

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORTS FOR CHILD WELFARE SOCIAL
WORKERS EXPERIENCING WORK BURNOUT RELATED TO
ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

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By
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to my parents, Fahima and Pir Etimadi. Their enthusiastic and passionate encouragement to my education made the pursuit of a Masters degree possible. I cannot express the gratitude and admiration I have for your support in the journey of my academic and professional goals. You have been a constant source of comfort and encouragement and through the unconditional love and good examples have taught me to work hard for the things I aspire to succeed in. I am grateful for the myriad of ways in which, throughout my life, you actively supported me in my determination to discover and comprehend my potential, and make this contribution to the world.

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ABSTRACT

Child welfare social workers have demanding jobs as frontline workers frequently working with trauma survivors, and are often affected by burnout. The purpose of this study was to identify what agency supports and resources are available to CWS social workers who experience work related burnout. This study utilized a qualitative research approach. An open-ended online survey questionnaire was distributed to fifty-four participants from the Human Service Agency of Merced County. A major finding from this study was that nearly all participants identified and discussed the effectiveness of two types of supports available to assist them in addressing burnout: formal support such as Employee Assistance Program (EAP), individual based agency support, and supervisor support. Participants also identified lack of agency support to prevent or address burnout. Results showed that effective supervision was the most accessed formal support by CWS workers to address the experiences of burnout. The second type of support participants identified and discussed was the effectiveness of informal support provided by colleagues and family. Results showed that CWS workers preferred accessing informal colleague support over formal supports, such as EAP. The current findings suggest that organizational practices and policies may want to emphasis on developing effective supervision, providing on-site counseling services, and lowering caseload among CWS workers. Organizations may also focus on supporting supervisors as they play a vital role in helping social workers cope with job demands and emotional stress from work.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

As the field of social work continues to develop, concerns regarding the effects of physical and mental exhaustion on social workers, known as burnout, instigated by work overload, and lack of support and resources are increasingly being explored in the research literature. According to a recent statistical summary by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, social workers held 607,300 jobs in the United States in 2012, predicted to expand at a 19% faster rate than the average for all other occupations by 2022. Social workers are employed in a variety of roles and settings, as child and family social workers, clinical social workers, school social workers, health care social workers, and community and social activists in social policy; in hospitals, mental health agencies, schools, state and local government, private practices, correctional facilities, community support agencies, and child welfare agencies (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

Skilled and experienced child welfare services (CWS) social workers are fundamental to ensuring that children and families receive high quality services (American Humane Association, 2011). However, according to a study conducted in 2001 by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), among 43 states investigated, the average rate of annual child welfare staff turnover reached 22%, resulting in 7% unfilled positions in state child welfare agencies. Burnout from

workload is cited as one of the main causes of critically high turnover rates among child welfare workers (American Humane Association, 2011).

Social work burnout is defined as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that commonly impacts individuals who do “people work” (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Existing research indicates burnout is characterized by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and absence of feeling of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Burnout can occur in any profession; however, it tends to be higher in occupations related to human services, especially social services, mental health, teaching, medical work, and law enforcement (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). In 2004, the National Association of Social Work (NASW) conducted a benchmark national survey of licensed social workers in which a random sample of 10,000 social workers was chosen from 48 states. Key survey findings indicated that, social workers were increasingly experiencing higher work demands while working with decreased resources and limited organizational support (Center for Workforce Studies, NASW, 2005).

The Government Accountability Office (2003) also conducted a study that examined issues of burnout and turnover rates among child welfare social workers. The child welfare workers that took part in this research study perceived high turnover rates and staff shortages as resulting in remaining staff struggling with inadequate time to complete their work due to higher caseloads. Owing to these issues, remaining workers could not develop satisfactory client relationships with

children and families and found it difficult to make essential decisions to confirm safety and guarantee permanent placements. This study further revealed that high turnover rates adversely affect the continuity of services, delay investigation timelines, and restrict the regularity of social worker visits with children. This, in turn, hinders child welfare agency implementation of crucial federal child safety and permanency goals, and the ability to deliver high quality services to children and families.

Burnout may also increase absenteeism, sick leave, and turnover rates, thus reducing work quality (Lloydi, King, and Chenoweth, 2002). Increased work demand and inadequate time to work effectively with clients may negatively impact client outcome and continuity of services. Furthermore, it may also contribute to low work morale, diminished concentration and focus on one's work, and deteriorated quality in client care (Acker, 2011; Beheshtifar & Omidvar, 2013; Conard & Kellar-Guenther, 2006; Maslach & Leiter, 2005; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993).

Other social work literature also supports the assertion that burnout adversely affects the quality of services delivered to clients. According to Maslach (1976), burnout plays an important role in the poor delivery of health and welfare services. Maslach and Jackson (1981) examined burnout in terms of negative and cynical attitude towards self and others. Pines and Aronson (1981) considered burnout in terms of negative attitudes toward others including clients. Given that burnout may be manifested in negative social worker attitudes towards clients, it is possible that it

may also be related to negative impressions of clients through depersonalization and cynical attitudes (Corcoran, 1986).

Ultimately, burnout may have a negative impact on clients from vulnerable and marginalized populations that require high quality and sensitive services. A study conducted in Illinois found that to complete all legal and policy requirements for children in foster care, social workers should not have more than 15 children in care on their caseload. Where low caseloads exist reduced child removal, decreases in residential placements, and shorter lengths of stay in foster care also exist (McDonald, 2003). The consequences of burnout and negative impressions of clients can be detrimental to social work practice and to the children and families CWS workers serve. For this reason it is critical to explore effective organizational supports and resources for CWS social workers to more effectively address issues of burnout. This, in turn, may help to reduce harmful effects to therapeutic relationships between social worker and their clients, as well as avoid increased workload demands (Social Work Institute, 2010).

From an organizational perspective, burnout is a process in which a previously dedicated employee begins to disengage from his or her work due to job stressors and strains (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006). High turnover rates among staff working in child welfare agencies are not a new phenomenon, and many social workers in these agencies have been observed to stay in their profession for no more than two years (Government Accountability Office, 2003). Factors influencing burnout and high turnover rates can be attributed to individual, administrative, and organizational

dynamics (Strolin, McCarthy, & Caringi, 2007). While lack of supervision and high expectations from the agency are the most common administrative factors; organizational factors include increased workload, low income, lack of career advancement opportunities, and agency practices. In 1998, the Public Policy Department at American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employee (AFSCME) conducted a national survey of AFSCME affiliated professional child welfare workers. The study included about 13,380 child welfare workers from 29 AFSCME affiliates in ten U.S. states. Child welfare workers in over half of the child welfare agencies examined in the study were responsible for an average caseload that exceeded the recommended standards published by the Child Welfare League of America (AFSCME, 2015). More than 60% of affiliates reported that, in recent years, their caseload increased, while less than 15% respondents reported that their caseload had not increased in recent years (AFSCME, 2015). According to the survey findings, a large amount of child welfare workers' time is spent in court, completing paperwork, and attending staff meetings, making it difficult to meet the high demands of the substantial caseloads (AFSME, 2015). According to research conducted by the Center for Public Policy Research (2006), California at that time had the highest average worker caseload across all U.S. states.

Staff turnover puts a financial strain on child welfare agencies that are then required to replace and train new workers, decreasing the work efficiency and the quality of service delivery (Government Accountability Office, 2003). The financial cost of new recruitment and training resulting from staff turnover is projected to be

approximately half of the worker's annual salary, estimated in 2006 to be \$15,162 (Cowperthwaite, 2006).

Effective self-care interventions and training initiatives are necessary to prepare a competent workforce to deliver quality services needed by children and families (Barford & Whelton, 2010). High turnover results in increases in remaining staff workload, decreased productivity and greater burnout, which contributes to further staff turnover and inadequate delivery of services to clients (Social Work Policy Institute, 2010). This vicious cycle serves as further confirmation of the need to study organizational strategies and interventions which may prevent and more effectively respond to the effects of social work burnout. Findings of such research initiatives are expected to reveal the most appropriate types of strategies that child welfare organizations may want to focus on to mitigate the ongoing harmful effects of burnout.

In conclusion, literature in the area of burnout has focused primarily on causes and consequences, specifically high turnover rates. It appears literature and research has focused less on effective organizational strategies that may decrease burnout among CWS workers. This particular aspect of the larger problem is important to study because high turnover rates influenced by burnout are costly to child welfare agencies and result in poor outcomes for the under-privileged children and families they serve.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore organizational supports and resources that may be effective in addressing issues of burnout for CWS social workers. The study aimed to identify organizational strategies and approaches that may be helpful in preventing and more effectively responding to social worker burnout; thus, mitigating high staff turnover and a resulting decrease in effectiveness of services delivered to vulnerable children, families, and communities. This study utilized a qualitative exploratory research approach to explore the effectiveness of current organizational support for CWS social workers at the Merced Human Services Agency (HSA) located in Merced, California and what CWS social workers identify as necessary organizational strategies, supports, and resources to more effectively address child welfare workplace burnout. This is an important aspect of burnout that is just beginning to be examined in the social work literature.

Numerous studies have explored causes and consequences of burnout resulting in high turnover rates; however, thus far, little attention has been given to the effectiveness of organizational strategies and interventions, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) developed to decrease burnout rates among child welfare workers (Jacobson, 2008). Therefore, this study was designed to explore the effectiveness of organizational support and resources currently provided to CWS social workers and other supports and resources that may be more effective.

The goal of this research study was to explore effective resources, supports, and agency strategies to assist CWS social workers to effectively prevent and/or

address burnout and turnover. The research was guided by the following research questions pertaining to the experiences of CWS social workers in Merced County HSA, California.

1. What are current supports and resources available within Merced County HSA child welfare agency and how effective are they in preventing and addressing burnout among CWS social workers?
2. What types of organizational resources and supports do CWS social workers identify that may be more effective in preventing and addressing burnout among CWS social workers?
3. What type of self-care do CWS social workers in Merced County HSA practice?

Significance of the Research Study

Burnout can increase incidences of CWS social worker absenteeism, sick leave, and turnover rates; ultimately decreasing the quality of services available to vulnerable client groups. It may also contribute to low work morale and diminished concentration (Maslach et al., 2001). CWS workers strive to promote safety and well-being for children and their families often making critical decisions affecting these clients. Consequently, it is of paramount importance that they are able to make decisions that ensure the safety and high quality of services provided to children and families. As mentioned previously, social work burnout can result in negative impressions of clients which can ultimately lead to poor quality of services delivered to clients. High caseloads and staff turnover result in a decrease in the effectiveness

of relationships between social workers and families which can result in limited attention to timely decision-making with respect to child safety and wellbeing (Government Accountability Office, 2003). This research may assist Merced County HSA and other CWS agencies to identify strategies to prevent and more effectively respond to CWS social work burnout and additional stress arising from turnover rates. The research may also benefit CWS agencies by identifying the existing quality and effectiveness of agency resources and support that CWS workers are receiving. Moreover, CWS agencies may use study results to identify additional resources and support that CWS workers believe may be more effective and helpful in reducing burnout and subsequent turnover. Therefore, the research findings resulting from this work may contribute to a greater understanding of burnout issues affecting Merced County HSA and other CWS agencies and ultimately improve the quality of services received by vulnerable clients. In particular, it is expected that the effectiveness of support and resources provided to CWS social workers will be better understood; providing insight to Merced County HSA and other CWS agencies to more effectively address the implications burnout has on individual social workers and the system as a whole to provide high quality of services to children and families. The results this study yielded may support CWS agencies to alter current organizational policies and practices regarding resources and support provided to CWS workers experiencing burnout. Necessary changes in agency policies and practices may promote a healthier work environment for CWS workers and assure high quality services and improved outcomes for children and families that they serve.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A motivation to choose a career in Child Welfare Services is the desire to help people, protect children, work with families, and conceivably save lives. However, the likelihood of work place issues such as high caseloads, administrative burdens, limited supervision, and insufficient support from organizations reduces the appeal of child welfare work, making it difficult for CWS workers to stay in their position (GAO, 2003). Literature related to social work burnout and turnover is identified and examined to provide a foundation for the present study. A detailed review of the work conducted on the issue allowed the researcher to better understand what has already been learned about social work burnout and turnover while also revealing gaps in the extant knowledge on these phenomena. This chapter focuses on the following specific areas of literature that help frame the current research: (a) burnout definitions and descriptions, (b) link between burnout and turnover, (c) turnover definition and impacts, (d) implications of burnout and turnover on the child welfare services social workers, (e) impact of organizational characteristics and structure on burnout and turnover, and (f) supportive factors that may help reduce or prevent burnout.

Burnout Definition and Description

Burnout is a well-researched area in the field of social work; a profession that serves people and therefore can be highly stressful and demanding (Pasupuleti, Allen,

Lambert, & Cluse-Tolar, 2009). Though many social workers exhibit dedication and achieve success in their work, some face various job-related challenges that are linked to job stress and burnout (Kinman & Grant, 2011). The concept of burnout was first discussed by Bradley (1969) and was later expanded on by Herbert Freudenberger (1980), who grounded his work on the observations of acute psychological strain among workers in the human services profession (Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001). Freudenberger (1980) defined burnout as a state of fatigue or frustration that is brought about by professional relationships that failed to produce the expected rewards.

Pines, Aronson, and Kafry (1981) defined burnout as a state characterized by physical exhaustion, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, emotional drain, and the development of negative self-concept and attitudes toward one's work, life, and other people. Maslach and Jackson (1981) defined burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that often transpires among professionals who do "people work." Burnout was later defined by Maslach (1982) as a psychological syndrome encompassing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment.

According to Maslach (1982), burnout undermines the care and professional attentiveness given to clients by human service professionals. Maslach and Jackson (1981) described emotional exhaustion as a feeling of being overextended and exhausted by emotional and physical stress. Emotional exhaustion is recognized as a fundamental aspect of burnout symptoms (Cordes, Dougherty, & Blum, 1997;

Koeske & Koeske, 1989). The three-dimension model of burnout introduced by Maslach et al (2001) consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of accomplishment is the most commonly cited burnout definition in the literature. Depersonalization, in this context, pertains to the negative attitude to the various aspects of the job and is thus theorized as a coping response to emotional exhaustion (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Studies have shown that depersonalization results from persistent emotional exhaustion (Cordes et al., 1997). Finally, diminished personal accomplishment is defined as an individual's inclination to evaluate oneself negatively, predominantly in regards to work with clients (Hansung, 2008). Several researchers have proposed that diminished personal accomplishment results from high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Bakker, Schaufeli, Sixma, Bosveld, & Van Dierendonck, 2000). Freudenberger (1974) and Maslach (1982) noted that burnout is an implicit outcome of work in caregiving and service occupations, where the main aspect of the job is the relationship between the provider and recipient. This interpersonal context of one's role implies that burnout is not just an individual stress response, but rather an outcome of individual's relational transactions in the workplace (Maslach, Leiter, & Schaufeli, 2009).

