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Burnout in Human Services: Collaboration as a Prevention Strategy

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Interagency Collaboration and Burnout Prevention in Child Welfare: A Clinical Sociology Perspective

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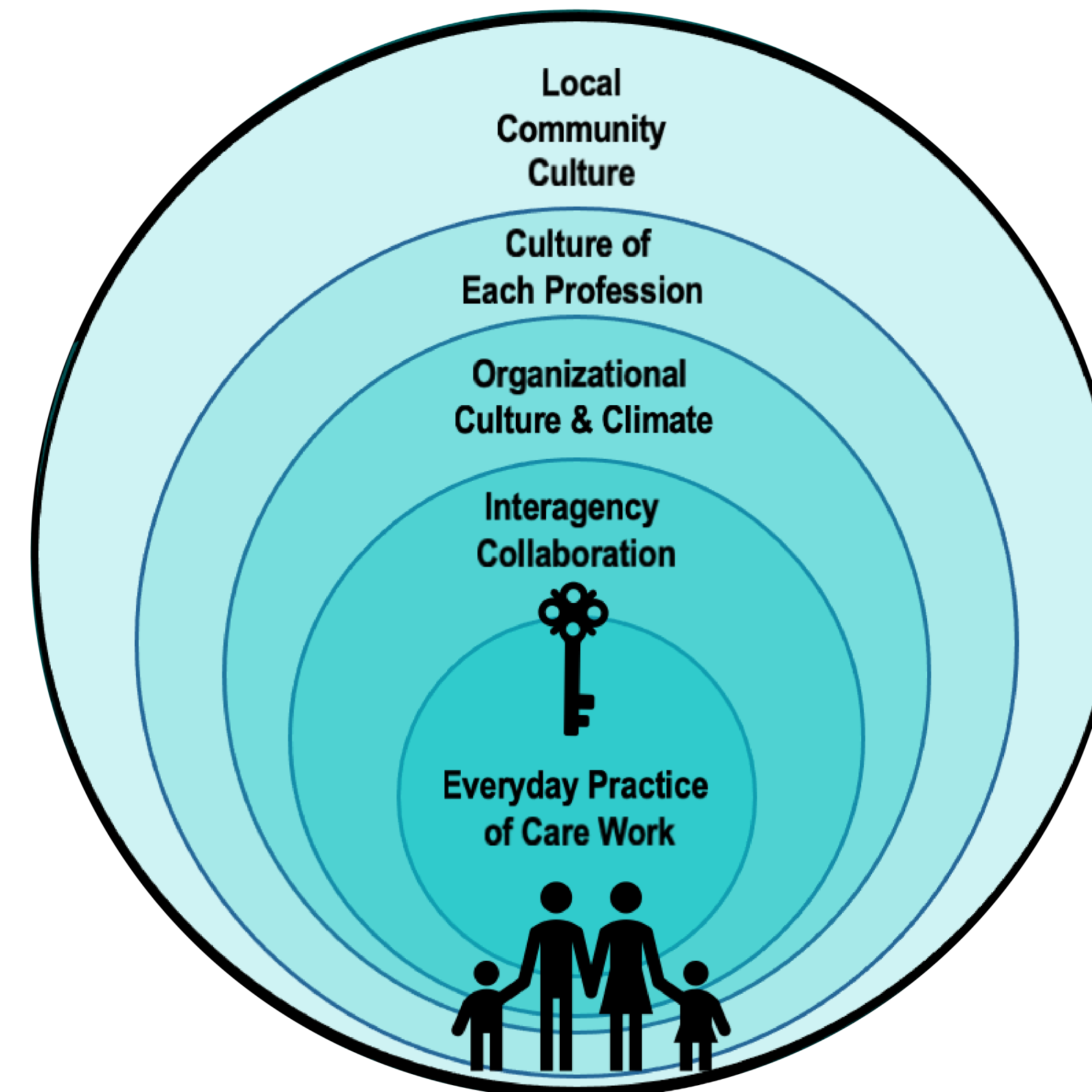
Abstract:

The phenomenon of burnout in child welfare, human services, and similar forms of care work has traditionally been viewed from predominantly psychological and organizational perspectives. Such perspectives tend to focus on the cluster of symptoms practitioners experience and implications for occupational impairment.

A clinical sociology perspective adds to these views by considering the scope of social settings and cultural work practices that produce an environment rife with ecological stressors that, among other negative impacts, produce factors that influence the prevalence of burnout in care fields. The authors suggest that building greater awareness of the social dimensions of burnout may lead to better occupational prevention strategies at the organizational, interpersonal, collegial or team, and individual levels of practicing care work. Such support is essential for managing viable and longer-term careers in care work fields.

Literature Review:

- Supervisor support helped lower chance of burnout among younger social workers and coworker support did not help any social workers prevent burnout (Phillips et al., 2020)
- More than 30% of children in foster care didn't have any Child Protective Services (CPS) response event records associated with their name (Drake et. al., 2022)
- Family Preservation can prevent CPS from being called to make a report on a family in the future (Simon et. al., 2021)



Jack*, a child protective service worker, noted “Jobs need to be kind of divided up and investigative social worker or social work in general, you have to wear too many hats. It’s not practical. You wear too many hats, you have too many responsibilities.”

Matthew*, a mental health counselor, expressed, “If you’re gonna make it in this world you’ve gotta see clients. You gotta help people, ...you gotta bill. Anymore, that’s what a lot of pressure is coming down to for therapists.”

Findings:

The research found that the strain social workers experience daily, including but not limited to internal and external role strain, caused or exacerbated burnout. An example of this type of strain includes the worker wanting to work extended hours due to client crises, but their employer requiring for them to stop working and clock out at a certain time. Interagency collaboration was found to have inconsistent effects on the prevalence of burnout.

Method:

The primary research took place in multiple organizational settings and involved thorough reviews of child welfare data and reports, case file reviews, participant observation, focus group interviews, and in-depth interviews in addition to informal interviews and discussions with over 200 individuals involved in human services across 24 organizations and 35 distinct programs. In-depth interviews were the primary qualitative method selected for exploring interagency collaboration among human service organizations (Padgett 1998; Singleton and Straits 2009).

Selina*, a child welfare case manager, remarked, “I kinda get they’re [the therapists in her agency] like higher up and I’m this lowly little person, so I kinda see them as more authority and because they’re dealing with so much and they don’t always want to take the time out and talk to me and answer all of my questions and be willing to take their time out of their day or after school to sit down and have this meeting with me, I end up not knowing what to do.”

References:

