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# BURNOUT RATES AMONG SOCIAL WORKERS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS

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BURNOUT RATES AMONG SOCIAL WORKERS:  
A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS

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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  
Master of Social Work

---

by  
Austin Taylor Kimes  
June 2016

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A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS

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Austin Taylor Kimes

June 2016

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## ABSTRACT

Research suggests that social workers experience burnout at elevated rates; however, no study has developed an average rate of burnout among general social workers and quantitative research on the topic is lacking in general. This study conducted a systematic review and synthesis of the existing literature on burnout among social workers in order to (1) identify average burnout rates among social workers; and to (2) confirm previous findings showing differences between social worker groups by area of employment. A quantitative secondary data methodology was used that included self-report data from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) that contained both cross-sectional and longitudinal data. The sample was obtained by parsing data from 17 of 379 studies that met inclusion criteria. Included studies utilized both random and non-random sampling strategies to provide data on 4391 participants.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Burnout .....	1
Macro Implications .....	2
Micro Implications .....	3
Policies .....	4
Purpose of Study .....	4
Importance of Research and Implications.....	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Demographic Factors .....	9
Personality Factors .....	10
Environmental Factors.....	11
Literature Issues .....	11
Theories Guiding Conceptualization .....	14
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	
Introduction .....	16
Study Design .....	16
Sampling.....	17
Data Collection and Instruments.....	18
Procedures .....	19
Data Analysis.....	21
Summary .....	21

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction..... 23

Description of Studies..... 23

Sampling Strategies..... 24

Descriptive Statistics..... 25

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Introduction..... 27

Discussion ..... 27

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and  
Research ..... 28

Conclusions ..... 29

REFERENCES..... 30

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Social Worker and Human Service Worker Burnout Rates.....	26
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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Burnout

Burnout, defined with its most agreed upon definition, given in 1982 by Christina Maslach, is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job. Individuals suffering from burnout experience emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of clients, and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 2005). Emotional exhaustion, “the central quality of burnout” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 402) refers to the feeling that one’s emotional resources have been drained and there is nothing left to give on a psychological level. Depersonalization refers to the development of negative or apathetic attitudes toward clients that can lead to providers viewing their clientele as deserving of their problems (1980; Maslach, 2005). The final construct of burnout involves under evaluations or negative evaluations about one’s personal accomplishments, performance, and impact on clients’ lives (Maslach, 2005). More recently, burnout has been modified to be described as being on a spectrum with engagement. Engagement is the opposite of burnout and is characterized by emotional energy, involvement with clients, and feelings of efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Like many terms in the study of humanities, the definition of burnout is not completely agreed upon, but Maslach’s definition has become ubiquitous

within the literature on the topic and is a clear favorite with 93 percent of journals and studies using her definitions since the end of the 1990s (Hombrados-Mendieta, & Cosano-Rivas, 2011). Burnout often manifests in the form of mild psychosomatic illness, such as insomnia; emotional problems, such as increased anxiety; attitude problems, such as hostility or apathy, especially towards clients; and behavioral problems, such as aggressive behavior (Adriaenssens et al., 2012; Fuente et al., 2015; Jansson-Frojmark & Lindblom, 2011). While no definitive data regarding the prevalence of burnout among social workers exists, a problem in itself, burnout has been found to affect social workers and workers in the healthcare industry more frequently than the general population (Hombrados-Mendieta, & Cosano-Rivas, 2011; Lloyd, King, & Chenoweth, 2002; Travis, Lizano, & Mor Barak, 2015).

### Macro Implications

On a macro level, burnout is a problem with broad implications. Both private and public organizations that employ social workers should be interested in reducing employee stress and burnout, both for ethical and practical reasons. Ethically, organizations are obligated to protect employees from harm that results from the completion of duties. Practically, the disorders link to turnover, absenteeism, and poor job performance represent an opportunity cost (Maslach, 2005; Taris, 2006). Organizations provide benefits to many social workers. Burnout has been shown to be a risk factor in a variety of health problems that require treatment, additionally, burnout

increases the amount of sick days' employees take (Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). Money is also wasted on training costs associated with higher turnover. Reducing turnover will prevent social workers from changing jobs or going into a different field and will prevent disruptions in productivity from understaffed departments. Finally, money can be saved as a result of the increased productivity that reduced burnout brings (Maslach, & Jackson, 1985).