Serving vulnerable children and families and providing them with support and empathy is at the core of CWS workers' professional responsibility. However, they are not given the support they need to function in their highly stressful occupations (Martin, 2015). Due to their highly demanding and challenging roles and responsibilities, CWS workers are prone to experience work-related burnout.

Burnout causes a negative perception in one's work, increasing turnover rates and negatively affecting both the CWS workers and their clients (Gillson and Hemmelgarn, 1998). In order to assist each child and family, CWS social workers need to dedicate extensive time and attention to each case. In order to successfully serve vulnerable clients, social workers must build effective and trusting relationships with them, which can only be achieved if they are given an opportunity to learn about clients' past and present life events that led to the current state of instability (Figley, 2002; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Such services provided by social workers require careful listening and often result in absorbing the pain associated with clients' suffering (Morresette, 2004; Rothschild & Rand, 2006). This type of day-to-day involvement with clients' distress can become emotionally taxing on social workers, resulting in professional burnout (Newell & MacNeil, 2010). Burnout is a major issue caused by excessive work demands that can result in mental confusion, psychosocial distress, and physical collapse (NASW, 2004). According to a study conducted by GAO (2003), child welfare workers work place issues such as high caseloads, administrative burdens, limited supervision, and insufficient time to participate in training reduces the appeal of child welfare work, making it difficult for workers to stay in their position. Furthermore, the study found that heavy workloads encourages child welfare workers to leave for other careers that they perceive as requiring less time and energy. The next section will discuss turnover definition and its costs to agencies and clients.

Link between Burnout and Turnover

Literature supports that burnout results from job demands such as work overload (Koeske & Koeske, 1989). Work overload is the perception of having too much work to accomplish in the time available with limited resources which may result in burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 2003). Burnout is associated with increased levels of turnover rates (Drake & Yadama, 1996). Emotional exhaustion is related to social workers leaving their jobs (Jackson, Schuler, and Schwab, 1986). Drake and Yadama (1996) reported that burnout predicted turnover among child welfare workers. According to a one-year longitudinal study of 52 child welfare workers, emotional exhaustion is a significant predictor of voluntary turnover (Wright and Cropanzano, 1998).

Turnover Definition and Impacts

Due to high cost and disruption to services, high turnover rates among CWS social workers continue to be a problem for CWS agencies. In 2005, the average turnover rate among child welfare social workers in United States was estimated at 19.6% (Rabe, 2006). An earlier study reported that, 12,221 social worker positions were available in the 58 counties of California. With a position vacancy rate of 9.5% county agencies were striving to employ about 1,171 social workers at the time of the study (Pasztor, Saint-Germain, & DeCrescenzo, 2002). Due to such social work staff shortages, remaining social workers employed by the agencies are forced to take on heavier caseloads. According to the report by the National Association of Social Workers (Center for Workforce Studies, NASW, 2006), the current number of social

workers across the country does not meet the demand of CWS organizations serving children and families. Yet, when discussing turnover, it is essential to differentiate between external and internal turnover. External turnover is the most common turnover and occurs when a CWS worker leaves the agency, while internal turnover refers to a CWS worker moving from one department unit to another (Clark, 2012). A 2011 California Public Child Welfare Workforce Study indicated that external turnover rate was at about 6.1% for 47 counties in California. While external turnover is costly, internal voluntary unit transfers can increase staff retention (Clark, Uota, & Smith, 2010). Results yielded by a 2004 survey of state public child welfare administrators indicated that high caseload was one of the main causes of preventable turnover (American Public Health Services Association, 2005).

The financial cost of turnover involves direct fiscal costs, such as those incurred by training and replacement, as well as indirect costs, including time required to train new workers and loss of client and worker relationship. Turnover costs have an adverse impact on organizations and have an increasing fiscal effect on taxpayers (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). In 1995, the cost to replace one CPS worker was estimated at about \$10,000 (Graef & Hill, 2000). Another report published in the same year estimated the cost of replacing a CWS worker in California at \$17,000 (Daly, Dudley, Finnegan, Jones, & Christiansen, 2000). Subsequently, Dorch, McCarthy, and Denofrio (2008) indicated that the average cost of replacing a CWS worker in 2003 was about \$27,000. In addition to financial costs, turnover also involves substantial time and energy expenditure. The GAO study

conducted in 2003 revealed that high caseloads resulted in compromised relationships between social workers and families and limited the focus to children's safety. Social work turnover causes distress to clients and adversely affects the remaining staff and new inexperienced social workers (Powell & York, 1992). Social worker turnover can also leave the organization with financial problems (Kompier & Cooper, 1999). Consequently, turnover can negatively affect the quality of services delivered, consistency of client relationships, and stability of services (Mor Barak et al., 2001). A North Carolina study found that it takes about six months from initial recruitment for a new child welfare social worker to be able to carry a full caseload (Gunderson & Osborne, 2001). Furthermore, considerable time is lost when new workers return to the office from training, as they usually need to consult peer workers or supervisors on the regional protocol. New workers are also prone to make mistakes and are less productive (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003).

There is an emotional cost of turnover on social workers and children. Social workers who have to cover the caseloads (of those who have resigned or are on leave) are often left with heavier caseloads, which diminish their productivity and undermine their relationships with clients (Bennett, Plint, & Clifford, 2005). This impacts morale, causing a further burnout, which is thought to be a precursor to turnover. Other literature suggests that one of the main challenges in recovering the quality of services delivered to foster children in maintaining the child welfare workforce (Bennett, Plint, & Clifford, 2005). According to a report by GAO (2003), children are in care longer if they experience worker turnover because it takes times

for new workers to fully engage with their caseload and to make the necessary decisions. While the additional time a child is forced to spend in the system is one of the major indirect costs of social work turnover, it is difficult to measure. According to a study conducted by Flowers, McDonald, and Sumski (2005), children who experience social worker turnover are 60% less likely to attain permanency within the federal timeline requirement. A qualitative study conducted in New York, in which 25 adolescents were interviewed, revealed increased loss of stability and trust in relationships as a result of caseworker turnover. The authors also noted that children who were assigned multiple workers experienced more frequent placement changes (Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, & Trinkle, 2010).

The literature reviewed above clearly indicates that CWS workers may experience high turnover due their highly demanding work that often causes burnout. Burnout and turnover appear to occur in a cycle - social work staff shortage results in greater caseload sizes for remaining workers - who in turn experience burnout and eventually leave the organization. Turnover has significant financial costs to agencies, as well as emotional and service deficit costs for clients left without social workers. Finally, as it also requires significant time and energy to recruit and train new workers, it is difficult for the clients to receive the services they need in a timely manner. The next section will discuss implications of burnout and turnover among child welfare workers.

Implications to Child Welfare Workers

Child welfare workers are responsible for providing support to vulnerable children and families. All 50 U.S. states have their own definition and laws grounded in standards set by federal law mandating professionals and institutions to report any suspected child abuse to child protective service (CPS) agencies. The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) is a federally supported program that gathers and analyzes annual data of child maltreatment and neglect. According to NCANDS, during the 2013 federal fiscal year, CPS agencies received an estimated 3.5 million referrals concerning approximately 6.4 million children. In addition, findings, pertaining to the 47 states that reported on screened-in and screened-out referrals, indicate that about 60.9% of referrals were screened in, while the remaining 39.1% were screened out. This corresponds to 2.1 million screened-in referrals, resulting in the national rate of 28.3 per 1,000 children for 2013 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015a).

The primary goal of child welfare agencies is ensuring safety and care of children. Child welfare organizations function to deliver services to children and their families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015b). Social workers are responsible for taking on cases of child maltreatment and deliver services to meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families. However, in order to deliver high quality services, social workers must have the physical and mental ability to provide efficient care for traumatized children. CWS workers are often involved with highly stressful cases and situations. Work-related burnout is particularly

prevalent among professionals that do “people work,” such as social workers. Thus, burnout is not a new issue in the field of social work.

Historically, social work has been associated with work-related stress and burnout. Austin (2003) reported that, during the early 1980s and 1990s, child welfare services underwent a decline as a result of the changing conditions in the welfare state. The consequences of the decline caused social workers to experience financial restrictions and political vulnerability (Hasenfeld, 1984). Financial constraints are commonly a major challenge to social service agencies and workers because limited funds decrease the availability of resources and affect functioning of various programs, causing work-related stress among child welfare workers (Arches, 1991).

In the past decades, researchers have studied burnout extensively among social workers and their findings have consistently revealed stressful work environments and emotional distress as the main causes. When 1,213 American social workers were surveyed, 75% of the respondents described their work as frustrating and 81% reported experiencing burnout from work (Light, 2003). Kim and Stoner (2008) conducted a study using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) of social workers in California. Their results indicated that social workers were experiencing higher levels of emotional exhaustion when compared to the standards reported by Maslach and Jackson (1986). In this study, the mean score of emotional exhaustion among social workers was considerably higher at 25.5 (SD=11.41) than the standard mean provided in the MBI at (M=20.99,SD=10.75) ($t=7.67$, $df=345$, $p<.05$). These results indicated that even with high levels of emotional exhaustion,

social workers were found to experience moderate depersonalization (Kim & Stoner, 2008). These results were consistent with Lloyd and King's (2004) study reporting that Australian social worker in mental health settings experienced high emotional exhaustion and moderate depersonalization. From this review, it can be understood that burnout is a multi-dimensional concept and can be differently understood based on which aspect of burnout is examined (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment). However, it is clear that social workers experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion compared to other occupational groups (Kim & Stoner, 2008).

Child welfare workers are regularly required to engage in traumatic situations involving child abuse and neglect that can result in the development of work-related stress (Dane, 2000). Critical views from other professionals and the media compound the stress experienced by CWS workers. In addition, child welfare workers often receive threats of violence from clients, which also adds to their work-related stress. Due to the nature of their work, many CWS workers experience burnout, and eventually start considering leaving the profession. Of the 159 CWS investigation workers, who were in their position for two years, Anderson (2000) surveyed 33% indicated having no intention of working for CPS in the long term. High caseloads, limited time to complete tasks, and tight deadlines prevented social workers from following up on cases, making it difficult to complete their work at the standard the clients needed (Daley, 1979). This can cause emotional exhaustion and lack of personal accomplishment among social workers, resulting in burnout. This vicious

circle can also explain findings by Anderson (2000), who revealed that a significant proportion of CWS workers had no intention of staying with their respective CWS agencies due to the high demanding work environment.

A major part of social workers' responsibility is crisis intervention and helping clients experiencing trauma. However, providing trauma intervention places social workers at risk of traumatizing themselves (Farrell & Turpin, 2003). It is not unusual for social workers to experience negative psychological reactions such as secondary traumatic stress (STS) when working with traumatized clients. STS is defined as "natural and consequential behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other [or client] and the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person [or client]" (Figley, 1995, p. 7).

When working with clients in crisis who are experiencing trauma, social workers can experience STS, the symptoms of which are similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Despite experiencing violent threats, highly demanding caseloads, lack of support, financial constraints, and exposure to STS, social workers receive moderate compensation, which likely adds to their frustration with work.

In summary, many social workers are susceptible to experiencing work-related burnout, which often prompts them to leave the profession ultimately resulting in high turnover rates. Thus, in order to achieve a stable workforce, CWS agencies must effectively address the long-standing issue of burnout and turnover. Burnout is a multi-dimensional concept and can be experienced differently based on the specific

aspects being examined. However, extant studies confirm that social workers are commonly at risk for experiencing work-related burnout. The impact of organizational characteristics and structure on social work burnout and turnover will be discussed next.

Impact of Organizational Characteristics and Structure on Burnout and Turnover

Even though individual stressors play a role in the development of burnout, organizational characteristics are recognized as its main contributor (Barford & Whelton, 2010). Conceptualizing work burnout as a factor caused by organizational outcome, rather than just caused by individual characteristic, shifts the focus from the individual to the social support and resource structure of an organization (Anderson, 2000; Kirk-Brown & Wallace, 2004). The recurrent friction among expectations and work demands and the work environment of an organization promote burnout in social workers (Curtis, Moriarty, & Netten, 2010). In a study conducted by Cushman et al. (1995), participants indicated various stressors related to organization, such as lack of funding, high worker turnover rates, personnel shortages, working in a bureaucratic work environment, and lack of relationships with other units.

One definition of organizational culture and climate refers to a set of implied norms that determine how a group reacts to their environment (Ostroff, Kinicki, & Tamkins, 2003). Organizational culture is shared through employee socialization and has an effect on work behavior of administrators, as it replicates the working environment and signifies the larger social culture of the organization. Organizational

culture affects the attitudes of employees and organizational outcomes (Ostroff et al., 2003). Charles Glisson (2007) performed a study in the area of culture and climate in public child welfare and child mental health organizations. The author described culture as the standards, expectations, and the system in which work is completed in an organization. Glisson defined organizational climate as the individual workers' view of the psychological impact that the work environment has on their well-being. This in turn forms an organizational culture because employees collectively share their experiences within the organization. In a constructive organizational culture, employees are supportive and value helpfulness of others. This type of positive organizational culture is characterized by low conflict, role clarity, and personalization (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998). According to Glisson (2007), the social context of an organization directly affects service quality and outcomes.

The manner in which employees plan and complete work goals is a major predictor of overall stress resulting from work pressure (Collings & Murray, 1996). According to Egan and Kadushin (1995), workers are commonly assigned to a role and complete their duties in their work setting. The expectations of the worker in that role, along with the expectations of other colleagues of that role, influence how a worker perceives and performs in his or her role. A study of child welfare administrators conducted by Jones (1993) revealed that child welfare administrators experience both professional role conflict and organizational role conflict. The study participants conveyed various occurrences of role conflict to the degree that others had conflicting expectations of them (Jones, 1993). Before being hired, a worker's

expectancy of the job is assumed to affect his or her intent to stay or leave the job. Prior to being hired, if workers are offered realistic review of the job, this allows them to reach an informed decision about whether or not the role is suitable for them. The Realistic Job Preview tool provides detailed information and clarification of the job, containing written explanations, pictures, job shadowing, videos, and features emphasizing the pros and cons of the job. The Realistic Job Preview tool is becoming more widely used among child welfare organizations and is employed to reinforce the workforce (Masternak, 2004). The Realistic Job Preview is considered successful due to the psychological principles it provides. More specifically, it offers the users an opportunity to better understand the reality of the job, promotes honesty between the job applicant and recruiter, and facilitates self-selection (Breugh, 1983).

Organizational stressors that derive from organizational structure and climate have been found to promote social work burnout. It is common for professional social workers to leave their profession due to stress and burnout related to supervision issues (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2009). Supervision issues that have been commonly cited in the literature involve lack of support from supervisors, conflict with supervisors' management style, and insufficient supervision (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2009). In a study conducted by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency that focused on former child welfare workers, 45% of participants stated that insufficient supervision was a prominent factor in their decision to leave the CWS agency (NCCD, 2006). Social workers prefer their supervisors to act as consultants who offer guidance (clinical supervision) as opposed to task supervision

(Rycraft, 1994). Chenot, Benton, and Hansung (2009) conducted a study of 767 California CWS workers in various counties across the state. The researchers found that the absence of effective supervisor and peer support correlated with the intention of new social workers to change careers. Scannapieco and Connell-Carrick (2007) looked at social workers who stayed with their agency and compared them to those who left their agency. Their findings indicate that the social workers who stayed spent more time with their supervisors compared to those who left. Quality supervision plays a major role in an organization. Excellent supervision is achieved through altering and improving supervisor training and focusing on the vital impact supervisors have on workers. Organizations should focus on improving the values supervisors incorporate and share with their subordinates and extend the amount of time workers receive with supervisors.

Often, when organizations alter the previously well-established work practices by introducing more complex roles, workers become vulnerable to stress related to role ambiguity (Lloyd, 2002). Role ambiguity emerges when there is vagueness about the scope of the role in a job and the expectations of others of that role. Balloch, Pahl, and McLean (1998) found that role ambiguity was a significant source of dissatisfaction among social workers that took part in their study. The participants cited sources of subjective stress as conflicting work demands, high expectations, insufficient time to complete tasks, and experiencing role ambiguity. Workers experiencing stress from uncertain goals or objectives eventually start to feel dissatisfaction with the job, as well as a decline in self-confidence, along with

reduced sense of self-esteem, low motivation, and determination to leave the job (Sutherland & Cooper, 1990). Job clarity can be a preventive factor in reducing burnout and turnover. Conversely, lack of job clarity forecasts burnout and high turnover irrespective of other characteristics of the job setting (Rabin & Zelner, 1992). Organizations' cultural responses to employee burnout resulting from role ambiguity can affect the likelihood of stressed employees adopting new positive coping methods for managing work-related stress. Organizational recognition and acceptance of stress reducing strategies is linked to lower rates of work-related stress and burnout. On the other hand, organizational rejection or suppression of stress reducing coping strategies results in lower productivity of workers and insufficient services provided to clients (Thomas, Kohli, & Choi, 2014). Bliese and Castro (2000) hypothesized that, when there is role clarity, workers are able to perform successfully, even when working in high pressure positions, because of the precise instructions regarding what to do and how to obtain answers. Studies conducted in other fields confirm the association between role clarity and organizational effectiveness. A study performed by Posner and Butterfield (1978) in which 489 underwriters took part, revealed a compelling correlation among their experience with role clarity and their rates of job satisfaction, as well as how they rated the effectiveness of their organization.

The emphasis on worker and organization relationships prompted many researchers to examine organizational settings in rural and urban work environments. Several studies have suggested that social service workers working in rural regions

experience high rates of emotional exhaustion, combined with low levels of individual accomplishment on a job burnout inventory scale similar to those reported by workers employed in urban settings (Angerer, 2003; Gellis, Kim & Hwang, 2004; Poulin & Walter, 1993; Rohland, 2000). However, some research suggests that social service workers employed in rural areas encounter higher rates of work burnout compared to their counterparts in urban areas. According to Landsman (2002), the correlation between rural workplace and higher social work burnout stems from amplified professional isolation, insufficient resources, and environmental impacts. Organizational structure of the workplace can influence job stress among employees (Angerer, 2003). Workplace issues, such as downsizing, unions, and budget control, can affect workers' marriages and families, and can eventually results in job burnout (Angerer, 2003; Maslach et al., 2001). According to Anderson (2000), this is particularly the case when no coping strategies are set by the individual or organization.

Researchers have recently started to focus on the impact of high caseloads on employee burnout. The standards set by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) recommend that 12 to 15 children be assigned to a social worker; however, a survey directed by APHSA reported that an average caseload carried per social worker averaged at 24 children among Children Protective Service workers and 23 among Foster Care and Adoption Workers. A study conducted by Koeske and Koeske (1989) found that a highly demanding workload was associated with employee burnout. The authors argued that resources and support within the

organization from fellow colleagues and management could counterbalance the stress related with demanding workload and prevent social work burnout in social service organizations. Studies completed on Title IV-E educated individuals and public CWS social workers indicated that, after completing their legal work obligation, some workers left CWS agencies because of job dissatisfaction. These CWS workers cited limited opportunities to apply their skills as the main reason for departure, along with nominal leeway to make their own decisions. They also noted that they usually received little recognition for their efforts in dealing with difficult caseloads (Cahalane & Sites, 2008).

Empirical evidence confirms the importance of inter-professional relationships social workers have within an organization on job satisfaction. Agresta (2006) completed a study involving 183 members of the School Social Work Association of America, focusing on the significance of organizational roles and the perceived significance of school social worker roles on job satisfaction. About 60% of school social workers indicated that regular contact with administrators enhanced their levels of job satisfaction. In addition, about 80% of school social workers indicated that regular contact with mental health professionals enhanced positive inter-professional relationship and raised their views on social work skills and expertise. The results of this study indicated that the perceived magnitude of social workers' role within an organization is a predictor of job satisfaction and a preventative factor of burnout.

A career ladder is a metaphor for advancement in one's job. It can be described as the progression from an entry-level position to a high-level skill set,

authority, and more compensation. Despite its prevalence in work settings, there is paucity of research on the relationship between career ladders and turnover among child welfare workers and organization (Sage, 2010). However, in various qualitative studies and job exit interviews, factors associated with job satisfaction that caused turnover included the lack of a career ladder (e.g., Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research, 2008; Pecora, Whittacker, Maluccio, & Barth, 2000; Ellis, Ellett, & Deweaver, 2007). Similar results from the study conducted by Schudrich et al. (2012), in which 760 social workers in child welfare agencies took part, indicated that child welfare organizations that provided social workers with promotion opportunities, contingent rewards, and sufficient pay and benefits ensured that their workers experienced increased job satisfaction and decreased intentions to leave the organization.

Job autonomy is defined as the amount of control workers have with respect to organizing and managing their own tasks and responsibilities (Liu, Spector, & Jex, 2005). Workers lacking job autonomy commonly experience feelings of reduced self-accomplishment with their work (Maslach et al., 2001). Absence of job autonomy in a workplace environment produces depersonalized feelings among colleagues (Coders & Dougherty, 1993). Social workers value job autonomy and those that leave their agency often mention bureaucratic hassles as a major reason for resignation (Hansung, 2008). A wide meta-analytic review of turnover research in the areas of child welfare signified that level of autonomy could be a reliable predictor of turnover intentions among social workers (Mor Barrak et al., 2001).

The literature above clearly recognizes that workplace environment and personal experiences may cause CWS workers to be more susceptible to experiencing burnout and turnover. In summary, it appears that the presence or absence of organizational factors are an important element in the development of social work burnout and turnover. The next section will discuss supportive factors that may help reduce or prevent social work burnout and turnover.

Supportive Factors to Reduce or Prevent Burnout

According to Figley (1995), there is a cost to caring and helping others. Social workers experience stress arising from helping others, which can test their personal coping skills, and induce burnout as a result of not being able to cope with the high demands of the job or maintain one's own aspirations (Blom, 2012; Brody & Nair, 2003). The incongruence between the desire to meet the high demands of the job and the resources available to do so leads to burnout in employees (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). As a result, an increasing number of social workers and organizations continue to encounter burnout, which could be addressed through prevention and remediation (National American Christian Social Work, 2014).

Studies indicate that organizational resources like supervisor support and work autonomy are important contributors to reducing burnout (Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli, & Schareurs, 2003). Other important supportive factors include effective supervision (London, Larsen, & Thisted, 1999) and social support among colleagues (Bakker et al., 2005). Counseling provided through Employee Assistance

Programs was also found to be beneficial in helping social workers overcome burnout.

Supervision is an educational practice that encompasses a worker with skills and knowledge to train new staff members or less experienced workers whereby a supervisor plays the role of a manager and supporter. Supervision is also recognized as the social workers' fundamental response to the challenging and stressful nature of the job (Schwartz, 2008). An effective supervision is achieved when superiors are able to efficiently engage in role-specific communication with their staff (Hansung, 2008). The role-specific communication comprises of performance reviews, discussing assignments, work scheduling, information about policies, and task instructions (Miles, Patrick, & King, 1996). According to Gibelman (2003), supervision can help reduce work-related stress by assisting social workers with processing the reactions to client situations, setting limits, and keeping realistic expectations. The purpose of supervision is to support workers and facilitate delivery of quality services for clients; in this way, supervisors demonstrate that they care for the wellbeing of workers and clients (Shulman, 1995). A common complaint among child welfare workers is that their supervisors are commonly too busy to offer the level of supervision workers need. In addition, supervisors' unavailability negatively affects workers' morale and efficiency (GAO, 2003). According to the results yielded by extant studies, supervision may be the most essential element in retaining a solid child welfare workforce. Workers who remain in their jobs report the support received from supervisors, while those that leave the agency usually cite lack of

support from supervisors as one of the causes for departure (Children's Service Practice Notes, 2015).

Peer support is defined as a perception that colleagues work better together and support one another, and is associated with workforce retention (Byrne, 1994; Glisson, 2007). Social support at work is exhibited through positive social interactions between colleagues, supervisors, and upper management (Karaek & Theorell, 1990). Empirical evidence has shown that peer support has a relationship with turnover rates. A study performed by Bride, Jones, and MacMaster (2007), in which 187 child welfare workers in Tennessee took part, revealed that peer support reduces the association between workers' intent to leave their agency and STS. In similar studies from other fields, such as teaching and nursing, peer support has been found to decrease burnout (Byrne, 1994). A supportive organizational culture allows workers to validate their feelings and helps prevent work-related stress (Bride & Jones, 2006). A study on peer and supervisor support conducted by Nissly, Mor Barak, and Levin (2010) indicated that these supports were negatively correlated with workers' intent to leave the agency. However, these supports did not safeguard against organizational stress (Nissly et al., 2010). Janssen (1999) identified social support as an important factor in reducing levels of burnout among workers. Similarly, Landstrom, Biordi, and Gillies (1989) observed that absence of peer support stimulated intentions of turnover in nurses.

Social workers function to provide services to disenfranchised vulnerable population; however, they are also at risk of becoming vulnerable through work-

related stress and burnout. Thus, social workers require support and resources to help overcome burnout. Originally founded in 1940 to concentrate on alcohol abuse and its effects on the workplace, Employee Assistance Program is defined as

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) serve organizations and their employees in multiple ways, ranging from consultation at the strategic level about issues with organization-wide implications to individual assistance to employees and family members experiencing personal difficulties. As workplace programs, the structure and operation of each EAP varies with the structure, functioning, and needs of the organization(s) it serves. In general, an EAP is a set of professional services specifically designed to improve and/or maintain the productivity and healthy functioning of the workplace and to address a work organization's particular business needs through the application of specialized knowledge and expertise about human behavior and mental health (Employee Assistance Professionals Association [EAPA], 2010. p. 6)

Multidisciplinary professional aspect of EAP encompasses social workers, nurses, counselors, psychologists, and substance abuse counselors (Jacobson & Hosford-Lamb, 2008). As a voluntary work-based program, EAP provides free and confidential assessment, counseling, referrals, and follow up services to employees and the dependents of employees with personal or work related stressors. Along with employees' problems, EAP works with management and administrators to address any organizational challenges. EAP programs are not structured identically; rather, they are intended to be personalized in order to meet the client needs (Jacobson & Hosford-Lamb, 2008).

Internal EAP programs are common and many have been implemented in large organizations. In these programs, professionals are hired from within the company they support. Internal EAPs are able to deliver personalized services and retain high visibility of the work environment. While internal EAPs are involved

with employee advocacy (Straussner, 2001), external EAPs have off-site offices and are affiliated with outside of agency professionals. This approach allows delivering bespoke services to employees and their dependents. External EAP is cost effective for large companies that are geographically dispersed. Although services provided by internal and external EAP programs are comparable, workers experience greater comfort when visiting external EAP professionals because it strengthens their sense of security with confidentiality (Jacobson & Hosford-Lamb, 2008).

Conclusion

CWS social workers have an important role in responding to child maltreatment and working to keep children safe within their families and to assist in the reunification of children who are in the system care. Due to the demanding nature of the CWS social worker role and responsibilities, they are frequently affected by work burnout, which left unaddressed often leads to staff turnover. Burnout is a consequence of work overload and lack of support. CWS workers who experience burnout experience physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, and development of negative self-concept and attitude towards one's work. Within the CWS field there are a number of factors that cause burnout including: high caseloads, administrative burden, limited supervision, and lack of education and training. Burnout greatly hinders a CWS social worker's capabilities to work successfully with vulnerable clients. Burnout must be addressed through training, supervision, peer support, support from agency, self-care, and continuing education.

