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Burnout Among Child Protective Services Social Workers in Georgia

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Lakeita Arrington-Judkins

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Burnout Among Child Protective Services Social Workers in Georgia

by

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MSW, University of Southern California, 2014

BSW, Auburn University, 2011

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Social Work

Walden University

February 2021

Abstract

CPS (child protective services) social workers are critical to the social service community. Due to the responsibilities of this role, CPS social workers encounter multiple stressors and high demands in the workplace. Burnout is prominent in the social service profession, specifically among CPS social workers. This qualitative action research study was conducted to explore CPS social workers' experiences of burnout and organizational issues related to those burnout experiences. Maslach's multidimensional theory on burnout was the theoretical framework. Data collection involved individual interviews facilitated online. The sample consisted of 8 experienced CPS social workers from the Georgia Department of Human Services. Using thematic analysis, 4 themes were identified: (a) lack of positive social interaction, (b) physical and mental exhaustion from field work, (c) impact of stress on work demands, and (d) lack of incentives on the job. The findings from this study can be used by CPS social workers and other professionals in the social service field to understand the organizational factors related to burnout. This understanding could prompt positive social change through leadership and policy adjustments designed to support the needs of CPS social workers related to burnout.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research study to my father, the late Ernest Arrington Jr. Although he did not live to see me receive any collegiate and postgraduate accomplishments, I will always remember his voice telling me to strive to do my best and I can accomplish whatever I put my mind to. A special thanks to my mother, Geneva Arrington, for all her prayers and encouragement throughout this journey. I also dedicate this to my lovely husband, Patrick, and my daughter Sydney.

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I would like to thank my husband for his continuous support. His motivation and encouragement assisted me through this process. The late-night conversations helped me to refocus on my goal. Thank you for propelling me to achieve my goal.

To my dear children, always remember you can achieve whatever you set your mind to achieve. Always set your goals high and know that it is okay if you fail to reach some levels towards your goal. Just remember never give up. Remember if you can dream it, then you can achieve it.

To my mother and grandmother, thank you for the reminders of the things you did not have the opportunity to achieve. Thank you for supporting and loving me unconditionally. Without your prayers, I would not have come this far. Thank you!

To my dear sisters, remember you can achieve your wildest dreams. Life can be a maze, but with patience and persistence, you will find yourself at the end of the tunnel. Keep achieving your goals and put your best in everything you do.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study and Literature Review

Introduction

Burnout among professionals is a rising concern (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017), and burnout among child protective service (CPS) social workers has steadily risen in recent years (Kimes, 2016). The Georgia Welfare Council reports a constant rise every year in turnover rates of CPS social workers due to burnout (State of Georgia, 2015). Social worker burnout can create a significant spiral effect on an individual if the workplace has been identified as high stress (Kimes, 2016). *Burnout* refers to when an individual is overstretched and no longer satisfied at the current place of employment (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017).

The methodology used for this project was action research. Individual interviews of CPS social workers were conducted for this study. With this study, I aimed to perform an in-depth analysis of burnout experienced by CPS social workers in a large urban area in the state of Georgia. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore social work burnout and organizational issues related to burnout among CPS social workers. The findings of this study have the potential for social change implications as a result of CPS social workers addressing social work burnout and organizational factors that could assist with reducing burnout.

Burnout can negatively impact CPS social workers and can negatively affect the community. Understanding ways to address CPS social worker burnout may decrease burnout symptoms, decrease turnover rates, increase workplace morale, and improve CPS

social workers' overall health. Thus, it is essential to ascertain how the CPS department is addressing burnout with social workers.

This action research project is subdivided into several sections. In the first section of this project, the identified problem, the purpose of this study, and the research questions are reviewed. This section is followed with a discussion of the nature of the doctoral project and the significance of the study as it relates to social work practice. The key theoretical framework that supports the study is also reviewed and followed by an exploration of associated values and ethics, a professional and academic literature review, and a summary. Section 2 provides a review of the selected methodology, data analysis, ethical procedures, and a summary.

