenhagen Burnout inventory. The sample study was compared from 2,302 caseworkers and supervisors. The study revealed that staff experienced higher levels of burnout related to agency associated factor of burnout and was strongly associated with job stress and dissatisfaction, as well as the intent to leave the job (Leake et al., 2017).

In Scotland, Grootegoed and Smith (2018) investigated how social workers deal with stress and inflexibility of services with Scottish children and families needing social work services. Using a case study approach, Grootegoed and Smith (2018) found that social workers under emotional exhaustion are likely to provide less support to clients. The findings also suggest that many ethical social work standards of social work diminish due to the lack of required resources (Grootegoed & Smith, 2018).

In South Korea, Cho and Song (2017) studied retention among social workers. The study also focused on emotional labor and organizational trust. Using structural equation model analysis, Cho and Song (2017) found that a high turnover rate is directly related to the deterioration of service quality. Findings also revealed a high turnover has a negative impact on employee attitudes. Further, the study demonstrated that supervisory support enhances confidence in the organization (Cho & Song, 2017).

In the United Kingdom, Antonopoulou et al., (2017) conducted a study on high levels of stress linked to burnout and retention among child welfare social workers. Using a general health questionnaire, Antonopoulou et al. (2017) found that increasing the well-being of workers, workplace opportunities, and work satisfaction might reduce stress.

In Italy, Berlanda et al. (2017) studied challenges emerging from social workers' dissatisfaction, using a qualitative methodology with child welfare social workers in the North East of Italy. Berlanda et al. (2017) found the predominant role of interpersonal trust and mutual respect as main predictors of both professional self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

The aforementioned studies established some form of relationship between emotional exhaustion and employment-related issues. However, in a review of Canadian social workers, Stalker et al. (2007) found that evidence of emotional exhaustion/burnout. However, at the same, the findings in Stalker et al.'s (2007) review showed strong job satisfaction among workers.

Limitations of Previous Research

Studies on burnout/emotional exhaustion yielded conflicting results. In fact, according to some research studies, there is indication that child welfare social workers are at high risk for burnout stress (Acker, 1999; Egan, 1993; Gibar 1998; SZE & Ivker, 1986; Um & Harrison, 1998). However, researchers have found that burnout and stress are unreliable because there are no sufficient

research findings within the issue (Colling & Murray, 1996: Gobson et. al., 1995; Taylor-Brown et, al., 1981; Thompson et. al., 1996).

In contrast, some researchers have found that child welfare workers experiencing burnout have successfully performed their job responsibly as well as having high levels of job gratification (Conrad & Keller-Guenther, 2006; Ellet, 2009; Nordick, 2002). Based on Conrad and Keller-Guenther's (2006) study on occupational distress among 363 child protection workers, only a 7.7% high risk of burnout was reported.

Although, some research has determined that burnout is not a major contributor to job dissatisfaction or intention to leave, this may have been due to gaps in the literature and proper investigation. On the other hand, child welfare workers may experience increased levels of stress due to large caseloads which may lead to lack of empathy towards others, lack of concentration and inability to focus and even lack of empathy with clients (Buonanno, 2018; Killian, 2008)

Most of the studies on emotional exhaustion have been conducted outside Southern California. Hence, this study will fill a gap in the literature by exploring emotional exhaustion among child welfare social workers in Southern California. The Golden State is one of the largest state in the US, both in area and in population. In addition, California implements the largest social welfare state in the country. Therefore, it is important to determine how child welfare workers experience and cope with emotional exhaustion or burnout.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Carl Rodgers's Person Centered Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory are the two conceptualization ideas that pertain to the purpose of this study. Each of them is described below.

Carl Rogers's Person Centered Approach

Person-Centered theory has been viewed the system of belief of all human interaction (Rogers, 1977). In social work administration, Rogers explains how person-centered theory has been used in agencies with greater productivity and career and personal satisfaction. Some of the examples for Rogers approach includes: leadership is characterized by impact and influence rather that power and control. Gives independence for groups and individuals, smooth the progress of leaning, support self-evaluation and achievement rewards (Rogers, 1977). This theory is important because it gives ideas on how employers can study the way of preventing burnout and promoting efficient and healthy work environments, as well as appreciation and value to their employees (Turner, 2017).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The conceptualization of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is important in social work. According to Maslow (1943), the Hierarchy of Needs Theory has five stages: physiological needs, safety and security needs, love and belongingness needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Physiological needs include things needed for survival such as food, shelter, air, sex, etc. Safety and security