There is some support available for CWS social workers through EAP programs; however, it is important for organizations to explore other factors that may lead to more supportive environment for CWS social workers experiencing work burnout. There is minimal research in the area of organizational impact on the development of burnout. This study seeks to explore the organizational supports offered and effectiveness of these supports to CWS social workers' to gain a better understanding of how to assist CWS social workers to effectively address and reduce burnout rates. There is a need for further research into the role of child welfare organizational resources and strategies to prevent burnout.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Study

CWS social workers in child welfare agencies represent the front line response to myriad social issues relating to child harm and family vulnerabilities. CWS social workers advocate for disenfranchised children and families who are commonly disregarded in society. In the course of their work, they make vital decisions and deliver essential social services to children and their families to support safety and well-being. However, social workers are experiencing increased levels of work burnout due to rising caseloads, increased demands for documentation, complexity of issues experienced by client, and lack of supervision. Social workers have also reported experiencing lack of job security (Center for Workforce Studies, NASW, 2006). The turnover rates among CWS social workers are growing due to these issues that result in increased work-related burnout (American Humane Association, 2011).

A qualitative exploratory research approach was used to examine the effectiveness of resources CWS organizations are currently offering, as well as additional supports and resources CWS social workers indicate they feel may also be effective to address burnout. Participants for this research study were drawn from CWS social workers at Merced County Human Services Agency. The three research questions that guided this study are:

1. What are current supports and resources available within Merced County HSA child welfare agency and how effective are they in preventing and addressing burnout among CWS social workers?
2. What types of organizational resources and supports do CWS social workers identify that may be more effective in preventing and addressing burnout among CWS social workers?
3. What type of self-care do CWS social workers in Merced County HSA practice?

The insight provided by this research finding may offer Merced County HSA and other CWS organizations valuable information regarding effective organizational support and resources to more effectively address burnout issues for CWS social workers.

Research Design

The main objective of this research was to provide an understanding of what may be effective supports and resources CWS agencies are providing to help reduce social worker burnout resulting in high turnover rates. Since there is limited research addressing effective organizational supports for CWS social workers to prevent or address issues concerning burnout, this study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). An exploratory research approach assisted in providing further insight into the issue. Qualitative research was used to gain in-depth understanding of human experiences and generate theoretically deeper observations that are not simply relegated to numbers (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). This

type of approach most effectively helped the researcher attain a nuanced understanding of the necessary organizational supports CWS social workers identify as effective to address burnout and prevent turnover. The researcher chose qualitative design as opposed to other research designs because it allowed flexibility and enabled the research procedure to progress as more observations were collected (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). Qualitative research methods are appropriate for studies exploring phenomena where little is known about it (Rubin & Babbie, 2013).

Sampling Plan

The research population for the study involved CWS social workers employed by a CWS agency. The researcher obtained access to potential study participants through a child welfare agency in the Central Valley County of Merced, California. Criteria for CWS social workers participation was the following, participants are working as CWS workers in child protective services and within the following child welfare departments: Emergency Response (ER), Family Reunification (FR), Family Maintenance (FM), Permanency Planning (PP), Court, and Adoption. Also, as the criteria for CWS social work employment requires, all participants may have a Bachelor or Master degree in Social Work or related field, such as Sociology, Psychology, and Counseling.

The participants were selected through a non-random sampling procedure. In non-probability sampling, subjects are typically targeted for their accessibility or the intentional decision of the researcher; participants are chosen by the researcher, not by the scientific or non-random methods (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). In this research,

purposive sampling was employed, as it allowed the researcher to study a small subset of a larger population in which specific characteristics of members of the subset were easily identified (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). The advantage of using non-probability purposive sampling was that it allowed the researcher to choose participants based on knowledge of the population and the specific purpose of the study (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). While purposive sampling is easy to conduct and inexpensive, it may lead to under or over-representation of particular groups in the study (Rubin & Babbie, 2013).

The online survey questionnaire was distributed to approximately 54 HSA CWS social workers with 36 being completed and returned to the researcher. This sample size allowed the researcher to gain a fair representation of the HSA employees through the survey tool.

Data Collection

To collect exploratory qualitative data, the researcher distributed an online qualitative questionnaire using SurveyMonkey (see Appendix A). The SurveyMonkey online questionnaire was made available electronically to CWS social workers in the above indicated child welfare departments, at Merced County HSA, California. CWS social work participants were made aware of the online questionnaire through an email sent out by the researcher explaining the purpose of the study. An online qualitative open-ended questionnaire was chosen as a data collection method instead of in-person interviews for the convenience and optimal participation of the CWS social workers. CWS social workers commonly experience

time constraints due to high work demands. For this reason, the researcher chose an online electronic qualitative questionnaire to ensure adequate flexibility for CWS social workers to complete the questions, and thereby increase response rates for completion. The purpose of this research was explained to the CWS agency and the participating CWS social workers, who were all required to confirm their willingness to participate in the study through an informed consent document (see Appendix B). Questionnaire completion took approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Questionnaires were distributed in February 2016. The online questionnaire was completed in four weeks. Following this period, the researcher accessed SurveyMonkey and retrieved the data from the online questionnaires.

Instrumentation

As mentioned above, the researcher collected qualitative data utilizing an online SurveyMonkey qualitative questionnaire as a data collection instrument (see Appendix A). The questions were guided by a thorough review of the literature. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions constructed to produce descriptive responses from CWS social work participants pertaining to their experiences with organizational support and resources they receive to effectively address burnout and the types of additional resources they feel are needed to support CWS social workers in overcoming the effects of work burnout. Also, what type of self-care CWS social workers practice. The questions were formulated in basic terms for simple comprehension in order to eliminate any potential for misinterpretation. The SurveyMonkey questionnaires were all open-ended, allowing the CWS social work

participants to respond to questions in their own words. This format reduced influence from the researcher and allowed participants to frame their own answers.

Data Analysis

Once the SurveyMonkey questionnaire data was obtained, it was analyzed utilizing Neuman's (2006) technique for qualitative data analysis. More specifically, data was organized into themes using a five-stage process that involves sorting and classifying, open coding, axial coding, selective coding, interpreting, and elaborating the data (Neuman, 2006). In the sorting and classifying stage, data was organized with respect to the research questions. In the open coding stage, key terms and important events were organized, guided by the research questions, extant literature, participant's language, and key terms utilized by the participating CWS agency. In the axial coding stage, data was re-evaluated to ascertain if any additional themes emerged. In the selective coding stage, data was subjected to a final evaluation in order to identify any cases or quotes that exemplify specific themes. During the final stage involving interpreting and elaborating, major themes and classifications were compared and contrasted with the findings reported in the literature, resulting in the development of ideas and a working theory.

Protection of Human Participants

Upon making the initial email contact, the research participants were informed by the researcher about the purpose of the study. CWS workers who agreed to participate in the study were informed that their participation is voluntary and that they can choose to withdraw from the research study at any time without any penalty,

repercussion, or loss of benefits. This ensured that the study participants do not feel coerced into participating in the research. Since data was collected electronically, informed consents (see Appendix B) were provided prior to administering the online questionnaire. The informed consent document was established as an agreement to participate in the research study and explained participants' rights. It also elaborated on how data was to be collected, analyzed, represented, and how identities of participants' will be safeguarded. The researcher further explained that participation in the research study was kept confidential, and that participants' names, phone numbers, or emails were not linked to the data. The researcher made sure that participants were aware that all information collected will be protected from inappropriate disclosure under the law.

As previously noted, the data was collected through SurveyMonkey and was managed through a secure account. The website tracked respondents by the Internet Service Provider (ISP) address of the computers participants used to complete the online survey questionnaire. While it is theoretically possible to identify a respondent by the ISP address, this capability resides with the SurveyMonkey Corporation and this information was not accessible to the researcher. Moreover, the questionnaires did not request any identifying information from the participants, making it impossible to identify the respondents by name, phone number, or email.

The participants were provided with resources and supports to assist them in addressing any issues related to study participation. Participants were also provided with names and phone numbers of the researcher and the researcher's faculty research

chair advisor in case they had any further questions or concerns regarding the research study. Lastly, this research study was approved by the University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this research study is to explore the organizational supports and resources available to CWS social workers who may experience burnout and be impacted by high turnover rates. This chapter reports the results from qualitative questionnaire completed electronically by CWS social workers in Merced County regarding burnout and the organizational support offered to assist them to effectively deal with burnout. This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What are current supports and resources available within Merced County HSA child welfare agency and how effective are they in preventing and addressing burnout among CWS social workers?
2. What types of organizational resources and supports do CWS social workers identify that may be more effective in preventing and addressing burnout among CWS social workers?
3. What type of self-care do CWS social workers in Merced County HSA practice?

The Sample

Fifty four CWS social workers are currently employed at Merced County Human Services Agency and the online survey questions were sent out to all fifty four CWS social workers. Thirty six social workers responded and participated in the study.

It should be noted that participants were not required to complete all survey questions and had the option to skip questions if they preferred to do so. Hence, not all survey questions had the same number of responses. A number of themes that correspond to the research questions emerged during the qualitative data analysis and are presented below. To provide additional context some excerpts from participant responses are also presented. A limitation of the study was lack of demographic information gathered on the participants. Consequently, making it difficult to discover trends and relationships between the themes gathered from the data and the demographics of participants.

Major Research Findings

Support Provided to CWS Social Workers

The first guiding research question is related to HSA organizational supports participants indicated are available for CWS social workers who experience burnout symptoms. Two themes emerged that appear to be related to this research question. The first theme that emerged was that CWS social workers identified and discussed formal supports provided by the agency. Formal supports in the agency are broken down further in to four sub-themes. The first involves the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The second sub-theme was the agency providing individual support such as offering time-off to workers and/or lowering caseloads. The third sub-theme was supervisor support. The fourth sub-theme was that social workers identified lack of support and resources provided by the agency to CWS social workers to effectively address work related stress and burnout. The second theme that emerged was that

CWS social workers identified informal supports provided by colleagues as important in addressing issues of work burnout. The two themes are discussed further in this section.

Formal supports and effectiveness

Study participants identified and discussed the effectiveness of three sub-themes such as: Employee Assistance Program (EAP), individual instrumental agency support, supervisor support in assisting HSA CWS social workers who experience burnout, and lack of support provided by the agency to CWS social workers.

Employee Assistance Program. Participants did not feel the quality of support provided by the EAP was effective to address CWS workers issues with burnout. In fact, 14 of the 36 participants reported that supports provided by the agency through EAP are not very effective or have not accessed the agency supports available. Ten participants identified individual based supports provided by the agency, such as lowering individual workers caseload or allowing time-off for workers experiencing work stress. However, these participants deemed individual based agency support as ineffective because due to large amounts of caseloads CWS social workers are unable to take time off from work. These participants shared that due to large caseloads and limited CWS social worker personnel, it is impossible for the agency to essentially lower workers caseloads. The most widely formal support participants reported was supervisor support. Sixteen participants recognized supervisor support as an effective form of support provided to CWS workers to address issues of work burnout. Lastly, participants felt there was lack of support and

resources provided by the organization to CWS workers to help address experiences burnout.

The most formal type of support that employees indicated is available to them is the counseling services through the EAP. Employees seeking assistance when experiencing work burnout can be referred to the counseling services or may seek out these services themselves. In regards to this service, participants reported feeling that EAP is not effective or acknowledged that they have personally not used EAP services. One worker's response to HSA agency's support to workers experiencing work burnout was:

I think that Merced County HSA sticks to the basic OSHA and worker's comp guidelines and offers employee EAP program but does not actively support workers who experience physical and emotional consequence to the nature of the job here. Many times, the psychological impact of this job is minimized and the practice is typically tell people to do self-care while not building in true self care practice or models. I would say that management does not always model healthy engagement, relationships, or support.

Some participants explained that when experiencing any symptoms of burnout, the agency refers workers to seek help to address their issues, "they tell them to call EAP or fill out an incident report and see the worker's comp director". Some participants expressed that they are aware that the agency provides counseling services to workers with traumatic cases or experiences caused by work, "when a traumatic event occurs, HSA will have a therapist available at the Main Agency. Also our insurance covers counseling services". Another respondent shared, "we have no support unless a traumatic event occurs then, they bring a counselor for a few hours".

Some participants shared that the EAP programs effectiveness to address issues of burnout is “minimal” or “not effective” due to the limited number of sessions offered and expressed the need for long-term EAP services. A participant believes that EAP services could be more effective, “if EAP offered more than five therapy sessions”. Another worker also explains, “they need more services that are long term”. Another participant believed that EAP services can be effective but need to be more accessible,

They are effective only when the social worker feels supported and utilizes the services. I've accessed these services myself and it's been beneficial. There is certainly more need for resources accessible to employees.

One worker expressed feeling that the EAP program is ineffective in helping CWS workers address issues of burnout and trauma related to work,

I feel they are not effective in addressing the chronic stress and health issues/concerns that social workers develop due to the perpetual stress-response to the secondary, and I would argue, primary trauma.

Another worker explained that counseling services are ineffective due to the insufficient time given to CWS social workers to access these services,

I believe it is insufficient. Although counseling services are covered through our insurance, it is almost impossible to take extra time off to see a counselor. It's almost not worth seeing a counselor as you will come back the next day with more problems.

Four participants, who recognized that the agency offered an EAP program, were otherwise unaware of how effective they may be because they had never accessed them. One participant explains, “I have not used the EAP program or felt the need to take time off work due to physical or emotional consequences of the job”.

Another social worker explained that if there was a need to use the EAP services, he

or she will be open to utilizing them, “I have never had to use them but I would use them if needed”. Another worker expressed:

The agency has the EAP program but I have never used it. We have a lot of parties to boost morale. Also, the supervisors are helpful with the staff.

Two workers shared not having personally utilized EAP services before but have seen colleagues who have utilized these services effectively:

I haven't personally utilized services available due to physical or emotional consequences due to the nature of the job, but I have witnessed others who have experienced it. I have seen workers who have taken time away from work on stress leave. Merced County is supportive by distributing the absent employee's work and keeping the reason for their absence confidential. I have also seen workers that have experienced the death of a child on their caseload. The worker is provided counseling services.

Another worker explained, “I don't have any first-hand experience in this area, so I am not sure. I do know they offer counseling services if a child that is assigned on your caseload dies”.

Agency support. The second support that CWS social workers identified accessing is individual-based agency intervention services such as agency providing time off or help with high caseloads.

If a worker is simply exhausted physically due to the nature of the work, they are supportive in taking care of our health and are supportive in taking time off or offering help. To deal with emotional consequences due to the nature of our job there have been times that the Agency brings in a Counselor for staff if needed.