### Micro Implications

On a micro level, burnout impacts clients. Burnout impacts the level of care social workers can provide and impacts the client-provider relationship, particularly in the areas of empathy and building rapport (Fuente et al., 2001; Lizano & Mor Barak, 2013). Not only are less stressed and burned out social workers able to provide better care, they are also more productive and better able to emotionally connect with clients (Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). Therefore, agencies that employ happy, satisfied social workers will have lower wait times than agencies that do not. Additionally, social workers themselves have a vested interest in reducing their levels of stress and burnout because it will improve their quality of life, reduce stress, and reduce their risk for a variety of illnesses (Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998).

## Policies

Burnout has been studied comprehensively and broadly since its discovery in the 1970s (Morse, Salyers, Rollins, Monroe-DeVita, & Pfahler, 2012). Organizationally, there have been some successful policies that corporations have been able to enact to reduce burnout, namely employee assistance programs and employee health programs, which have had some success in reducing burnout and employee stress (Ybema, Marije, Scheppingen, & Arjella, 2011). Unfortunately, and ironically, studies looking into reducing burnout among mental health practitioners, and thus policies to reduce burnout among mental health workers, are few. Data is lacking in many important areas, but one of the more glaring areas where a gap in knowledge lies is data concerning general scores of burnout for social workers and what might be considered a high score (Morse, Salyers, Rollins, Monroe-DeVita, & Pfahler, 2012).

## Purpose of Study

The purpose of this systematic review and synthesis is to build upon Doctor Lizano's 2015 work in order to consolidate findings from empirical studies examining the rates of burnout and its associated constructs for social workers in order to gain insight into burnout rates among social workers as a group. Burnout has been broadly studied from a variety of perspectives, including social work. Unfortunately, social work researchers seem to be lagging in the area of burnout as no statistics on the rates of stress and

burnout among human service workers exist (Lizano, 2015). This is especially troubling considering the evidence that human service sector workers, including social workers, are at increased risk for burnout (Guy, Newman, Mastracci, & Maynard-Moody, 2010; Lizano, 2015; Lloyd, King, & Chenoweth, 2002; Ybema, Marije, Scheppingen, Arjella, 2011).

The fact that such general data is absent is indicative of a major gap in our ability to provide care and preventative measures for burnout among social workers. This gap in research threatens the legitimacy of social work research and demonstrates an ethical failure in our inability to produce research that can be used to warn and protect social workers from one of the real risks involved in practicing social work. Additionally, the lack of progress in dealing with burnout among social workers impacts the outcomes of clients, social workers, and organizations by contributing to the problem of retaining competent staff (Morse, Salyers, Rollins, Monroe-DeVita, & Pfahler, 2012). By addressing the issue of the lack of data on burnout rates among social workers, this study will open the door for future studies to examine the discrepancies between social workers and the general population in terms of burnout rates.

This study will utilize a systematic review and synthesis as it is the best available method to index and consolidate existing research on burnout rates among social workers. This systematic review will focus on empirical studies examining burnout among social workers and is guided by the following

research question: What are the rates of burnout and its constructs among social workers?

This study presents findings from a comprehensive computerized search of peer-reviewed literature using key search terms for a burnout term coupled with a social worker population term. Burnout terms used in the search include, burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Workforce population search terms include social work, social workers, child welfare, counseling, and therapy.

These key terms were used to identify potential abstracts from four databases: ProQuest, Social Work Abstracts, PsycInfo, and JSTOR, and one search engine, Google Scholar. Studies were initially considered based on the information presented in their abstract. Suitable articles were then considered in their entirety to ascertain if they met inclusion criteria.

The following inclusion criteria were used to select studies for inclusion in this review and synthesis: 1.) The study must examine burnout or at least one dimension of job burnout (e.g. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment) as a continuous variable; 2.) The study must use the Maslach Burnout Inventory as its instrument, 3.) The study must be published between the years 1980 and 2015, 4.) The study must focus specifically on a social worker population, 5.) The study must be a quantitative or mixed design primary research article, 6.) The study must be published in a

peer-reviewed journal that focuses on social work, and 7.) The study must be published in English

After this systematic review was completed, the findings were synthesized including scores on the Maslach Burnout Inventory construct scores into means and standard deviations, and data distribution were assessed. Studies were then reviewed and classified based on research design, independent and dependent variables, sample type and size, sampling strategy, operational definition of burnout, method of statistical analysis. Additional trends in data, such as the sample composition of studies and geographic information about the study context were also included.

#### Importance of Research and Implications

It is important to increase our understanding of the reasons for the high levels of stress and burnout among social workers because it helps broaden and legitimize the field of social work by contributing to the burgeoning field of organizational social work research and practice. Specifically, this study aims to inform the beginning and assessing stages of the generalist model. This will be accomplished by providing benchmark statistics on burnout rates among social workers we can assess the problem and provide a foundation upon which researchers can contribute with more focused research.

The more we learn about burnout as it relates to social workers the closer we come to developing solutions that help to improve the quality of life of social workers, increase the quality and personalization of care clients

receive, and limit money wasted on the costs associated with reduced productivity and high turnover rates (Fuente et al., 2015). Breakthroughs in this area could improve our models of burnout, impact agency hiring practices, improve quality of life for social workers, and provide guidance for which fields social workers should go into.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Demographic Factors

Unfortunately, data regarding the prevalence on burnout by demographics is both sparse and frequently conflicting, but it appears that there is no relationship between gender and the chance of experiencing burnout (Maslach, & Jackson, 1985). However, a recent meta-analysis of the relationships between gender and burnout found that there are gender-specific differences in scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, with women scoring higher on the former and men scoring higher on the latter (Alarcon et al., 2009). Additionally, other researchers have suggested that gender may be statistically significant risk factor (Hamama, 2012). Another contested variable is ethnicity, while the available literature on the subject is extremely limited some research has failed to find significant differences in burnout scores across racial lines, at least one study has concluded that, employees' ethnicity and cultural values may increase or decrease their vulnerability to the impact of incivility at work (Welbourne, Gangadharan, & Sariol, 2015; White et al., 2015). Age is another variable that has conflicting literature, but not for lack of data on the subject. Some researchers have concluded that burnout tends to decrease with age (Alacacioglu et al., 2009), while others have found the exact opposite (Alacacioglu et al., 2009). Following the trend of conflicting literature, both marital status and parent

status have researchers concluding that they increased risk of burnout and decrease risk of burnout (Fuente et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2009; Maslach, 2005).

### Personality Factors

Researchers agree that scores on a variety of personality traits and constructs are strongly related to burnout, including self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, emotional stability, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, positive affectivity, negative affectivity, optimism, proactive personality, and hardiness (Alarcon et al. 2009). Additionally, research has found that core self-evaluations, the Five-Factor Model personality characteristics, and positive and negative affectivity explain significant variance in each of the burnout constructs (Alarcon et al. 2009). Currently, the big five personality inventory has been the overwhelming favorite of researchers thus far with few studies using any other multidimensional measure (Alarcon et al. 2009; Fuente et al., 2015). Unfortunately, because work conditions and interpersonal relationships in the workplace have been found to have stronger relationships with job burnout, the prevailing attitude among researchers today is that burnout is largely a social, rather than an individual phenomenon (Lee and Ashforth, 1996; Lizano & Barak, 2013; Maslach et al., 2001), in spite of findings that, “employee personality is consistently related to burnout” (Alarcon et al. 2009, p. 1).

## Environmental Factors

While research is sparse and often contradictory regarding many socio-demographic risk factors, environmental risk factors have been extensively studied with few contradictions among the literature. Most studies focus on the idea that that burnout is caused by excessive job demands and lack of job resources or poor person-job fit (Lizano & Barak, 2012; Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). While there are a large variety of environmental risk factors, almost all, such as role ambiguity, lack of social support, and intensity of contact with clients are related to aspects of the work environment (Maslach et al., 1996; Fuente et al., 2015). Research has also found burnout is strongly positively correlated with work-family role conflict, stress, job satisfaction, and person-environment fit, which are also related to either excessive job demands, limited job resources, or poor worker-job fit (Lizano & Barak, 2013).

## Literature Issues

Burnout has been studied fairly extensively since at least the early 1970s (Schaufelie, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009; Ybema, Marije, Scheppingen, & Arjella, 2011). What began as a grassroots movement that was written off as pop psychology because it had too many definitions and not enough solid empirical literature to support it has grown to be a more accepted area of research (Fuente et al., 2015; Maslach et al., 1996; Schaufelie, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). However, there are still significant gaps, problems, and

contradictions within the existing literature today. First and foremost is the criticism of the construct validity of the main measure and definition of the disorder.