needs relate to elements that bring freedom and peace of mind. Love and belongingness needs deal with intimacy and peer acceptance. Esteem needs cover recognition and respect based on achievement. Finally, self-actualization needs involve a situation in which an individual lives to his full potential. Child welfare managers and supervisors can use Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to identify and guarantee the physical and emotional needs of their employees.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on burnout/emotional exhaustion. Factors responsible for burnout/emotional exhaustion were explored. The concept of self-care was also reviewed. In addition, this section critically analyzed the body of research on emotional exhaustion that is available in the literature before concluding with an overview of Carl Rogers' Person Centered Approach and Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes information of how this study will be carried out. This section discussed the study design, sampling, data collection and instrument, procedure, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

This is an exploratory research project, adopting a qualitative methodology. The strengths in using exploratory, qualitative approach with child welfare social workers consist in understanding human experience. The multiple realities experienced by individual participants and the considerable amount of related issues directly from social workers in practice. The one-on-one phone interview will allow greater depth and wealth of information. Limitations of qualitative design include possibility for biased responses and lack of generalization (Grinnell & Unrau, 2010).

Sampling

This study used the non-probability purposive and snowball sampling methods to explore emotional burnout among social workers in Southern California. All participants were social workers by trade and/or by profession who worked (or have a history of working) for agencies affiliated with a Southern California Department of Public Social Services, Children Services Division.

Participants were also those with at least a bachelor's degree in behavioral sciences, including social work. The sample consisted of 12 child welfare social workers (N = 12). Demographic characteristics of the study participants are presented in details in the Results Section.

Data Collection and Instruments

In this qualitative study, the researcher conducted a used semi-structured interview with the 12 social workers who agreed to participate in the study. Demographic questions as well as open-ended interview questions are provided in Appendix B. The interview questions explores emotional exhaustion among child welfare social workers as well as self-care and coping strategies among these workers (please refer to Appendix B).

Procedures

Participants were contacted via phone and/or email regarding their participation in the study. These participants were approached individually, outside their working hours, regarding the purpose of the study. Before the interview, the researcher read the study informed consent to the participant (via phone) and asked them to provide consent to participate. For face-to-face interviews, the participants read the study informed consent themselves and signed them before the interview took place (please refer to Appendix A).

Protection of Human Subjects

The California State University San Bernardino Institutional review Board gave approval to conduct this study, which occurs during the spring 2021 Semester. All participants gave their authorization to participate in the study by signing the informed consent. The researcher did not collect personally identifiable information from the study participants. The researcher kept data collected in a password-protected computer and stored interview transcripts in a secure place. Only the researcher and the research supervisor have access to the data. The researcher will destroy all interview files two years after the completion of the study. Meanwhile, due the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher took proper precaution to protect the safety of participants (proper social distancing during face-to-face interview).

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed interview data by hand, using a spreadsheet and thematic analysis procedures. This involved the organization of the responses into codes and then themes. The demographic variables (gender, age, race, and marital status, level of education, spirituality, employment status and length as well as current caseload) were collected only for sample diversity (descriptive) purposes. Hence, these variables were not analyzed.

Summary

This chapter explained the methodology used in this study: qualitative design, purposive and snowball sampling methods, semi-structured interviewing procedures, IRB approval, and thematic analysis were among the key points covered in this section.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains two sections. The first section presents the frequency distribution of the study participants, while the second section highlights the findings of the study.

Frequency Distribution

Table 1 below presents the participants' demographic characteristics. As demonstrated in the table, in terms of race/ethnicity, almost half of the participants identified as Latinx/Hispanic, one-quarter of them were Black, only a few were Asian. Regarding gender, the vast majority were female. In terms of marital status, almost half were married, or in a relationship, one third were single or never married, and a few separated, divorced, or widowed.

With regard to age of the participants, almost half were between the ages group of 30-39, and nearly the second half were between the ages of group 40-49. With respect to years of work experience, almost 2/3 had ten years or less work experience, and a few had 10-19 years and 20 to more years of experience in child welfare social work. In terms of education, half of the participants had a bachelor's degree, and half had a masters' degree. Regarding work status, the vast majority of the participants are child welfare social workers and child welfare social services practitioners, and one a retired child welfare social worker.