Another worker explained the agency's support to individuals as,

I've heard of employees going on stress leave, supervisors helping employees manage their caseload, and supervisors taking your current cases and stress level into consideration when assigning cases.

Some workers expressed that the agency encourages flexibility in work schedules and time away for personal needs,

HSA encourages self-care and allows for a flexible work schedule to take care of personal needs. We are encouraged to take time off or to seek counseling, supervisor support as well.

One worker explained that the agency tries to boost work morale:

By providing adequate training and doing things such as pot lucks and creating an environment for SW to get together.

These participants also expressed that though the agency allows workers to take time-off, it is impossible to do so due to high caseloads and not enough workers to cover cases, “depends on your case load and if you can actually take time off or have a supportive supervisor”. One worker explained that the flexibility in work can be helpful but workers are unable to take advantage of this service,

I would describe the agency's flexibility with regards to work schedules as helpful; however, the work load many times makes it impossible for the worker to take advantage of this flexibility.

The participants that identified the individual-based agency support also identified these supports as ineffective due to the increased amount of workload,

Having to choose which case is assigned, or having the help from others is helpful, but when everyone's caseloads are high, there's only so much that administration can do to alleviate the stress.

Another social worker explained that the agency services cannot be effectively used by CWS workers because of increased caseloads: “the amount of support and resources will never be effective due to the increasing amount of caseload work for one social worker”. Some participants expressed that they recognized the current services available to CWS workers to help address their issues with work burnout;

however, felt that more resources were needed, “I think that Merced County could do a better job in supporting workers in that area. I know that they send out counselors, but think maybe more can be done such as offer self-care groups”.

Supervisor support. The last formal support that CWS social worker identified commonly accessing is supervisor support. It appeared that supervisor support is utilized by many workers who experience burnout and stress related to work, which allows workers to cope, vent, and immediately engage in discussions about case incidents and creates a culture that encourages and supports workers. It also appeared that CWS workers find positive supervisor relationships as more important and effective compared to other formal services provided by the agency. In fact, 16 participants out of 36 participants of the survey indicate the high importance and effectiveness of supervisor support and relationship. One worker explains the effectiveness of having a positive relationship with one’s supervisor in regards to dealing with work related stress,

The supports are very effective. Having a good relationship with your supervisor and letting them know when you need help or are overwhelmed is the best practice.

Another worker describes how supervisors step up to the plate when workers are feeling stressed out and need to take time off from work,

I’ve heard of employees going on stress leave, supervisors helping employees manage their caseload, and supervisors taking your current cases and stress level into consideration when assigning cases.

When describing the support and resources offered to CWS social worker by Merced County HSA, one worker describes the greater importance the supervisor

relationship has compared to other supports provided by the agency, “any support is inconsistent and really depends on the relationship you have with your supervisor or the other administrators”. Participants describe the effects of supportive supervisors on social workers as resulting in feeling valued by the agency,

Having a supportive supervisor who is open to hearing out their workers is crucial to the work of social workers. Furthermore, having a supervisor who encourages its workers to seek assistance when they feel pertinent demonstrates the importance that supervisors place in their employees.

Another social worker describes the efforts supervisors take to assist social workers who may be experiencing work burnout, “the supervisors are available to discuss the issue and see what supportive services can be offered to help the worker”. One social worker explains that supervisors understand that workers have a life outside of work and are understanding when workers need to take time-off from work due to personal issues. This worker stated,

One thing I really like is the supervisory staff understands that "our" families come first. They are very understanding about family issues or concerns that may arise and allow for time-off if needed without any kind of repercussions and not a lot of needed explanation. It makes me feel like I am "trusted". I have not had that with all my previous employers.

One social worker indicated that the efforts made by the agency are less important than supervisor relationship, this worker stated:

Parties are good for morale but when it comes down to it; your work relationship with your supervisor is what makes a difference in your overall attitude towards your job.

Lack of agency support and recognition for workers experiencing burnout. Another theme that emerged regarding support in addressing stress and burnout, shared by nine social workers, was that they do not feel the agency provides

enough support to CWS workers to help them address experiences of burnout from work. It appeared that some participants felt that the agency was not providing adequate resources to employees. It also appeared that unless the consequences were substantial, workers did not receive any assistance. One social workers stated, “workers do not feel support and are angry/frustrated with the lack of communication and support”. When questioned, how the agency supports workers experiencing physical and or emotional consequences of work, one responded reported, “I don’t believe they do”. Another worker expressed, “I personally don't think they do much to worry about our well-being. Instead they overwork us with high caseloads. No emotional support”. Some workers expressed “we have no support unless a traumatic event occurs then; they bring a counselor for a few hours”. Some respondent express that the agency does not provide support nor encourages staff to practice self-care,

Often times, we barely have a lunch because we are out in the field working. They don't emphasize us having lunch. Instead they worry about the work getting done. They don't care whether we have worked 12 hours and had no lunch. Often times they don't appreciate our work.

One worker expresses his/her frustration with the agency in regards to limited to no resources while workers are overloaded with work, this participant indicated,

I don't think we get any support. In fact, we get overworked and are overloaded with cases. Limited supervisor and agency support. The expectations are high from the agency and supervisors; however, services are limited.

Another social worker expressed that the agency can make more effort to assist and provide support and resources to CWS workers experiencing work burnout, this respondent indicated,

I think that Merced County could do a better job in supporting records in that area. I know that they send out counselors, but think maybe more can be done.

Informal Supports and Effectiveness

The last theme that emerged from the data was that participants preferred certain informal supports to address work related stress and burnout over formalized supports. The two sub-themes for informal method of support participants commonly accessed are colleague and family support. It appeared that these two types of informal support are the most easily accessible methods which allow CWS workers to immediately vent and engage in discussions about stressful cases. It also appears that CWS workers find positive colleague relationships very important and effective in dealing with experiences of burnout and work related stress. In fact, seventeen participants out of thirty six participants of the survey indicated the importance and effectiveness of colleague relationship.

From the responses of social worker in the survey, it may be understood that the CWS social workers in Merced County HSA have created a unique workplace environment and culture, in which they rely more on one another for support instead of relying on formal agency supports. One respondent shares,

I know that Merced County HSA offers the EAP program for employees. We also accrue vacation and sick time that will allow us to take hours or days off work. I personally feel that some CWS supervisors and many coworkers have created an environment that allows workers to ask for help when stress levels are high and when they feel assistance is needed.

Another worker shares that colleagues in the agency provide assistance to each other when feeling work burnout, “we have a great support from fellow coworkers who are there to assist us in dealing with the nature of the job”. Other

participants use terms to describe their colleague support as, “peers are all supportive”, “venting to other social workers is very helpful”, and “speaking with colleagues is helpful”. Participants also described that it is helpful to “consult with colleagues and other professionals about cases”. Another worker explains that having conversations with colleagues when feeling stressed out from work helps his or her “thought process” on stressful situations at work. One worker explains the benefits of colleague support as,

In terms of co-workers, I feel that the support they give each other is very big and beneficial. Also, workers who have had more experience in the field are able to provide a lot of resources. This has really helped me.

Some social workers expressed that when feeling work related burnout, social workers are encouraged by the agency to seek assistance from colleagues and supervisors. Participants stated that “co-workers care for each other” and it helps workers cope when they have positive “interactions with colleagues”. One social worker stated,

They have counseling available and encourage us to talk with each other about any emotional trauma or stress we experience. They also promote self-care.

Another social worker specified that using colleagues as a support is more effective because colleagues commonly have similar experiences and are able to understand each other, this workers stated, “I use my coworkers as my support for self-care. They have same experiences and can help give advice”. Other participants used terms like, “support is given by colleagues” and “support is effective but depends on who your colleagues and supervisors are”. One participant shared, “I talk about difficult subjects with my colleagues”. Another responded shared, “I consult

with colleagues and other professionals about my cases”. Twenty participants shared that “talking with colleagues” “venting to colleagues” is effective in addressing work related stress. One social work participant shared, “I have conversation with my colleagues in order to help my thought process”. Another respondent shared similar coping methods, “I sometimes need to vent out with my co-workers”.

Social workers also indicated that friends and family are a support system with whom they can speak with when experiencing work burnout. Twelve participants identified family as their support system. These participants used terms like “talking to family and friends” is helpful. One participant stated “I spend time with my family, they are my support system”. Having a family they can trust and confide in provides a feeling of security because family support can listen, provide information, advice, and give comfort. One participant reported, “My family supports at home. I'm glad I have a husband who is a great listener when I need to vent my emotions”. It appeared that these participants relied on their family as a support with whom they confide in regards to work stressors.

Some participants acknowledged “family activities” are helpful because it is time spent around members who are supportive and willing to listen. Time with family allows participants to have a sense of belonging and helps with coping with stress. One participant shared “having good home life with family” as important factors of support. Another participant shared that “spending as much time possible with family” provides support when feeling stressed from work. Another participant

shared that family time help “alleviate stress from work”. It appeared that for some CWS social workers, family support is a significant defense against stress from work.

In summary, two findings were discovered in regards to organizational support participants indicated are available for CWS social worker who experience work burnout. The first theme that emerged was that CWS social workers identified and described the effectiveness of the formal support available to them in addressing burnout: Employee Assistant Program (EAP), agency interventions such as time away from work and reduced caseloads, supervisor support, and lack of effective agency supports. The second theme that emerged was that social workers identified informal support provided by colleagues and family to help address work burnout. The next section will discuss the findings that emerged in relation to identifying additional supports and resources to combat burnout.

Additional Supports CWS Social Workers Feel Should Be Offered

The second guiding research question was related to additional supports CWS social workers felt HSA could provide to assist social workers to effectively address work burnout. After analyzing the data, three themes emerged around this question. The first and most common theme that emerged was that participants felt the agency needs to hire more workers and decrease caseloads for CWS workers to help lower their experiences with workplace burnout. The second theme that emerged was that participants felt that the agency needed to provide different counseling services and to promote more self-care practices to CWS workers to help them cope with their experiences of work burnout. The third theme that was noted was that participants felt

HSA could promote an agency wide culture of caring. The themes are discussed in the following sections.

Increase staff and lower caseloads. The first theme that emerged was participant recommendations to the agency to lower workers caseloads and hire more staff that can help to respond to the demanding workload. Fourteen out of the 36 participants reported that they felt HSA should lower caseloads and hire more trained staff. To express their recommendations, participants used terms like, “lower caseload size” and or “hire more staff”. One participant stated, “hiring more staff and getting them on the floor sooner than all of the training they go through”. Another worker shared frustration with the high demanding workload, “decrease to a more manageable case load, hire more support workers and build up employee moral through collective activities”.

Some participants also shared that the agency could hire more social worker aides who can be used to help more effectively manage the workload “support systems like having social worker aides would be beneficial in aiding the social worker's case load”. Another participant also felt that lower caseloads may improve the quality of services delivered to clients, “lower caseloads would improve quality of work and services being offered”. In regards to this, another worker shared, “preventing the high caseloads could be by hiring more people, giving us a day to focus on notes and no emergency referrals or issues given to us”. One social worker stated that lowering caseload can help CWS social worker focus more on individual clients, this respondent stated,

The agency needs to hire more staff to help lower the workload. Social workers are carrying too many cases at once and we cannot give all of our clients the same attention and care they require. Also, we need more services to help clients.

Another worker shared that the agency can help workers by providing incentives, lowering caseloads, and hiring more workers,

It would help to lower case load. It will also help to hire more social work assistants that can help social workers with their high caseloads.

On-site counseling support and promotion of self-care. The second theme that emerged was for HSA to provide more on site counseling support for CWS social workers to help workers address issues of burnout. On-site support that was suggested by participants included: counseling services and promotion of self-care to CWS social workers. These on-site supports may provide CWS workers with accessible services to address burnout as soon as they felt they needed it.

Participants discussed the idea of providing more individual counseling to workers and possibly designating an on-site clinician who can counsel workers when needed. Participants shared that on-site support would allow CWS social workers to access a counselor at any time when feeling stressed and have the opportunity to receive unlimited counseling sessions, unlike the EAP program which only offers limited counseling. Participants stated, “offer more than five therapy sessions”. Another worker shared that an, “onsite clinician would be helpful”. Workers also used terms like, “offer counseling services”. Two participants indicated that the agency should offer “discounts on yoga and massage sessions”. Another respondent discussed that the agency can help workers by promoting self-care, sending workers to training, and offering incentives can promote a healthy work environment,

I believe that more services need to be readily available to employees. For example, having a designated counselor for employees--one or more, who may be contracted by our Agency or practice in our own agency. Also, sending employees to more training to learn about self-care and different practices that as social workers we can do. Even having a massage therapist on site that can give discounts to employees may be a good idea. I know it's done in other counties. Providing incentives to employees, such as a free pass to a yoga class or a healthy dish and having different options that are culturally sensitive.

Another social work participant discussed the importance of having an onsite counselor, who can help workers work through stressful work situations and keep confidentiality of workers,

I believe that the Agency needs a therapist available at all times for social workers to see confidentially, as frequently as needed. This individual would not be able to be paid by the Agency and would be prohibited from reporting anything to the Agency. I believe the Agency needs to model more healthy engagement and relationship skills in the chain of command--often the way information is communicated to workers adds to the level of stress and difficulty in complex situations.

Several social workers discussed the idea of providing self-care, the importance of self-care, and the benefits it has in social work profession. Failure to take care of oneself throughout ones career as a CWS social worker can result in ongoing stress and can diminish the satisfaction one derives from work and one's ability to be fully present with client. One social worker stated,

Just taking care of oneself. Knowing when to say no on adding extra tasks, yes we are in the profession of wanting to help others; however you must first care of yourself before you can help anyone else. Self-care is extremely important.

One participant recommended that the agency provide group activities that can help promote community support, "I think supervision groups and social activity groups for co-workers to engage in would build community and support". Another

participant shared that the agency needs to provide, “pay increase, reinstate loyalty bonus. But recognizing and being aware of oneself is most important for self-care”. One worker discussed that workers can benefit from “more teaming building events”. Other workers suggested that the agency provide self-care group to worker where workers can talk about their experiences and share their feelings with other CWS social workers in the agency, “I think maybe types of self-care groups (with workers only) that can meet at work to talk about experiences or issues we are dealing with”. One worker shared her frustration with the agency’s lack of effort to help workers practice self-care,

Often times, we barely have a lunch because we are out in the field working. They don't emphasize us having lunch. Instead they worry about the work getting done. They don't care whether we have worked 12 hours and had no lunch.

Culture of caring. The third theme that emerged in response to identifying additional supports participants felt would be beneficial to CWS social workers to address their experiences with burnout was the need for the agency to promote a culture of caring and support. From the responses discussed above, one can determine that the agency workers along with their supervisors have developed a culture of support; however, workers want to see increased promotion of care and support from agency administrators. One social worker stated, “more compassion from the administration, then that would trickle down to our supervisors that could then provide the support they want to”. Another participant shared that the workers need, “a strength based and positive supportive work environment”. One social worker shared that the behavior and actions of management does not model a positive

environment that encourages support, and management is quick to tell employees to practice self-care; however, provide little self-care practice,

The practice is typically tell people to do self-care while not building in true self care practice or models. I would say that management does not always model healthy engagement, relationships, or support.

Most social workers identified that burnout caused by work stress can easily be experienced, many of these social workers rely on colleagues and direct supervisors for support, but they also felt that the administrators in the organization can work towards showing more support and care towards CWS social workers. While discussing agency's practice, one social worker stated her frustration of not being appreciated by agency administration, "often times they don't appreciate our work". In regards administration, another participant shared, "they do not actively support workers" and another worker identified that administration lack in providing "emotional support and overwork us". One participant stated that there is a "lack of communication" from administration at the agency. Another participant explained that agency support is inconsistent because it depends on the "relationship you have with administrators".

In summary, three themes were identified regarding recommendations the participants had for additional supports they felt the HSA could provide to assist social workers to more effectively address burnout. The first theme that was discussed was that participants felt the agency needs to hire more social workers and lower the high number of caseload carried by individual social workers. The second theme that was identified was that CWS social workers recommended that the agency

provide different on-site support such as counseling services to CWS workers to help them cope with their experiences of work burnout, also that the agency promote self-care practices. The last theme that emerged was that participants felt there needed to be an agency wide culture of caring that reinforced support, participants felt that this type of caring needs to start at the administrations and can trickle down to supervisors and workers. The next section will discuss the findings that emerged in relation to the third research question.

CWS Social Worker Self-Care Practices

The third guiding research question related to what type of self-care CWS social workers practice to help prevent them from experiencing work burnout. One theme emerged from this research question. The theme that emerged was that CWS social workers identified individual based self-care such as time off from work, outdoor activities, and hobbies as an important factor to their self-care practice. Most participants discuss that upon recognizing signs of stress, they focus on the coping process with their stressors. One participant shared a self-care care strategy: “I enjoy going outside in nature, hikes, playing video games, watching movies, exercising, etc. Sometimes having a Netflix and chill kind of day”. Another social worker shared that she/he does not allow work at home, “leave my job at work once I leave and don’t answer my work cellphone”. Another social worker agrees: “not taking work home with me, shutting off my phone, venting to other social workers, and shopping”. A participant stated, “my self-care consists of doing things that I find enjoyment in. Things that will distract my mind from thinking about work”. Three participants

identified “attending church” as their personal self-care practice. One participant shared the importance of family time to his/her self-care practice,

I spend time with my family, they are my support system. I do my best to leave work issues at work and not take it home. I take vacations throughout the year which helps me come back with a positive perspective.

Another participant shared the importance of caring one’s needs not just outside of work but during work hour as well,

The self-care I use it to make sure I take my breaks and leave the office for lunch. I make sure to get to work on time and leave on time. When I am feeling emotionally or physically drained, I will take a day off from work.

Many participants shared that part of their self-care practice includes, “exercise, meditation, and having a happy home life”. Workers also stated that they like to “take trips with my family to forget about stress from work”, “attend church”, “outdoor activities” “watch television” “attend social gatherings” “take mental health days off” and “spend quality time with family”. One worker shared that his/her self-care practice is “talking to my friends and family”. Some participants shared the importance of “taking breaks” during work. One worker shared, “I never make the issue personal. I have family activities, exercise and spend time in the great outdoors”. Another social worker shared the importance of taking “vacations”. One worker shared,

Get involved in activities that engage my happiness such as spending time with my family, exercising, get enough sleep, eat well and mentally preparing myself each day for work. Otherwise, I would be really stressed.

One respondent stated that part of his/her self-care practice is “therapist massage/chiropractor medical and dental checkups”. Another worker shared,

I have received counseling services. I actively engage in discussion with my supervisor and participate in our clinical program which helps me with processing cases with my clinical supervisor. I also practice mindfulness and exercise regularly.

Another respondent shared his/her practice with self-care that can meet both the physical and mental health needs:

I try to take my lunch every day and relax. I talk to my supervisor when I am beginning to feel stress. I try to spend as much time as possible with my family. I try to get enough sleep at night. There are some nights when I can't sleep because I am thinking of everything I have to do the next day. Netflix helps with this issue. I engage in positive thinking and remember that I am only one person and there are limits to what I can do. I try to find humor throughout the day and laugh. And I take long baths in a warm tub.

One participant shared, “my self-care consists of doing things that I find enjoyment in. Things that will distract my mind from thinking about work”. Another respondent shared similar coping methods:

I go to church almost every weekend. This is my biggest help. It keeps me grounded and reminds me that everyone matters no matter their circumstances.

In all, one theme emerged reading how CWS social workers identified they practice self-care to help them address their experiences with work burnout. The theme that emerged was that social workers use individual based self-care practices such as time off from work, quality family and friend time, and personal hobbies as an important factor to their self-care practices.

Summary

This chapter outlined the major findings of the data as it relates to each guiding research question in the study. The first guiding research question related to how CWS social workers identified Merced County HSA supports workers

experiencing work burnout. Two themes emerged in regards to this research question: the formal and informal agency support.

The second guiding question is related to additional supports CWS social workers believe may also be effective or be more effective in addressing issues of burnout experienced by CWS social workers. Three themes emerged regarding this research question: participants recommended agency lower caseload and hire more workers, provide different counseling services to workers, and promote an agency wide culture of caring.

The third guiding question is related to CWS social workers self-care practices that can help address issues of work related burnout. One theme emerged regarding this research question: individual based self-care practices such as taking time off and enjoying hobbies outside of work.

Throughout the survey responses it was evident that CWS social workers are impacted by the work they do with vulnerable children and their families. This often impacts social workers causing burnout which ultimately impacts the work they do with vulnerable clients. Furthermore, CWS social workers have some support from the agency to address consequences of burnout. However, some participants reported that services provided by the agency are ineffective, which is coupled with demanding workload, and this further contributes to the stress experienced by CWS social workers. CWS participants identified informal support as being more effective in addressing consequences of burnout. It is imperative that Child Welfare Agencies acknowledge the impacts of high work demands on CWS social workers causing

burnout and provide effective resources to assist CWS social workers to combat burnout so that they can better service the communities they serve.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived effectiveness of organizational supports offered to CWS social workers who are experiencing workplace burnout. Thirty-six participants completed an open-ended qualitative survey questionnaires related to three research questions. These were constructed to examine CWS social workers perceptions and opinions related to this topic. The survey questions involved exploration of CWS social workers perception of supports offered to them by Merced County Human Services Agency (HSA), their perceived effectiveness of these services, supports CWS social workers recommend the agency provide to better assist them to effectively deal with work burnout, and self-care practices of CWS social workers to help prevent them from experiencing work burnout. The resulting information was used to identify major themes and findings related to the research questions. This chapter represents a critical analysis of the results and discussion of their relevance to existing literature and child welfare organizations. Lastly, this chapter discusses the limitation of this study, implications for social work practice and policy, and provides recommendation for future research.

Major Findings as they Relate to the Literature

Organizational / Formal Support Provided to CWS social workers

The first guiding research question focused on existing organizational supports offered to CWS social worker to help them address work burnout. Two

themes emerged from this research question. The first theme that emerged was that CWS social workers identified and discussed formal support provided by the agency such as Employee Assistance Program (EAP), agency providing individual support, supervisor support, and lack of agency support provided to CWS social workers experiencing burnout. The second theme that emerged was that CWS social workers identified informal support provided by colleagues and family as an important support system.

The first finding was that CWS social workers identified and discussed the effectiveness of three existing formal supports available through the organization to assist workers in addressing workplace burnout, the sub-themes included the provision of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), individual agency support such as providing time off work or reduced caseloads, and supervisor support. Existing literature indicates that EAP is often viewed as a main formal supports provided to CWS social workers (Jacobson & Hosford-Lamb, 2008). Literature also supports the other finding where participants recognized individual-based agency support (Wade, Beckerman, & Stein, 1996). The issue for the participants in this study however was that they felt that workers could not take advantage of individual support due to high caseloads. Existing literature also recognizes, as did the participants in the study, that supportive supervision is a fundamental support for social workers given the challenging and stressful nature of their work (Schwartz, 2008).

Employee Assistance Program. Participants acknowledged employee assistance programs as a support system provided by the agency to workers

experiencing burnout. However, participants did not identify EAP as particularly effective. Participant responses indicate that EAP provided short-term services, often only five counseling sessions, which they indicated was not sufficient support for CWS social workers who are experiencing burnout. Participants felt that supports provided by EAP would be more effective if EAP counseling services were provided on a longer-term basis. The data also revealed that some participants were aware of the EAP program; however, they had never accessed the services. EAP programs were developed in response to the recognition of a correlation between work stress and work productivity (Schwartz, 2008). Employee assistance programs have been indicated to influence worker productivity by offering workers programs such as counseling to assist workers who may be experiencing personal or work related stress and burnout. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the programs provided by EAP to CWS social workers in CWS organizations to prevent or reduce work burnout is not well documented. It was also evident in this study that CWS social workers rarely access assistance through EAP programs. Therefore, further research or inquiry by the HSA would be beneficial to understand why EAP programs are not being accessed by CWS social workers.

Individual-based agency support. With respect to individual-based agency support such as time-off and lower caseloads, many participants identified that the agency tries to offer these types of supports to individual workers. However due to high caseloads and limited personnel, workers are unable to take advantage of these supports. This literature in the area indicates organizational culture that “normalizes”

the outcomes of working with trauma survivors can provide a supportive environment for social workers to help workers address negative outcomes of their job (Bell, Kulkarni, Dalton, 2003). A supportive organization is one that allows workers vacation time and creates opportunities for social workers to vary their caseloads and work activities, take time off for illness, participate in continuing education, and make time for self-care activities (Bell, Kulkarni, Dalton, 2003).

It has also been found that organizations that provide diverse caseloads to social workers are associated with decreased experiences of vicarious trauma (Chrestman, 1995). The diversity in caseload allows social workers to keep the traumatic material in perspective and help prevent the formation of disturbing worldviews (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Research indicates that having a diverse caseload can help decrease work stress and vicarious trauma among social workers (Chrestman, 1995). Agencies can develop intake procedures that attempt to distribute clients among staff in a way that pays attention to the risks of vicarious trauma that certain clients might present to workers. Trauma cases should be distributed among social workers who possess the necessary skills to work with specific client trauma; this can help decrease work stress (Dutton & Rubinstein, 1995; Regehr & Cadell, 1999; Wade et al., 1996). The participants that identified individual-based agency support also identified these support as ineffective or often unavailable due to high caseloads and limited personnel. The result often was that the participants were not able to take time-off from work or have reduced caseloads. It would be beneficial for

HSA to further explore how they may more consistently offer individual-based services that are achievable for CWS social workers.

Supervisor Support. Consistent with the literature, the most widely accessed formal support to prevent or reduce workplace burnout that participants of this study identified was supervision. Participants in the study clearly identified supervisor support as an effective support system for CWS social workers. Literature identifies supervision as a core response to the demanding and stressful nature of the work (Schwartz, 2008). Effective supervision is achieved when supervisors are able to engage in role-specific communication with their staff (Hansung, 2008). Role-specific communication involves performance reviews, discussing assignments, work scheduling, information about policies, and task instructions (Miles, Patrick, & King, 1996). According to Gibelman (2003), supervision can help reduce work-related stress by helping social workers with processing their reactions to client situations, setting limits, and keeping realistic expectations. The purpose of supervision is to facilitate optimal services for clients both qualitatively and quantitatively, in this way, supervisors demonstrate that they care for the wellbeing of workers and clients (Shulman, 1995).

Social workers who stay in their jobs convey the support received from supervisors, while those who are not retrained by the agency usually specify lack of support from supervisors as one of the causes for departure (Children's Service Practice Notes, 2015). In addition to serving workers emotional support, supervisors can also teach workers about vicarious trauma in a way that is supportive, sensitive,

and respectful to its effects (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Regehr & Cadell, 1999; Rosenbloom, D., Pratt, A., & Pearlman, 1995; Urquiza, A. J., Wyatt, G. E., & Goodlin-Jones, B. L., 1997). As reported by Chenot, Benot, & Kim, (2009) supervisor support is a greater predictor of retention rates among social workers who are in their early and middle stages of their careers. Similarly, a survey among 119 social workers disclosed that supervisor support was the only support that was predictive of job satisfaction among social workers (Acquavita et al., 2009).

There continues to be discrepancies in the literature about factors that contribute to retention rates among social workers. Nonetheless, supervision in social work programs that emphasizes on intervention skills has been identified as a factor to reduce work burnout (Joubert, Hocking, & Hampson, 2013). Supervision is an essential part of social work practice as it offers social workers supportive opportunities to reflect, learn, and develop in order to provide the best services for clients (Joubert et al., 2013). An exploratory study of 16 oncology social workers, found that the most valued constituents of supervision is the supervisor linking professional practice to frameworks while delivering support and guidance (Joubert et al., 2013). The participant responses in this study indicate that participants found trust and emotional support as being central to supervisory support. Participants mentioned the relationship with their supervisors impacted their ability to work through stressors instigated by work. Given the findings that supervision is heavily identified by study participants, as a key strategy or support for combating workplace burnout, HSA may want to consider continuing to focus on, develop and support HSA supervisors to

provide action oriented support to address workplace burnout in CWS social workers. This strategy proves to be key in providing employees with ongoing and accessible support and promotes workers to seek assistance, rather than struggle to deal with work burnout on their own.

Lack of agency support and recognition for workers experiencing burnout. The third finding was that the participants felt that HSA was not overtly supportive to CWS social worker experiencing work burnout. Participants felt that unless the consequences were substantial, CWS social workers did not receive any assistance from the agency. This finding is consistent with Handran (2013) who found professionals who deliver services to trauma survivors need to be supported and feel safe in their agency. Organizations have an obligation to promote and stimulate a culture that cultivates safety and support. If organizations fail to deliver safety and services to CWS social workers, they risk their agency becoming collectively burned-out. Organizations that experience stressors become collectively traumatized, staff exhibit high levels of burnout, low levels of compassion satisfaction, and experience secondary trauma, (Handran, 2013). A study conducted on occupational stress among professionals within a social service agency found that workers reported higher levels of stress as a result of organizational structure and climate, predominantly relating to the problems of working in low work morale (Bradley & Sutherland, 1995). Recent research on personal factors related to job satisfaction suggests that role conflict (Um & Harrison, 1998) and the perception of a non-supportive organizational climate (Zlotnik et al., 2005) are associated with lower

levels of job satisfaction. Likewise, a review of job satisfaction research in child welfare found a positive relationship to job characteristics like: support, promotion opportunities, compensation, and low role conflict (Dickinson and Perry, 2002). According to Hamama (2012) supportive work environment can help decrease and prevent burnout. Prior studies have found that social workers receiving higher amounts of social support from organization experience greater job satisfaction (Acquavita, 2009). Social work professionals working with adults and children reported that social support from the organization to be one of the most important factors in decreasing burnout experienced by workers (Hamama, 2012).

In addition, access to resources such as materials, knowledge, time, skills, and funds is important for social workers to assist them in providing effective services to their clients (Choi, 2011). When social workers have better access to strategic information, they are more proficient in contributing to their agencies goals and advocating for their clients (Choi, 2011). One type of resource access is training opportunities that are provided to social workers (Choi, 2011). A study completed by Trute (2010) of 36 family centered social worker found that these social worker participants unanimously identified access to training as an organizational factor that allowed them to do their jobs. Not having enough training opportunities influenced stress, which is a factor that often leads to burnout among social workers (Harr, 2013).

O'Donnell & Kirkner (2009) reported that having access to adequate working conditions, flexibility with assignments, and access to vacation time is associated to

higher job retention for social workers. Literature supports that organizations have an accountability to intervene, and there are literatures with suggested methods; however there is a need for more research about the efficacy of these methods (Hamama, 2012). If HSA does not encourage CWS social workers to seek assistance regarding burnout and provide adequate and accessible support and resources to workers; then the organization risks experiencing the consequences of burnout and becoming a trauma-organized agency.

Identified informal supports and their effectiveness.

A second major theme in the study was that most participants preferred certain informal supports to address workplace burnout over formalized supports. The most commonly experienced and beneficial informal assistance expressed by participants was peer collegial support. Bahraini (2008) found that peer support offers workers with social, emotional, and professional support to help prevent or reduce compassion fatigue. This type of social support in the workplace is developed through support of colleagues, supervisors, and administration (Hamama, 2012).

The participants of this study shared that communicating with colleagues was helpful in reducing stress from work because colleagues share similar experiences. Informal support is defined as social workers conversing about complex work experiences with their co-workers in a relaxed manner (Joubert et al., 2013). Hamama (2012) explains that supportive work environment functions provide listening, attention, emotional support, professional encouragement, mental challenge, professional challenge, and shared worldview. Informal support has been found to be

a significant structure to decrease symptoms of vicarious trauma (Joubert, Hocking, and Hampson, 2013; Choi, 2011). Also, the personal connections that social workers experience towards others were found to be protective and predictive factor of the development of vicarious trauma (Choi, 2011). Vicarious trauma also referred to as secondary traumatic stress (STS) or compassion fatigue, is the experience of individuals, generally professionals, who are exposed to other people's traumatic experiences and, as a result, develop their own psychological consequences (Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress, 2012).

Social support from co-workers is identified as a significant social condition to lower levels of perceived burnout (Janseen, 1999). It is confirmed that colleague support has significant impact on negative feelings workers may have towards their work (Baker, Israel, & Schurman, 1996). Support from colleagues has also been demonstrated to be significantly related to how individuals connect and associate to the organization (Alexander, Lichtenstien, & Ullman, 1998; Jinnett & Alexander, 1999). Correspondingly, Landstrom, Biordi, & Gillies (1989) found that a lack of colleague support encourages turnover intention among workers.

Additional Supports CWS Social Workers Feel Should Be Offered

The second guiding research question relates to additional supports CWS social workers felt HSA could provide to assist social workers to effectively address work burnout. Three findings emerged around this research question. First participants felt the agency needs to hire more workers to lower CWS caseloads; this may assist in supporting the formal support the agency can provide as outlined above

around providing more self-care time for workers through time off, training opportunities, or reduced and varied workloads. The second finding that emerged was that participants felt that the agency needed to provide different counseling services that are long-term and promote self-care to CWS workers to help them cope with their experiences of workplace burnout. The last finding that emerged was that participants felt HSA could promote an agency wide culture of caring.

HSA to reduce caseloads by hiring more staff. The first finding that emerged was participant recommendations that the agency reduce worker caseloads by hiring more staff. The 2004 survey of public child welfare administrators found that high caseloads and workloads are among the top reasons for preventable turnover (American Public Human Services Association, 2005). Highly demanding workload is also associated with employee burnout (Koeske & Koeske, 1989). According to NASW (2004), burnout is caused by excessive work demands that can result in mental confusion and psychosocial distress. Child welfare workers identify high caseloads as a factor that reduces the appeal of child welfare work, making it difficult for workers to stay in their current positions and encourages workers to leave their work for other careers (Government Accountability Office, 2003).

High turnover among child welfare social workers in CWS agencies is a continuing problem (Center for Workforce Studies, NASW, 2006). Social work staff shortages in CWS agencies causes remaining social workers to take on heavier caseloads, adding more stress to workers who are struggling to meet their current work demands. High turnover affects the workload of remaining workers, resulting in

remaining workers experiencing work burnout which leads to additional staff turnover (Social Work Policy Institute, 2010). The current number of social workers across the nation does not meet the demands of CWS organization serving vulnerable clients (Center for Workforce Studies, NASW, 2006). Child welfare organizations with low median caseloads for CWS social workers experience lower turnover rates compared to CWS organizations with high caseloads that in turn experience high turnover (Lawson et al., 2005). The standard caseload per social worker set by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) is approximately 12 to 15 children per caseload; however, according to a survey conducted by American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) reported that an average CWS social worker caseload is 24 children.

High caseload is identified as one of the factors that hinder implementation of services to clients (Trute, 2010). Burnout and turnover among CWS social workers occur in a cycle in CWS organizations. CWS social work staff shortage leads to greater caseloads sizes for remaining social workers, who in turn experience burnout and eventually leave their work. The HSA should ensure that CWS social workers are not overworked with high amount of caseloads and are given appropriate amount of cases as set by CWLA.

On-site counseling and self-care opportunities. CWS social workers also identified on-site support for CWS social workers to help workers address issues of work burnout as an area where they feel they would like to see further support from HSA. On-site support that was suggested by participants included counseling services

that are longer-term and the promotion self-care to CWS social workers. This recommendation is consistent with Saakvitne & Pearlman (1996), who found that organizational problems can occur if the system fails to work with staff to identify and address signs of vicarious trauma and do not support personal psychotherapy. The participants of the study indicated that more on-site long-term counseling services are needed compared to current EAP counseling services that are short-term usually consisting of only five sessions, and promotion of self-care are needed for CWS social workers. Participants' recommendations are supported by the literature. Participants of this study discussed the need for accessible services that can be available immediately for CWS social workers who experience work related stress. According to Bloom (2006) organizations affected by traumatization experience similar symptoms to individuals working within that organizations that have experienced trauma from work. When organizations and individuals become traumatized from the work they do, the services delivered to their community are destined to suffer as well (Handran, 2013). Counseling resources is a form of self-care that can be promoted by CWS organizations, agencies can make accessible counseling resources available for all staff members that interact with traumatic material at work (Regehr & Cadell, 1999; Wade, Beckerman, & Stein, 1996). Agencies may also consider the feasibility of forming peer support groups that CWS social workers can take advantage of and access when needed. It will also be beneficial for agencies to provide health insurance that covers mental health services (Rosenbloom, Pratt, & Pearlman, 1995). This will allow workers to seek mental

health services independently. In addition to providing on-site counseling services, organizations can promote self-care by providing opportunities for structured stress management and physical activities.

Organizations with limited resources can consider exchanging training on areas of expertise with other agencies that may have expertise in stress management. Organizing activities like walking and meditation group during lunch hours or after work can also contribute to the wellness of CWS social workers. Training opportunities is also identified as a self-care resource for social workers (Choi, 2011). In a study completed by Trute (2010), social workers associated access to training as an organization factor that assisted them in doing their job. In another study conducted by Harr (2013), not having access to training opportunities influences stress which leads to workers experiencing burnout. Inadequate resources provided by the agency impacts social workers feelings of empowerment and support (Harr, 2013). It is evident that organizational components play a role in the occurrence and reduction of work burnout experienced by social workers. CWS organizations should also explore new methods to help provide more accessible on-site support for CWS social workers so that workers can feel safe and supported allowing them to seek assistance for work burnout and allowing workers to continue to successfully work with children and families.

Culture of caring. The third finding that CWS social workers identified in response to supports they felt would be beneficial to combat workplace burnout was promotion of an agency wide culture of caring and support. This was best described

as encompassing all levels of the organization engaging in a supportive environment to address issues that contribute to workplace burnout. This participant recommendation is congruent with literature that indicates, supportive organizational culture that encourages social workers to share their experiences and reactions to client trauma is identified as a protective factor for social workers developing vicarious trauma (Cox & Steiner, 2013). An organization culture that normalizes the effects of working with trauma can assist in providing a supportive environment for social workers to address those effects in their own work and allows social workers an opportunity to practice self-care (Bell, Kulkarni, & Dalton, 2003). A supportive organization not only allows for vacation time, but administrators help create opportunities for social workers to vary their caseloads and work activities, take time off for illness, participate in continuing education, and practice self-care activities (Bell, Kulkarni, & Dalton, 2003). A culture of caring requires administrators to monitor staff vacation time and encourages staff with too much accrued time to take time-off. Administrators will also bring self-care issues to surface and address self-care issues in staff meetings and provide opportunities for continuing education (Bell, Kulkarni, & Dalton, 2003).

Participants of this study indicated that CWS social workers would like to see more compassion and empathy from administrators. This finding is congruent with Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995, p. 170) explain that organizations must maintain an “attitude of respect” to help create a culture of caring for social workers. This type of attitude is beneficial for clients and workers because it acknowledges that work with

trauma survivors often involves multiple long-term services (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995, p. 170). Organization administrators that are proactive in linking clients with adjunct services will not only support clients but also decrease the workload of social workers (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Administrators in agencies must develop a culture where individual workers can be open about their experiences of professional burnout and vicarious trauma (Choi, 2011). In some organizations, social workers are often expected to hide their emotions consistently (Newell & MacNeil, 2010).

In addition, Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) have suggested that workers need personally meaningful items in their workplace. These can include pictures of their family, places they have traveled to, landscapes of nature, and quotes that help them remember who they are and why they do this type of work. Agency administrators can display a sense of caring by encouraging social workers to make these small investments in their work environment. Administrators can encourage self-care in workers by placing inspiring posters in waiting rooms, staff meeting rooms, hallways, and breakroom instead of placing posters of agency rules and regulations. This can also help the organization model the importance of personal in professional (Howard, 2015). Administrators can also invest in providing space such as breakroom where workers can rest at the job site (Yassen, 1995) and provide coffee maker, soft music, and comfortable furniture that workers can enjoy (Howard, 2015).

Top-managerial personnel such as administration are an important source of support for social workers. Administration can show consideration for workers through supportive interactions and displaying concern for subordinates' needs, such

as permitting subordinates more participation in decision making and encouraging communication (Oaklander & Fleishman, 1964). Other empirical research studies have presented that top-managers' support is associated with positive job attitudes such as job satisfaction among workers (Butler & Cantrell, 1997; House & Baetz, 1979) and organizational commitment (Avolio et al., 2004), and retention (Taunton et al., 1997). The HSA administrators may want to examine their workplace and the components that may be increasing workers development of burnout. Additionally the HSA should become aware of burnout factors and implement organizational components that can help promote an organizational culture that is conducive to the prevention and reduction of work burnout. In child welfare agencies, which conventionally operate with inadequate resources and persistent service demands, such dedication from organization administrators, irrespective of how small, are not inconsequential.

CWS Social Worker Self-Care Practices

The third guiding research question related to what type of self-care CWS social workers practice to help prevent them from experiencing work burnout. What emerged from this question was that CWS social workers identified individual based self-care such as time off from work, attending church, outdoor activities, and support from family and friend support as an important factor to their self-care practice.

Participants identified individual based self-care practices that best fit their needs as an important factor in reducing work related stress. Most participants shared that upon recognizing signs of stress, they focus on coping with their stressors. This

finding is consistent Cox and Steiner (2013) who defined self-care as premeditated choices that professionals make to respond mentally, emotionally, and physically to stress; they also take measures in their personal life to improve physical and mental health well-being. Self-care has a significant outcome on social workers; workers are less capable of providing care to clients if they have not first met their own personal self-care needs (Collins, 2005). Furthermore, it is a social work ethical responsibility to ensure that they are capable of providing care for clients by caring for themselves first (Collins, 2005). As Collins notes “we demand that clients take charge of their lives by addressing disruptive and troublesome practices. So, too, shall we demand it of ourselves” (p. 272). According to Hamana (2012), the nature of the social work profession is mentally and emotionally demanding, frequently leaving personal self-care needs unmet.

The concept of self-care is popular within the field of social work but there are no specific meanings within social work research (Cox & Steiner, 2013). Self-care has been known to be “an ethical imperative for professional helpers” (p. 52). Some activities associated with self-care are exercising, eating healthy, taking breaks at work, and engaging in recreational activities. These activities mirror the activities identified by the participants of this study as their self-care practices. Self-care is essential for social work professional to assist them in counteracting the symptoms of work stress and vicarious trauma. Social workers who utilize coping self-care strategies inside and outside of work setting are better capable of maintaining their challenging work.