Problem Statement

Burnout is a common issue among social workers who work in the field of CPS (McFadden, Campbell, & Taylor, 2014). In a large urban city in Georgia, there is a lack of understanding of the social work organizational factors that contribute to burnout of local CPS social workers. However, despite the common issue of burnout and the lack of understanding, there has not been any research completed addressing burnout among CPS social workers in this area. The social work practice problem addressed in this research project is the understanding of the influence of organizational factors that contribute to burnout of CPS social workers in a large urban city in Georgia.

Social work burnout has increased over the years (McFadden et al., 2014). As a result, the turnover rate has nearly doubled among those working in the social work profession (Wagaman, Geiger, Shockley, & Segal, 2015). The work environment is a key

contributing factor that has played a significant role in burnout (Cho & Song, 2017). The increased demand of CPS services has created tremendous burnout among CPS social workers (Woodhead, Northrop, & Edelstein, 2016). Researchers have also found that social worker burnout may be associated with high caseloads, which creates a stressful environment (Cho & Song, 2017).

Increased social worker burnout rates have caused an increase in job turnover rates (Kimes, 2016). This can be seen in the job retention rates for different departments in the State of Georgia. Annually, the State of Georgia Department of Human Services sets various target goals involving employee retention. While the department had an employee retention goal of 20.68% for the 2018 fiscal year, the department ended the fiscal year with only 13.50% retention (State of Georgia, 2018). Low retention rates can be detrimental to social work practice because of higher demand on existing workers, which can create social worker burnout (Kimes, 2016).

The local CPS offices in this large urban city have experienced difficulties filling social work positions due to the constant turnover rate (State of Georgia, 2015). This difficulty has occurred despite state efforts to recruit licensed social workers to fill the positions. During the 2013 fiscal year, the State of Georgia created a stipend as an incentive to recruit social workers to CPS positions. Despite implementing this stipend, the State of Georgia continues to have difficulty filling these social work positions. Corresponding data show there were 126,364 reports of child abuse and neglect cases investigated in the state of Georgia in 2018 (State of Georgia Department of Human

Services, 2018). The State of Georgia Department of Human Services (2018) also reported that every social worker is assigned an average of 18 cases to manage.

Through research into the experiences of CPS social workers in Georgia as they relate to burnout and organization factors, this study has the potential to increase awareness of the issues surrounding social worker burnout of local CPS workers. The results of this study may also provide CPS social workers with increased knowledge of how to manage stressful work environments amid limited workers and resources.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this action research project was to explore burnout among CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia and the organizational factors surrounding their experiences of burnout. The following research questions were used to guide this exploration:

RQ1: What are the experiences of CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia related to burnout?

RQ1a: What role does the organization play in the experience of burnout?

RQ2: What strategies do CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia use to address burnout?

RQ2a: What role does the organization play in the strategies used to address burnout?

This doctoral study is needed because researchers have recognized the deficiencies surrounding CPS social workers and burnout. Burnout among CPS social workers has become the primary issue discussed related to worker retention (Miller et al.,

2017). The increased reports of child abuse and neglect cases place a significant strain on the CPS department to ensure enough social workers are available to handle the number of cases (Laird et al., 2018). With the findings from this study, I hope to assist CPS social workers in heightening awareness surrounding burnout and the organizational factors associated with it.

Definitions of Key Terms

Burnout: Diminishing one's strength; being overstretched, which is followed by exhaustion (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Child Protective Service (CPS) Social Worker: A person who investigates child abuse and neglect cases (Benbenishty et al., 2015).

Organizational Factors: A culture that focuses on the delivery of values, norms, beliefs, structure not limited to policy and procedures in that organization (Zidane et al., 2016).