In terms of living arrangement, one-third of the participants had 1-2 children, another third of the participants had 3-4 children, and the rest had no children. Regarding religion and spirituality, the vast majority of the participants considered themselves religious or spiritual person. Lastly, in terms of current caseload, half other the participants had between 20-39 caseloads, one fourth had less than 20, and the rest had 40-60 child welfare caseloads.

Table 1

Sample Demographic Characteristics (N = 12)

Race/Ethnicity	N (12)	% (100)
White	1	8.3
African American/Black	3	25
Latinx/Hispanic	5	41.7
Asian	2	16.7
First Nations / Native Americans	1	8.3
Gender	**N (12)**	**% (100)**
Male	1	8.3
Female	11	91.7
Marital Status	**N (12)**	**% (100)**
Single/never married	4	33.3
Married/in a relationship	5	41.7
Separated	1	8.3
Divorced	1	8.3
Widowed	1	8.3
Age	**N (12)**	**% (100)**
30-39	5	41.7
40-49	5	41.7
50-59	1	8.3
60+	1	8.3
Years of Experience	**N (12)**	**% (100)**
Less than 10	8	66.6
10-19	2	16.7
20 or more	2	16.7
Degree	**N (12)**	**% (100)**
Bachelor Degree	6	50
Master in Degree	6	50
Current Job Title	**N (12)**	**% (100)**
Children Social Worker/SSP	11	91.7
Retired Social Worker	1	8.3
Children	**N (12)**	**% (100)**
1-2	4	33.3
3-4	4	33.3
None	4	33.3
Spiritual	**N (12)**	**% (100)**
Yes	11	91.7
No	1	8.3
Current Case Load	**N (12)**	**% (100)**
Less than 20	3	25
20-39	6	50
40-60	3	25

Presentation of the Findings

The thematic analysis adopted in this study revealed three major themes: 1) child welfare social workers suffer from a multifaceted form of emotional exhaustion, 2) social workers believe that the benefits of child welfare ultimately outweigh its costs, and 3) child welfare social workers use a variety of ways to cope with work-related emotional exhaustion. Each major theme is described below.

Theme 1: Child Welfare Social Workers Suffer from a Multifaceted form of Emotional Exhaustion

This theme includes five subthemes: high caseloads / unmanageable volume of paperwork; lack of management support; stress, anxiety, and feeling of exhaustion; fear of emergency calls; and court uneasiness/discomfort. First, the participants reported having an overwhelmed amount of caseloads, too many court reports, and not having enough time to do them.

Turnaround time for reports is insane! Making those deadlines while trying to gather all relevant information and making sure you go into as much detail as possible while trying to be as thorough as possible with the work you do, as not to miss anything.

Second, with respect to lack of management support, most participants reported dealing with unsupportive supervisors. These participants expressed this felling as follows:

When the reports are overwhelming, management does not provide the tools/resources to do our job. (Respondent 5)

Discuss issues with co-workers and vent to co-workers, accept that you will never have adequate support and your caseload will never be manageable. (Respondent 8)

Piling up stress, layers of complications and too many hands in the pot - really situation feeling like there are too many supervisors and chiefs and not enough Indians or workers to do all that needs to be done completed. (Respondent 1)

*I have a headache at least four times per week. Usually, after a conversation with a supervisor or regional manager. (*Respondent 6)

Third, the vast majority of participants reported having feelings of stress, anxiety, emotional and mental exhaustion, unwillingness to work, and lack of energy and feeling overwhelmed.

Usually when I wake up, I begin to go over all the tasks I have due that day. I have some feelings of being overwhelmed. I start to wonder what craziness I will find out that day. (Respondent 7).

I am exhausted and worried about what I have to do the next day. (Respondent 8)

Stressed out, trying to put myself mentally in a zone to get the energy enough to do everything I need to do in a day," "Recently, I've been getting migraines, and if I had to guess, they stand from constant staring

at the screen to type research, etc., and general lack of sleep. Those

headaches usually come whenever I am hard-pressed for time and need

to pull all-nighters which is frequent if I count 4x a month. (Respondent 9)

Fourth, participants reported fear of emergency calls and court uneasiness. Participants experiences the aforementioned feelings when ready to go home after leaving the work place and when having to testify in court. On these two fronts, participants stated:

Afraid to pick up the phone because I think it's going to be an emergency,

if the day is bad I re-live the day and negative situations. (Respondent 12)

When I was getting yelled at by the presiding judge of the Juvenile

dependency Court and feeling there is no control and organization often

felt when stressed piled up. (Respondent 1)

When I need to testify in court. All eyes on me. (Respondent 5)

<u>Theme 2: Social Workers Believe that the Benefits of Child Welfare Ultimately</u>

<u>Outweigh its Costs</u>

The second major theme has two subthemes: opportunities to serve families and rewarding careers. Most respondents reported having rewarding feelings and personal satisfaction with the job, and that helping children and families is what keeps them going at their job. Below is how study respondents expressed this theme.

My genuine belief that I can be a good social worker as this job is what I

have always wanted to do. (Respondent 12)

Getting to help and support families. (Respondent 4)

Assisting people, assisting with change and working in challenging cases.
(Respondent 5)

A lot of it is there are rewards working with the diverse population and the
personal satisfaction I get in doing a good job and being able to help out
those who are not as fortunate and have been through so much.
(Respondent 1)

Theme 3: Child Welfare Social Workers use a Variety of Ways to Cope with
Work-Related Emotional Exhaustion.

Finally, the third major theme encompasses five subthemes: physical
activities, emotional activities, social activities, relatively good sleeping
patterns/habits, and self-care. The vast majority of participants reported
engaging in physical activities and friends and family time as a mode of self-care
such as not taking work home, taking a vacation, mind relaxation, gym, exercise,
hiking, walking, family time, television, Netflix, girl time, dancing, mental healing,
self-time, cooking, and playing music. Below is how participants expressed their
coping mechanisms regarding emotional exhaustion.

Exercise, time with family, being able to enjoy weekends and days off
without thinking about work and how much there is to do. (Respondent 4)

Occasionally spend time with friends. I mostly spend time with my kids.
(Respondent 4)

Learning to leave the social work and stresses of the job behind and coming home to family to devote time and be there emphatically with them; family, wife, and children. (Respondent 1)

I visit my friend once or twice per month. (Respondent 3)

I have a strong support system, I take time for myself as needed, go out with my friends, have dinner, girl time etc. (Respondent 7)

I go to bed early and wake up early. (Respondent 11).

Self-care to me is doing something fun that will distract me from any stress that I could be experiencing from work. (Respondent 11)

Putting your-self 1st, getting my nails, hair done, traveling. To keep sane you have to learn how to disassociate, which can be hard at times. (Respondent 9)

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore emotional exhaustion among child welfare social workers in Southern California. Through interviews with 12 child welfare social workers, this study found that (1) child welfare social workers suffer from a multifaceted form of emotional exhaustion; (2) child welfare social workers believe that the benefits of child welfare ultimately outweigh its costs, and (3) child welfare social workers use a variety of ways to cope with work-related emotional exhaustion.

Implications of the Findings

The findings in this study have implication for child welfare, research, social work, and theory. The implications for child welfare consist in the in terms of implications for research, the findings expand the literature on emotional exhaustion among child welfare social workers. In fact, previous research did not focus much on emotional exhaustion in Southern California. Hence, these findings make a significant contribution to the existing literature. The findings are consistent with previous research showing emotional exhaustion among child welfare workers (Antonopoulou et al., 2017; Berlanda et al., 2017; Cho & Song, 2017 ; Griffiths et al., 2018; Grootegoed & Smith, 2018; Leake et

al., 2017; Travis et al., 2016). The findings are also consistent with Stalker et al.'s (2007) work by revealing an overall job satisfaction among child welfare social workers.

Meanwhile, in terms of implications for social work practice, this study reveals that child welfare workers are prone to emotional exhaustion. Therefore, these workers should take reasonable steps toward practicing self-care. Without proper self-care, social workers could lose their ability to provide quality service to children and families (clients). Child welfare managers should develop a plan aimed at helping social workers overcome emotional exhaustion. The findings in this study also have implications for theory, especially Carl Rogers' Person-Centered Theory has been viewed the system of belief of all human interaction (Rogers, 1977). In fact, the findings reflect Rogers' theory explains how person-centered theory has been used in agencies with greater productivity and career and personal satisfaction. The findings also reflect Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs by showing the emotional needs of the participants.