Literature proposes that pursuing self-care techniques is beneficial to social work professionals (Collins, 2005; Newsome et al., 2006; and Williams et al., 2010). Self-care can be a spiritual act that necessitates social workers to become self-aware of their personal stress level (Collins, 2005). Social workers experiences' with work burnout to the need of self-care illustrates how self-care can be a technique to combat the experience of work burnout (Pooler, 2011). McGarrigle (2011) also supports the effectiveness of self-care in decreasing work related stress experienced by social workers.

Conclusion

This study resulted in several significant findings in regards to the relationship between Merced County Human Services Agency (HSA) and workplace burnout among CWS social workers. First it is evident that participants experience work stressors which if left unaddressed may lead to workplace burnout, turnover, and resulting negative impacts to services for children and families. Participants discussed several formal support available to them such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), individual-based agency supports, and supervisor support. The findings determine that CWS social workers do not perceive formal supports such as the EAP program and individual based support to be very effective. Participants shared that services provided by the EAP program to be too brief and recommended longer-term services. Participants also shared that EAP counseling services are not readily available. Participants revealed that individual-based agency support such as being provided time off work and decreased caseloads are not effective because workers are

unable to take advantage of these services due to high caseloads and limited social work personnel. However, participants did perceive formal supervisor support as effective in terms of helping workers address work related stress and burnout.

Participants expressed that peers and supervisors have created a culture that underpins CWS workers to seek support when experiencing work stressors. Informal support (peer and family support) was more commonly accessed by CWS social workers. It seems possible that participants are reluctant to access some formal supports such as the EAP program because workers do not view them as being effective and do not feel that administration is empathetic or supportive towards workers experiencing workplace burnout.

It is possible that CWS social workers may even blame themselves for the symptoms they experience which may further contribute to the failure of administration to reach out to workers and offer agency formal supports when workers are at risk of experiencing workplace burnout. Given this, it is essential that the HSA promotes a culture of caring that is preemptive in acknowledging the impacts of workplace burnout so that it creates an environment where CWS social workers feel encouraged to seek assistance they need to address burnout. Lastly, CWS participants made several recommendations to the agency as to what supports and resources they felt could be offered by HSA to help effectively address workplace burnout. The recommendations included reducing high caseloads, hiring more staff, providing on-site and accessible counseling support, and promoting an organizational culture of caring. These recommendations are consistent with burnout

informed organization approaches found in the literature which illustrate the need to lower high demanding caseloads carried by individual CWS social workers, hiring more staff to help assist with high work demands, and providing accessible support to CWS social workers to process and cope with work stressors that may lead to burnout. An organizational culture that promotes caring may better encourage CWS social workers experiencing burnout to seek assistance and adopt new positive coping methods to help manage work related stress. If CWS social workers feel supported by organizational administration they are more likely to seek assistance for work burnout.

Resources and support from administration, supervisors, and colleagues can counterbalance the stress related to demanding workload. These findings and implications are important for CWS agencies to work towards implementing workplace burnout informed practices that emphasis developing effective organizational supports to detect and address the effects of workplace burnout. Additionally, social workers whose primary duty is to deliver direct services to traumatized people may benefit from opportunities to participate in social change activities (Regehr & Cadell, 1999). CWS organizations that do not provide such services might consider providing community education and outreach to influence policy. These activities can offer a sense of empowerment that can be invigorating and may neutralize the negative effects of trauma work.

The findings of this research study were both consistent with and contributed to existing literature. The main findings that were consistent with previous studies in

the literature are the importance of supervisor and colleague support in decreasing social workers experiences with professional burnout. An additional similar finding in this study and previous studies was the impact of high caseloads and limited social worker personnel has on CWS social workers experiences with burnout. One finding in this study that was not as prevalent in prior studies was CWS social workers view on formal support as EAP and individual-based agency support as ineffective in addressing burnout.

Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy

This study has important implications for social work practice as it relates to CWS social workers and the support and resources they receive in response to workplace burnout. The research regarding social work burnout in CWS agencies has been studied and literature provides evidence that CWS social workers are likely to experience burnout due to the stressful nature of the profession. However, research around the topic of organizational factors and the effectiveness of resources provided by agencies has only begun to be explored. Social service organizations need to provide effective supports and resources to assist workers in addressing burnout. CWS social workers identify some current support and resources as ineffective in assisting to address work burnout. If HSA organizations fail to properly address social work burnout, then they are at risk of becoming a trauma-organized system. This can result in devastating organizational struggles such as high turnover rates, professional misconduct, and high absenteeism.

In order to prevent these outcomes, CWS organizations need to be proactive in ensuring that they are offering effective formal supports through EAP and on-site supports provided to CWS social workers. An organization that is promoting a culture of caring that emanates from the top of the organizational structure down can help promote recognition of the symptoms of burnout, the engagement of peer support, self-care, and other individual coping techniques to address social work burnout. It is fundamental that organizations are prepared to offer effective services and resources to CWS social workers to assist them in coping with and addressing the stress they experience in order to ensure the wellbeing of their workers, and positive outcomes for the children, families, and communities they serve.

The findings suggest that there is a need for child welfare agencies to provide more easily accessible and effective formal supports for CWS social workers experiencing burnout. The findings suggest several intervention strategies that can be utilized by the organization, administrators, and policy makers. The research indicates the need for CWS organizations, administrations, and policy makers to develop creative ways of managing high caseload pressure, emotional exhaustion, and frustration on the job. During the recent economic downturn around 2007 and 2010, the child welfare caseload in California grew 27% compared to only 13% in the rest of the nation (Danielson, 2012; Social Work Policy Institute, 2010). This data underlines the need to advocate for policy change and legislative actions that can establish a more manageable caseload for child welfare workers.

One suggestion for the CWS organizations is to regulate current policies to focus on expanding opportunities for support for CWS social workers. Policies can emphasize offering workers an increased sense of autonomy and control over their work (Hamama, 2012). Agencies may also provide longer-term, accessible and supportive counseling services to CWS social workers through Employee Assistance Programs, because participants indicated that current counseling services through EAP do not provide ongoing support as they are session-limited. Agencies may also consider strategies such as offering incentives to utilize yoga, massage sessions, and offer additional time off from work to process work related stress (Joubert et al., 2013).

An additional suggestion for CWS organizations is to provide on-site support such as accessible onsite counseling services and promotion of self-care. The promotion of counseling services and self-care may allow agencies to concentrate on trainings of vicarious trauma and administer instruments that measure the risk of burnout (Newell & MacNeil, 2010). Another suggestion is for CWS organization administrators to show compassion towards CWS social workers by developing a culture of care where individuals can feel open about sharing their experiences of burnout with others (Choi, 2011).

Given that the findings in the study strongly support the importance of clinical supervision, CWS agencies may consider adapting policies that emphasize and promote regular clinical supervision in addition to administrative supervision. This policy would encourage workers to be part of decision-making opportunities that

directly impacts their work. In addition, CWS organizations may consider limiting the number of clients a social worker can carry on their caseload.

The findings of this study revealed that a supportive work environment is extremely important in preventing burnout. The participants of this study identified supervisor support and colleague support as the most commonly accessed resources when feeling stressed from work. To counter the threat of burnout and turnover, CWS organizations may construct and implement proactive intervention strategies suggested by the participants of this study such as, team building skills, peer support groups, accessible counseling services, short breaks for relaxation, and flexibility in schedules. The Conservation of Resources theory (COR) has a theoretical guide in maximizing resource gain for workers (Vinokur-Kaplan, 2009, p. 228). COR proposes that management may consider employees actual and perceived resources when assigning tasks. If workers tasks can be completed based on the perceived types of resources available to them, it may reduce work burnout. An implication for practice is the need for social workers to have adequate support from their organization, social workers require support from their organization to be able to continue to be effective practitioners' to the community they serve. These findings and their implication will contribute to the increasing body of literature that highlights the importance of effectively addressing burnout among child welfare workers. Workplace burnout substantially affects the profession of social work and it is important for CWS organizations to adequately respond to burnout and support CWS social workers.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study was the lack of demographic information. Specifically, information on gender, level of education, social work classification, years of experience in the field, and other personal background demographic information were not collected. With this information, qualitative methods could have been further used to look at whether or not; demographic variables are associated with particular social worker experiences of burnout, or the types of coping methods and supports utilized by CWS social workers, as it was found in the literature that certain demographical factors may contribute to the development of burnout or deter the development of burnout. This study provides insight into the organizational supports, and their effectiveness to address work burnout, offered to the participants in the Merced County HSA. However, it is important to note that it cannot necessarily be generalized to all CWS agencies and social workers. Finally, some self-selection bias might have also been a factor, since CWS social workers who felt affected by their work might be more likely to respond to the work burnout questionnaire, as they perceived this study to be relevant to them.

Recommendation for Future Research

The literature has identified the profession of social work as being at high risk for stress and workplace burnout. Previous studies conducted reveal that social workers are experiencing burnout but the depiction is unclear which organizational supports offered to them effectively address professional burnout. The existing literature and findings from this study demonstrate areas for further social work

research on organizational support for CWS social worker to address burnout. The inclusion of demographic variables and their relationship to the incidence and experience of burnout may deepen understanding of various variables that appear to affect burnout. Future research may also involve using in-depth qualitative interviews to deepen the understanding of variables that impact burnout. This type of follow up research approach would give participants the opportunity to provide more context and insight into the responses attained from this research study. Another possible direction for research is to further study how CWS organizations can develop more effective structures to promote social workers access to formal supports and increase their perceived autonomy in ways that can reduce stress and burnout.

Another possible direction for future research may be to include participants from a broader scope of social work including mental health, schools, hospital, and foster care agencies settings. This research focused solely on CWS social workers working in CWS organization, which could explain some of the findings. A research study with a broader range of social workers may offer a unique perspective, deeper understanding, and possible comparative of the experiences of different types of social workers and professional work burnout. It would be beneficial to incorporate social workers from a wide range of agencies in order to compare the different types of support and resources other organizations may provide to workers who experience burnout.

Further research may also be warranted to explore the extensive assortment of potential stressors that result in burnout in social workers and the development of

effective strategies to alleviate such stressors. Additional research efforts can result in the development of more effective strategies created to decrease and prevent workplace burnout. Increased knowledge in this area can influence the job satisfaction of social workers. Insight on how social workers understand and experience burnout and supports provided by the agency and can aid in the development of more effective resources and interventions to increase retention rates.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
ORGANIZATIONAL BURNOUT QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY MONKEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey Questions

1. How do you think Merced County HSA supports workers who experience physical and or emotional consequences due to the nature of their job?
2. How would you describe the effectiveness of these supports and resources?
3. What kind of self-care do you use to address your issues with physical and or emotional consequences due to the nature of your job?
4. Are there other supports or resources you believe may also be effective, or be more effective, in addressing or preventing issues?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

I, Shah Jan Laila Etimadi, a graduate student in the Master of Social Work program at California State University, Stanislaus am conducting a research study as part of my Master's thesis requirement on Child Welfare Service (CWS) social workers' experiences and organizational support of burnout. The study explores the impact of burnout on CWS social workers and the support they receive to effectively deal with the impacts of burnout from the Human Services Agency (HSA). I hope that the findings of this research leads to a better understanding of the support and resources that are required to effectively assist CWS social workers in dealing with burnout and turnover.

As a CWS social worker, you are being invited to participate in this research study because we feel that your experiences as a social worker can contribute much to our understanding and knowledge of the organizational support and resources provided to CWS social workers experiencing burnout. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be required to complete an online open-ended questionnaire that explores your experiences with burnout and the types of support, if any, you received from HSA. To participate in this study, you will not be required to provide any identifying information, which will ensure your anonymity.

The online questionnaire will take approximately thirty to forty-five minutes to complete. Once the questionnaire is completed, the results will be available to me through SurveyMonkey. Following the completion of the study, all the online questionnaire results will be permanently deleted from SurveyMonkey and results will be published in aggregate, individual identifying information will not be reported. All information collected will be protected from inappropriate disclosure under the law.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You can choose not to answer certain questions. The choice you make will have no bearing on your job or on any work-related evaluation or reports. You may change your mind and stop participating in this research even if you agreed earlier without any penalties. While there are no direct benefits to you, but your participation is likely to benefit the social work profession from the general data obtained through your participation as it might develop a better understanding of CWS social work encounters with agency support and resources to help them deal with burnout, and possibly lead to the development of more effective agency resources and support to help address burnout among CWS social workers.

By completing the online questionnaire and submitting it implies you have consented to participate in the study. If you have any questions about this research study please contact the researcher, Shah Jan Etimadi by phone at (209) 914-9-688 or by email at setimadi@csustan.edu; or contact my faculty sponsor, Dr. Jane Rousseau by phone at (209) 667-3015 or by email at jrousseau@csustan.edu. The study proposal has been reviewed and approved by University Institutional Review Board (UIRB), which is a committee whose task is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm; if you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact the Campus Compliance Officer by phone at (209) 667-3794 or email IRBAdmin@csustan.edu. In the case that you experience any distress after completing the online questionnaire please call the Merced County Mental Health Crisis Stabilization Unit Warm-Line at (209) 381- 6819.

Thank you for your participation.

Shah Jan Laila Etimadi

Master of Social Work Student

Date: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX C

UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Stanislaus State
Institutional Review Board
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Turlock, CA 95382

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Joyce Bell
UIRB Administrator

December 1, 2015

ShahJan Etimadi
One University Circle
Turlock, CA 95382

Re: Protocol #1516-065

Dear ShahJan,

Congratulations. Your research has been approved via Expedited review and can be conducted as detailed in your research protocol, **“Social Work Burnout,”**

This designation is for one year and will expire on November 30, 2016. If you have any questions regarding this designation, please contact the IRB Administrator at (209) 667-3493.

Please Note:

Human subjects research liability protection from the university only covers IRB-approved research by faculty, students, and employees of CSU Stanislaus. If your employment or student status changes during the year or if you make changes to your methods, subject selection, or instrumentation, please discontinue your research and notify the IRB to obtain the appropriate clearances.

If any research participant experiences a serious adverse or unexpected event during or following participation, please notify the IRB Administrator immediately.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan M. Neufeld".

Susan M. Neufeld, Ed.D., Chair

cc: Jane Rousseau