Nature of Doctoral Project

Action research is the best methodology for this study as this research is used to gather practice-focused knowledge from clinicians in the field. Action research focuses on enhancing practice issues and knowledge and creating a strong societal structure (Newton & Burgess, 2016). Action research also contributes to the standard of focusing on changing practice understanding (Newton & Burgess, 2016). The data for this qualitative study was influential in capturing authentic feedback from participants while including non-objectivity within milieu (Given, Winkler, & Willson, 2014). Individual interviews were the best data collection method for this study because conducting

interviews provided me the ability to obtain feedback from various experiences within a personal and relaxed setting, which can stimulate in-depth conversations (Paradis et al., 2016).

Through action research, I conducted this study to identify in-depth details surrounding the experiences of CPS social workers related to burnout and the role of the organization surrounding burnout. The facilitation of this action research study may also assist me with my goal of providing an understanding of the organizational factors contributing to the experiences of burnout of CPS social workers (see Bortoletto, 2017; Ungar et al., 2015).

Individual interviews were conducted with CPS social workers. Participants were recruited using social work groups on the social media platform Facebook. I also used purposive sampling and networked with former colleagues within CPS to identify and recruit potential participants. Eligible participants were invited to participate in individual interviews online via Zoom.

As a qualitative research method, individual interviews, are structured using an open group format allowing for the collection of descriptive data. The individual interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The thematic analysis of the collected data allowed me the opportunity to examine and record patterns to ensure accurate data were obtained.

Significance of the Study

Burnout among CPS social workers has steadily risen (Kimes, 2016). However, there is a lack of research and understanding of burnout among CPS social workers in

Georgia. Data collected from this action research study will add to the literature on burnout for the social work profession. The collected data and study results may also be used to contribute to social work practice by improving the understanding of the influence of organizational factors in social work that contribute to burnout of CPS social workers. The findings from this study may also be used specifically by Georgia CPS social workers and social service agencies to increase their awareness about burnout and organizational factors that contribute to burnout.

This study may also contribute to policy changes in social organizations. The use of action research for this study will allow participants to share their experiences of burnout. Through the analysis of the data collected from the individual interviews, I sought to identify specific barriers that CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia encounter regarding burnout at work. This information may be used to provide suggestions on strategies that can be implemented to reduce burnout among CPS social workers (see Barck-Holst et al., 2017).

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The theory used to enhance this study was Maslach's (1976) multidimensional theory on burnout, which was implemented to extrapolate how CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia look at their experiences of burnout within the organization. Maslach's multidimensional theory of burnout is commonly used to describe stressful work experiences of social workers and other human services professionals (Bianchi et al., 2014). Maslach and Schaufeli (2017) reported burnout as a

psychological stressor and torment that leads to frustration in the workplace. Maslach's multidimensional theory is used throughout many professions and work environments.

Recent empirical research has formulated burnout as a work condition (Bianchi et al., 2014). With the support of recent empirical research, Maslach's multidimensional theory of burnout was used for this study to analyze burnout among CPS social workers and the impact of organizational factors on burnout (see Maslach, 1998). With the multidimensional theory of burnout, Maslach (1993) conceptualized burnout based on three significant elements: (a) depersonalization, (b) emotional exhaustion, and (c) personal accomplishments.

Additionally, there are six areas of work-life that can exhibit tremendous mismatch among individuals and those in the workplace based on Maslach's multidimensional theory (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017). Those six areas of work-life mismatch are (a) workload, (b) control, (c) community, (d) reward, (e) values, and (f) fairness (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The value of the six areas of work-life within a workplace is significant for Maslach's theory, which was used to support this research study (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017).

Through individual interviews in this qualitative study, CPS social workers provided organic experiences and strategies related to burnout. Maslach's multidimensional theory has the potential to assist CPS social workers with an outlook on burnout and organizational factors in a large urban community in Georgia. Using Maslach's multidimensional theory as a theoretical framework, CPS social workers can

decipher their experiences and strategies surrounding burnout because of organizational factors (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017).

Values and Ethics

CPS social workers have the potential to encounter burnout within the workplace that can diminish a person's performance and critical thinking. CPS social workers exhibit the majority of their burnout in the workforce while investigating abuse and neglect cases (Cho & Song, 2017). Research has shown a significantly increased rate of burnout in the workplace of CPS social workers (Cho & Song, 2017). Social workers often reference the values and ethics that govern this profession with guidance in dealing with burnout (Cho & Song, 2017).

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics highlights different values for which social workers are held accountable. These values include service, social justice, dignity and self-worth of a person, importance of the human relationship, integrity, and competence. The social work values/principles most relevant to this research study are service and integrity. The value of service relates to how a social worker assists clients with reaching and obtaining client-centered goals (NASW, 2018). The value of integrity provides a lens into ethical practice in the field of social work and the role of a social worker's honesty in the profession (NASW, 2018). CPS social workers and their organizations must follow the NASW code of ethics to ensure quality and integrity are exemplified. Hence, CPS social workers and the organization must maintain integrity and service while propelling clients forward.

These NASW values were essential to my action research project. NASW values assist an organization and CPS social workers by guiding them ethically and professionally. The NASW Code of Ethics (2018) was focused on developing top-tier service to patients and organizations to ensure all needs are fulfilled. As a result, this action research study on burnout among CPS social workers and the impact of organizational factors is intertwined with the NASW Code of Ethics values, principles, and standards by supporting excellence in the field and workplace (NASW, 2018).

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In this study, I focused on CPS social worker burnout in a large urban city in Georgia and organizational factors surrounding burnout. For the purposes of this study, empirical research was located specifically related to burnout among social workers. However, there are limited data on burnout among CPS social workers. The majority of peer-reviewed articles included are scholarly articles no older than 5 years. Few scholarly articles older than 5 years were located and provided additional insight on patterns other researchers observed.

The databases used to conduct the literature review included PsycInfo and SocIndex, ProQuest Research Library, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Psychology Database, ProQuest Social Science Database, ProQuest Sociology Database, PsycArticles, Sage Journals, Science Direct, SpringerLink Journals, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar. These databases and search engines assisted me in locating articles using keywords, including *social work burnout*, *burnout*, *emotional exhaustion*,

social worker, coping, work stress, job stress, CPS turnover rate, social work turnover, social work retention, and CPS retention.

Child Protective Services and Role of Child Welfare Social Workers

CPS social workers fill many roles within their departments. Foster care, along with child abuse and neglect cases, receive the majority of reports within an agency. Advocacy is also an essential role in child welfare departments (Greenbaum et al., 2015). Williams (2018) found evidence that child welfare social workers are not only advocates for those who are most vulnerable, but these social workers become an important support member for the families. Additionally, the amount of advocacy a CPS social worker employs for a client to ensure the client's safety needs are met is immeasurable (Bragin et al., 2015). Researchers credit aggressive advocacy and the firmness of the worker for overcoming specific barriers social workers encounter related to following government policies and procedures (Lizano, 2015). Additionally, child welfare social workers are taught how to navigate some of the most graphic cases, which is essential in the field of advocacy (Salloum, Kondrat, Johnco, & Olson, 2015). Child welfare social workers must go into homes that have reports of possible abuse or neglect (Williams, 2018). Advocating for the most vulnerable is a daily role for many CPS social workers. CPS social workers effectively engage with community stakeholders regarding specific problems that affect the community (Williams, 2018). Therefore, advocacy is primary role for CPS social workers.

CPS social workers have a role in conducting child abuse and neglect investigations. Benbenishty et al. (2015) report that the goal for any CPS social worker

who goes into a home to assess the safety and needs of that child is to ensure every need is fulfilled. Additionally, CPS social workers must remain vigilant while assessing a child's environment (Benbenishty et al., 2015). Research shows that predators in the home are usually the primary guardian or caretakers during the initial home visit, which is why vigilance is vital for CPS social workers (Radey, Schelbe, McWey, & Holtrop, 2017). Additionally, CPS social workers are placed under tremendous stress when conducting unannounced home visits that require a quick response to determine a child's safety (Brassard & Fiorvanti, 2015). Benbenishty et al. (2015) reported that CPS social workers are at heightened risk of danger while conducting child abuse and neglect investigation in which clients are in a dangerous situation. Furthermore, conducting investigations for child abuse and neglect carry enormous amounts of stress.

Another role for CPS social workers is case management. The increased caseload and the uncertainty of what each day will entail for these professionals have the potential of causing burnout (Steinlin et al., 2017). In a quantitative study with 319 Swiss children and youth residential care staff, child abuse cases were identified as the hardest cases to manage for child welfare social workers throughout an investigation (Steinlin et al., 2017). Hence, managing difficult cases requires child welfare service social workers to initially complete each case without any background information. CPS social workers must ensure records and files are kept up to date with little to no errors. Those who carry a big caseload can risk falling behind while ensuring records are maintained and in compliance.

In addition, child welfare workers are assigned a certain number of cases and must go into the victim's home to determine if abuse and/or neglect are present (Yurur & Sarikaya, 2012). After the CPS social worker has conducted their investigation, they must determine if the case will be substantiated or unsubstituted (Yurur & Sarikaya, 2012). If the case is substantiated for child abuse or neglect, there are additional documents and record keeping that CPS social workers must complete when submitting files to law enforcement.

Locating community resources is another essential role of CPS social worker. If a child needs additional resources, such as counseling assistance, food assistance, utility assistance, locating a provider, transportation, childcare assistance, and shelter, CPS social workers must attempt to locate resources in the clients' community. These professionals may find themselves stressed and overwhelmed if there is a lack of resources (Donisch, Bray, & Gewirtz, 2016). CPS social workers tend to go into their place of employment not knowing what to expect throughout their workday (Schelbe, Radey, & Panisch, 2017). CPS social workers have expressed that having unpredictable workdays increases burnout (Schelbe et al., 2017).

Burnout has caused some CPS social workers to seek employment with more stability (Schelbe et al., 2017). Additionally, CPS social workers have stated that priority cases and after-hour cases contribute to the root cause of burnout (Dagan, Ben-Porat, & Itzhaky, 2016). Social workers may have to stay out in the field an additional eight or more hours, attempting to resolve an issue in the home or even to relocate a child for

safety reasons (Dagan et al., 2016). As a result, unpredictable roles encountered in a workday have the potential to cause burnout.

Burnout in Child Welfare

Burnout is defined as stress that has been dormant for an extended period (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Researchers have found that burnout among child welfare social workers is a prime topic of discussion for many child service agencies (Miller et al., 2017). Researchers have also found that burnout among a majority of child welfare social workers is due to high demand cases (Laird, Morris, Archard, & Clawson, 2018). Caseloads pile up when child welfare social workers attempt to locate proper placement when a child's safety is at risk (Laird et al., 2018).

Increased workload for child welfare agencies is a global issue; within a 5-year span in the United Kingdom, referrals to children's services increased by 35,000 cases (Laird et al., 2018). This significant increase in caseloads prompted a governmental change in the child welfare program, and Laird et al. (2018) conducted a mixed-method study to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Additionally, researchers have reported a 28% spike in child welfare cases that resulted in increased burnout among CPS social workers in the United Kingdom (Laird et al., 2018). According to Laird et al. (2018), there was a 16% rise in staff turnover, correlated with high caseloads in the child welfare program in England. A CPS social worker's inability to manage a high caseload in conjunction with a department's high turnover rates can increase experiences of burnout.