<div align="center">Limitations and Recommendations</div>

There are significant limitations associated with this study. The first limitation is the low sample size. Indeed, the study included only 12 participants. Hence, their views or responses do not represent the entire Southern California. The second limitation is geographical location, as the study focused only on Southern California. The third limitation is the possibility for bias, especially in social desirability bias. With this qualitative paradigm, this study did not provide

the researcher with a proper control for social desirability bias. Gender imbalance is another limitation in this study. Indeed, only one participant identified as male. With more male participants, the results could have been different because the lifestyles, responsibilities, and views of women can and may be different than that of men. Future research should attempt to address the limitations identified in this study.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the emotional exhaustion amongst Child Welfare Social Workers in Southern California. Irma Mondragon is conducting the study, a graduate student under the supervision of Dr. Rigaud Joseph, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The Institutional Review Board has approved the study at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to explore emotional exhaustion associated with workload among child welfare social workers in Southern California

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked a few questions about emotional exhaustion associated with your work.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the research or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The information you will provide will remain confidential. The research team will store all   files in a password-protected computer. The researcher will also protect your identities by not revealing any specific quotes or information about them that could cause them to be identified by a reader. All recordings and interview transcripts will be destroyed 3 years after the project has ended.

DURATION: It will take 20 to 30 minutes to complete the interview.

RISKS: Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. However, findings from the study will contribute to our knowledge in this area of research.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Joseph (909) 537- 5507.

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/) at California State University, San Bernardino, after June 2021.

****

I agree to have this interview be audio recorded___ YES_ NO
I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understood the consent document, and agree to participate in your study
_____   _____
Place an X mark here Date.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Demographics

1) What is your gender?
   a) Male
   b) Female
   c) Non-binary/transgender
   d) Other, please specify: _____

2) What your age range?
   a) Under 20
   b) 21-29
   c) 30-39
   d) 40-49
   e) 50-59
   f) 60 and above

3) What is your race/ethnicity
   a) White/Caucasian
   b) Hispanic/Latino/Latinx
   c) African American/Black
   d) Asian American
   e) Native American/First People
   f) Pacific Islander
   g) Other, please specify: _____

4) What is your marital status?
   a) Single/never married
   b) Married / in a relationship
   c) Divorced
   d) Separated
   e) Widowed
   f) Other, please specify: _____

5) What your highest level of education?
   a) High School Diploma/GED
   b) Associate degree
   c) Bachelor's degree
   d) Master's degree
   e) Specialist degree
   f) Doctorate degree

6) Do you consider yourself a religious/spiritual person?
   a) Yes
   b) No

7) How many children do you have?

a) None
b) 1-2
c) 3-4
d) 5 or more

8) What is your current position/job? _____

9) How long have you been in your current position? _____

10) What your current caseload? _____

Survey Questions

1) Please tell me about your current job?
   a) What are some good things about your job?
   b) What are some not-so-good things about your job?

2) What are your feelings on day-to-day basis when you are getting reading to go work?

3) Please describe your feelings when you are ready to leave your workplace and go back home?

4) Describe a situation where you experienced headache symptoms in your current job? How often do you experience headache symptoms?

5) Describe a situation where you experienced hand-sweating symptoms in your current job? How often do you experience hand-sweating symptoms?

6) What are your sleeping patterns look like?

7) What do you attribute the loss of sleep to? (if applicable)

8) Describe a situation where you wanted to quit your job? How often have you thought about leaving your job?

9) What keeps you going in your current job?

10) What is your social life look like? Please describe your social life?

11) What is self-care to you?

12) How do you cope with pressure in the job

Survey Questions Developed by: Irma Mondragon

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IRB #: IRB-FY2021-91
Title: Emotional Exhaustion among Child Welfare Social Workers in Southern California: A Qualitative Study
Creation Date: 10-28-2020
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Rigaud Joseph
Review Board: Main IRB Designated Reviewers for School of Social Work
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt

Key Study Contacts

				Contact	
Member	Irma Mondragon	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	003014699@coyote.csusb.edu
Member	Rigaud Joseph	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	Rigaud.Joseph@csusb.edu
Member	Rigaud Joseph	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	Rigaud.Joseph@csusb.edu

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