The contested construct, sense of personal accomplishment, has been criticized for both theoretical and empirical reasons (Lizano & Mor Barak, 2012). Theoretically, it has been argued that this construct is a personality trait and therefore not in line with job demand- resources theory (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). It is worth pointing out that this construct still fits within the theoretical perspectives of person-job fit.

Empirically, the relationships between personal accomplishment and the other constructs, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, have been found to be weaker than the relationship between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Additionally, as a measure this construct has been found to not demonstrate invariance when used longitudinally (Kim & Ji, 2009; Lizano & Mor Barak, 2012; Travis, Lizano, & Mor Barak, 2015).

Another issue in the literature is the fact that, despite years of research, most data is cross sectional and not theory driven. Many of the studies that do utilize a longitudinal approach are dated and use statistical approaches that are inadequate for longitudinal analysis. Another issue is that there are few studies that propose actionable solutions to the problem of burnout for social workers, or anyone for that matter (Lizano & Mor Barak, 2012; Maslach, Leiter,

& Jackson, 2011). Additionally, most research conducted before the advent of standardized measures for burnout, while valuable to the development of the field of study, is not very useful today for the same reasons the field was criticized for in its infancy, and due to its subjective and qualitative nature (Maslach, Leiter, & Jackson, 2011). Furthermore, a lack of studies with strong methodologies, such as representative sampling, contributes to confusion about what might be considered a high score for social workers (Morse, Salyers, Rollins, Monroe-DeVita, & Pfahler, 2012).

Another problem in burnout research is that there is not very much reliable data regarding the protective and risk factors of burnout for different demographics or personality traits and types (Fuerte et al., 2015; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). There is also disagreement and confusion regarding nearly every demographic factor that has been researched with conflicting results about the effects of gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, and parental status on burnout (Fuerte et al., 2015). Research regarding the relationship between personality and burnout is extremely limited even though studies have consistently shown significantly strong relationships between employee personality and burnout (Alarcon et al. 2009). This is especially problematic considering the fact that one of the main theoretical explanations, person-job fit, deals heavily with employees' personality traits and their fit with environmental factors as an explanation of employee stress, behaviors, and problems (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998).

Finally, one of the most glaring issues in the literature is the fact that more than 40 years of research has failed to produce broad statistics on the rates of stress and burnout among social workers, or other human service workers (Lizano, 2015; Ybema, Marije, Scheppingen, Arjella, 2011).

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Currently, Research regarding burnout is typically guided by one of two theoretical perspectives, Job-Person Mismatch (J-PM) theory, derived from aspects of person-environment theory and the Maslach multidimensional model, and Job Demands- Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker et al., 2014; Maslach, Leiter, & Jackson, 2011; Schaufeli et al., 2009). J-PM proposes that burnout is the result of mismatches between the nature of the employee and the nature of the organization in six work life areas: work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, breakdown of community, absence of fairness, and value conflict. The J-PM builds upon preceding models that focus on the relationships between job demands and job resources and improves them by adding dimensions that can account for employee's personal factors. It also explains why different people respond to organizational stressors with different levels of burnout and is able to incorporate recent findings regarding the relationships between personality constructs and burnout (Alarcon et al. 2009; Fuerte et al., 2015).

The JD-R model is more in line with traditional research regarding the impact of organizational stressors and offers explanations for how specific

stressors might affect the different dimensions of burnout. The JD-R model argues that burnout is developed as a result of two work categories, excessive job demands, areas that require effort and are associated with a mental strain, and a lack of job resources, characteristics of the job that diminish job demands. The model predicts that job demands primarily effect emotional exhaustion and that a lack of job resources primarily effects depersonalization, and that this results in reduced self-evaluation and burnout. The JD-R model provides a more in depth explanation for burnout and predicts specific effects of specific stressors. Unfortunately, it does not adequately account for the construct of personal accomplishment and does not explain the effects of personality on burnout (Halbesleben, & Buckley, 2004; Lizano & Barak, 2012).

This study is guided by the J-PM model of burnout because unlike the JD-R, J-PM model accounts for personal factors in burnout, mismatch between organization values and personal values as a stressor for burnout, and because it can theoretically explain all three dimensions of burnout (1980; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Maslach, 2005). Furthermore, this model can explain current research suggesting that burnout is on an engagement spectrum by explaining engagement as a result of high levels of person-organization fit (Fuerte et al., 2015).

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This chapter will discuss study design, why a systematic review was chosen, what a systematic review design is, and the practical methodological implications and the limitations involved with this study. This chapter will also describe the sample from which data will be obtained, the numbers to be included, selection criteria, a justification for why the sample was chosen, and potential issues with availability of the sample population. Another topic that will be covered in this chapter is what data will be collected, variables involved, level of measurement, and the instrument involved in collecting data and a subsequent analysis and justification of using said instrument. Detailed explanations regarding data collection will also be included. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a description of the quantitative procedures that will be utilized in this study.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study was to evaluate burnout scores among social workers in order to answer following research question: What are the rates of burnout and its constructs among social workers? A systematic review and synthesis was utilized and is the most ideal method for this research as it provides the largest sample possible. As a result, data collected from the



sample will be most generalizable to the population. A systematic review and synthesis is usually a quantitative research design that seeks to conduct an exhaustive summary of current literature as it relates to a specific research question. This involves collecting secondary data from the existing literature by developing inclusion criteria and then searching as broadly as possible in order to find studies that meet said inclusion criteria. After studies have been collected and screened for relevance to the research question, data is extracted and combined to produce new results.

The methodological implications for this study are that the results of this study will likely be more generalizable than the results of the studies that will be included in the systematic review. Additionally, quantitative analysis can be done in order to confirm that theory and test results agree with each other. The methodological limitations include the fact that if the studies included are inconclusive with each other than the results of a systematic review will also be inconclusive; and the fact that a systematic review is only as strong as the studies that go into it. Additionally, systematic reviews are limited because it is difficult to analyze data collected from multiple instruments. Therefore, this study only includes studies that utilize the Maslach Burnout Inventory to measure burnout and its constructs.

### Sampling

Data was obtained from research studies that used study samples consisting of social workers. Data was collected from secondary sources and

as a result, the sample was quite large ( $n = 4391$ ). The selection criteria for the sample was that subjects must be social workers who were involved in studies that met inclusion criteria listed previously. Sampling trends, such as type, size, and strategy, among the selected studies will be discussed and acknowledged in the results section. One possible concern is that there may be too many studies concerning specific aspects of social work, such as child welfare social workers, compared to others, which could potentially skew results.

#### Data Collection and Instruments

This study collected a large amount of data. As this study was exploratory in nature there were multiple variables of interest. Interval variables included Maslach Burnout Inventory emotional exhaustion score, depersonalization score, and personal accomplishment score. Categorical variables included studies' sample type (e.g. field of social work practice), sampling strategy, and method of analysis. All variables were measured by collecting secondary data from peer reviewed studies that met required inclusionary criteria. The strengths of this method of data collection include the fact that it is possible to get a very large sample size and the fact that results are very strong and generalizable. The biggest limitation of this method is that it relies on research that has already been conducted, therefore it is not possible to utilize this method for newer areas of research.

This study exclusively reviewed and synthesized empirical studies that used the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The MBI is the most widely used measure of burnout and has been shown to be valid and reliable by a variety of studies (Schaufeli, Bakker, Hoogduin, Schaap, & Klader, 2001; Poghosyan, Aiken, & Sloane, 2009). However, the relationships between personal accomplishment and the other constructs, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, have been found to be weaker than the relationship between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Additionally, as a measure this construct has been found to not demonstrate invariance when used longitudinally (Kim & Ji, 2009; Lizano & Barak, 2012; Travis, Lizano, & Barak).

### Procedures

A comprehensive computerized search of peer-reviewed literature using key search terms for a burnout term coupled with a social worker population term was conducted. Burnout terms included, burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Workforce population terms included: social work, social workers, child welfare, counseling, and therapy.

These key terms were used to identify potential abstracts from four databases: ProQuest, Social Work Abstracts, PsycInfo, and JSTOR, and one search engine, google scholar. Studies were initially considered based off of

their abstract and then suitable articles were considered in their entirety to ascertain if they met inclusion criteria.

The following inclusion criteria were used to select a study for inclusion in this review and synthesis: 1.) The study must examine at least one dimension of job burnout (e.g. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment) as a continuous variable; 2.) The study must use the Maslach Burnout Inventory as its instrument, 3.) The study must be published between the years 1980 and 2015, 4.) The study must focus specifically on a social worker population, 5.) The study must be a quantitative or mixed design primary research article, 6.) The study must be published in a peer-reviewed journal, and 7.) The study must be published in English Data was collected online by Austin Kimes between December 2015, and March 2016.

First, a comprehensive search of peer-reviewed article abstracts was conducted. A computerized search of the aforementioned key terms yielded a total of 379 abstracts. These abstracts were reviewed and yielded 63 that were deemed suitable for further review. Of these, 24 could not have their full text's accessed, 19 used redundant data or the wrong scoring system, or failed to report their burnout scale scores as a continuous variable, and 4 had incomplete or omitted data, leaving 16 studies that were considered suitable for analysis.

## Data Analysis

Scores on the Maslach Burnout Inventory were compiled into means and standard deviations. In one case, Seifert, 1999 emotional exhaustion, scores were weighted to match the traditional scale of the other studies. Additional data distribution was assessed and field of social work practice was found to be highly suitable as an independent categorical variable for testing burnout differences between groups. Studies were then reviewed and classified based on research design, sample type and size, sampling strategy, operational definition of burnout, and method of statistical analysis. The main concept explored via quantitative analysis was burnout. Constructs and linear dependent variables include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The categorical independent variable explored was studies' participants' field of social work.

## Summary

In summation, a systematic review was chosen because it allows for the most generalizable results for answering the research question. This method also allows for a very broad sample from which to obtain large amounts of data with few potential issues or limitations. Furthermore, this method allows for a large number of variables to be examined fairly easily.

Unfortunately, this study is limited in that original data was unobtainable and research was conducted via secondary data that contained only means and standard deviations, which limited analysis options and efficacy.

Furthermore, this study draws on published, peer-reviewed, articles in English and as a result it is open to some selection bias.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study to build upon and confirm Doctor Lizano's 2015 systematic review, as well as to consolidate findings from empirical studies into descriptive statistics examining the rates of burnout and its associated constructs for social workers in order to gain insight into burnout rates among social workers as a group. This section will cover a description of studies and will go over findings regarding descriptive statistics of burnout scores.

#### Description of Studies

Studies were reviewed and classified based on their research design, sample type and size, MBI constructs measured, and statistical analysis approach. The sixteen studies ranged in publication year from 1990 to 2014. Study sample sizes ranged from 25 to 987. Of the 16 studies presented in this review, 31.25% (N = 5) of the studies were comprised of a sample of child welfare workers (Anderson, 2000; Boyas, Wind, & Kang, 2012; Lizano et al., 2014; Savicki & Colley, 1994; Smith & Clark, 2011), five used a general social worker sample (31.25%) (Brinkborg et al., 2011; Kim, 2011; Mackie, 2008; Sanchez et al., 2014; Um & Harrison, 1998), four used a medical social worker sample (25%) (Coady, Kent, & Davis, 1990; Cohen & Gagin, 2005; Oktay,

1992; Siefert, Jayaratne, & Chess, 1991), one study used mental health social workers (6.25%)(Evans et al., 2006), and one study analyzed both mental health social worker and occupational therapist populations (Lloyd & King, 2004).

### Sampling Strategies

Study settings took place in a variety of regions including Australia, Spain, Sweden and the United States. Seven of the studies utilized random sampling for their data collection, with seven relying on non-random, selected samples (Anderson, 2000; Brinkborg et al., 2011; Coady, Kent, & Davis, 1990; Cohen & Gagin, 2005; Lloyd & King, 2004; Oktay, 1992; Sanchez et al., 2014). The remaining two samples utilized secondary data that was previously collected via non random sampling (Lizano et al., 2014; Smith & Clark, 2011). Most of the studies examined (N = 13) used a cross-sectional research design with one study using a longitudinal approach (Savicki & Cooler, 1994), and two studies using a pre-test/ post-test approach (Brinkborg et al., 2011; Cohen & Gagin, 2005). All studies utilized quantitative research methods ranging from simple bivariate analysis such as t-tests, correlational analysis, simple regression, and chi squares, to much more complicated tests such as MANOVA, LISREL, and hierarchical regression. Studies were fairly homogenous in the way they captured burnout, with nearly all using some version of either the MBI and three using the MBI-HSS (Kim, 2011; Lizano et al., 2014; Sanchez et al., 2014). Regarding differences between MBI versions,



early versions used two scales, intensity and frequency, later versions dropped the intensity scale in favor of one frequency scale. The authors have noted that the first edition of the MBI is still valid, and have directed researchers to simply drop the intensity scale (Brinkborg et al.). Of those examined, one divergent study used only the intensity scale on the original MBI, despite expert direction to use the frequency scale (Siefert, Jayaratne, & Chess, 1991).

The same study dropped the emotional exhaustion scale for the question, “do you feel burned out.” As a result, the emotional exhaustion data from this study was omitted. Most of the remaining studies reviewed used all three dimensions of the MBI to measure burnout. One study used only one dimension of the MBI, the emotional exhaustion scale (Um & Harrison, 1998). Two studies used two dimensions of the MBI, both utilizing the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization scales (Boyas, Wind, & Kang, 2012; Lizzano et al., 2014).

### Descriptive Statistics

Mean MBI scores for the entire sample, cps workers, and non cps workers can be seen listed below as well as scores for human services comparison groups.

Table 1. Social Worker and Human Service Worker Burnout Rates

Sample	MBI Construct Means		
	Mean EE	Mean PA	Mean DP
Total Sample*	24.64	37.45	7.89
Non CPS Workers*	23.08	38.39	6.93
CPS Workers*	26.8	35.69	9.12
Comparison Group	21.35	32.75	7.46

\*Scores have not been corrected for sampling or measurement error

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

This chapter will include a discussion of the results, recommendations for social work practice, policy and research, and a conclusion.

#### Discussion

The most concrete conclusions that can be drawn from these results is that the data support Dr. Lizano's findings that CPS workers are more burned out than their peers in other focuses (Lizano et al., 2014). Additionally, social workers appear to be potentially more burned out and have less feelings of personal accomplishment than other human service workers based on their MBI scores compared. This is an important and concrete step for the state of knowledge on the topic as this is the first study to broadly consider MBI scores across the profession. Additionally, this is the first study to compile multiple scores into composite scores sorted categorically by area of practice. However, further meta-analysis must be done in order to determine if these differences in MBI scores are statistically significant.

It is imprudent to draw broader conclusions on the state of research on burnout among social workers as the vast majority of published studies failed to meet inclusionary criteria. As a result, selection bias is potentially a significant factor and must be considered in all conclusions. However, MBI can

still be considered valid and generalizable as the MBI is widely considered valid and reliable. Additionally, all studies included demonstrated a strong Cronbach's alpha, signifying good reliability.

While it might be hasty to generalize these results to the broader state of research on burnout among social workers, certain conclusions can still be drawn. Given that quasi experimental designs on impact of a treatment on burnout scores would require the publication of said scores, it is distressing that this researcher was only able to find two such studies (Brinkborg et al., 2011; Cohen and Gagin, 2005). Thus, it is fair to say that the state of research regarding the efficacy of burnout treatments is severely lacking. The apparent scarcity of studies that meet inclusion criteria suggests that research involving differences between groups' burnout scores is being neglected, as is any other research that requires the publication of mean scores.

Regardless of research design, researchers need to do a better job of publishing more information for secondary analysis as it is apparent from this study that a significant amount of data, particularly MBI scores, are being underutilized.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

These results, while unsurprising, demonstrate a clear need to educate social work students about the risks and detrimental effects of burnout in order to better prepare them for professional development. Policy advocates should

put more emphasis on burnout prevention and treatment programs by lobbying for more employee wellness programs for those involved in human service fields. Researchers should focus on the development and efficacy of burnout treatments. Additionally, researchers might consider more focused meta-analytical studies in order determine effect sizes of specific variables on burnout.

### Conclusions

The main take away from this study should be that this particular area of research needs more work. While this study addresses a major gap, more studies need to be done in order to cover under represented areas such as experimental design studies to test the efficacy of treatment as well as broader meta-analytical studies to provide more quantitative analysis on the state of research on burnout among social workers.

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