Savaya, Gardner, and Stange (2011) reported that child welfare social workers have encountered verbally and physically aggressive clients. The researchers used the critical reflection theory in their qualitative research conducted in Israel. The researchers asked students to identify critical incidents in child welfare practice. The findings suggested that critical reflection allows social workers to manage stress levels more effectively (Savaya et al., 2011).

In addition, researchers have found that another cause for burnout among child welfare social workers is a lack of resources (Manttari-van der Kulp, 2016). Manttari-van der Kulp (2016) incorporated the moral distress theory in a quantitative research study, in which data was collected using electronic questionnaires distributed to 817 Finnish social workers. In addition, this study's results show that 42.4% of workers did not want to continue working at their current job (Manttari-van der Kulp, 2016). This information is beneficial and heightens awareness surrounding burnout among child welfare workers that can be generalized to child welfare workers in the United States.

In one quantitative study, with a group of patients receiving a sick certificate in Southern Germany, researchers have found that the overload on social workers attempting to locate resources, experienced fatigue, and depression due to the worker's inability to fulfill the assignment (Schneider et al., 2017). In addition, researchers report that social workers expressed their concerns constantly to their supervisors, regarding the need of using sick leave due to overwhelming stress on the body and the need to recoup for the next unpredictable workforce day (Lidwall, 2015). Therefore, this vital

information provides an understanding of the impact a worker may encounter physically and mentally throughout a workday.

Organizational Factors Affecting Burnout in Child Welfare

Child welfare social workers rely on the organization to provide policies and guidelines on how to perform professionally within the job description (Seymour, 2017). The high work demand that organizations place on social workers can increase burnout (Woodhead et al., 2016). Since this is an ongoing issue, child welfare social workers have expressed how their organization can assist with reducing and, in turn, increase retention in the organization (Gibbons, Murphy & Joseph, 2011). In a quantitative study with child welfare social workers, Woodhead et al., (2016) discovered that occupational stress levels are high, and strategies were suggested by the workers to reduce burnout and increase retention. Therefore, an investigator can be emotionally overwhelmed, which has the effect of increasing burnout.

Moreover, researchers have found that a child welfare social worker that has longevity with the job tends to hold on amid burnout, due to attempting to fulfill retirement requirements (Schwartz, Tiarniyu & Dwyer, 2007). Schwartz et al., (2007)'s quantitative study used hope theory and analyzed it to understand social worker burnout more in-depth. They further investigated the exhaustion that occurs throughout the span of a social worker's career and noted that the levels of stress and exhaustion slowly increased throughout the career of the professional.

Subsequently, the CPS social worker's inability to cope and manage high-stress situations can increase the symptoms of burnout in the field of social work. That burnout continuously increases as the professionals attempt to fulfill their duties.

Practice Factors Affecting Burnout in Child Welfare

The culture of today's society has shaped how CPS workers respond to an investigation. In the past, CPS social workers removed children from the home immediately until the investigation was finalized. Now, child welfare service social workers provide knowledge and in-home resources to assist the non-offending parent (Avby, Nilsen, & Ellström, 2017). Research studies show that most clients who implemented a safety plan towards keeping their children were generally cooperative with the CPS social worker (Avby et al., 2017).

Furthermore, Avby et al. (2017) reported that social worker satisfaction occurs when a good organization is implemented within the place of employment. This information is helpful when determining how the organization within CPS can assist in delivering beneficial case management, with the hopes of reducing recurring cases. Therefore, CPS social workers can experience significant burnout due to the legal system that needs to approve a safety program. A quantitative study was created to investigate the physical and mental effects on a child protective services social worker (Wagaman et al., 2015). Based on the results from Wagaman et al. (2015), the authors indicated that social workers should be given adequate empathy in the beginning and throughout their careers.

Correspondingly, there is an average of 40% of social workers that carry a negative attitude in the workforce (Mizrahi & Berger, 2005). This information is helpful when understanding how a person's mindset may be preconditioned before entering the profession. Mizrahi and Berger (2005) report ways upper leadership can assist with curving this mindset of social workers, attempting to create a more positive outlook in the workplace. This positive change can increase a social worker's productivity and morale within the organization (Mizrahi & Berger (2005).

Therefore, one practice factor CPS social worker encounter is locating a child's parent during investigations due to the other parent being housed in prison (Seymour, 2017). For example, giving the child to the next of kin would be ideal in this situation however contacting the next biological parent is best practice (Seymour, 2017). Furthermore, the search process for the next biological parent and child being placed in temporary foster care forces a strain not only on the CPS social worker but also on the child. In fact, one research study showed that of many fathers that have gone to prison, their father had also been to prison, which can cause a domino effect on the child which creates an ongoing cycle for the role of CPS social workers (Hansen, 2017). In the study of incarcerated fathers, Hansen (2017) observed individuals four months before release and six months after release; the researcher noted the improvement within the household.

However, if the case is still open due to an investigation the social worker would typically create a safety plan. Granted, the father is back in the home the social worker practice role would now include constant observation in the home along with supervision of the father who was previously incarcerated to ensure a smooth transition with the

father and child (Hansen, 2017). This observation allows the CPS social worker to note improvement which gives credit to the father who was in prison and obtains a job to meet the needs of the family (Hansen, 2017). For that reason, this support that is being noted by Hansen (2017) is helpful in understanding the correlation of a two-parent household and meeting the needs of the family which would provide a successful case closure and safety plan goals met. The supportive framework of this study will also reduce any future CPS involvement in the home which will reduce certain practice factors surrounding burnout among CPS social workers.

Hansen (2017) explained that social support plays a huge factor with a father who is incarcerated. Therefore, a CPS social worker may advocate for that father to have supervised visits from a prison video system (Hansen, 2017). This practice is an example of an evolving factor that is needed for today's society. Furthermore, the CPS social worker may now have to go through intensive channels to ensure the visitation plan is set in place for the child and incarcerated parent, which can create possible burn out (Seymour, 2017).

Community Factors Affecting Burnout in Child Welfare

There are several community factors that affect burnout among child welfare workers, such as financial, healthcare, food, and housing, just to name the most frequent issues (Bywaters et al., 2015). The mentioned issues are common problems that play a factor in the community. Child welfare social workers have observed constant reports of one or more of the needs from the list (Bywaters et al., 2015). Bywaters et al. (2015) report a correlation between a client's socioeconomic status and lack of resources.

Additionally, it is found that a client's location within a community can affect the type of assistance and resources available (Bywaters et al., 2015). In a sample using Los Angeles youth, Bywaters et al. (2015) noted the demand for resources for the lower parts of Los Angeles, compared to the north end. The researchers also noted that the demand is higher based on education, financial hardship, and location.

The majority of open and substantiated reports that were received from a family study with Child Protective Services in the home report cases of needed additional resources (Yang, 2015). Therefore, the lack of resources can have an impact on the CPS social workers attempting to locate entities willing to assist the families in need, which can create increased stress levels and lead to burnout (Yang, 2015). Yang (2015) reported the similarities among CPS involvement in the home and assistance needed; results show that CPS involvement decreases once the need is met. This information is helpful with projecting the importance to stakeholders in the community; it is to meet the needs of those who are having a hardship. In return, this may reduce social worker burnout.

Community resources play a role in factors that affect burnout in child welfare. There is a constant lack of financial assistance within the community (Peters, 2017). The socioeconomic status of the client can also play a role within the community. Individuals that generally encountered a hardship tend to have a need for finances, which can be limited or nonexistent in many communities (Bywaters et al., 2016). Pelton (2015) explains the correlation between poverty and child abuse and neglect, which has risen over the past five years. Therefore, the continued lack of financial resources will play a

role in child abuse and neglect cases (Pelton, 2015). Pelton (2015) reports that the increased cases of abuse and neglect correlate to the rise of social worker's burnout.

Research shows that individuals who are experiencing poverty must make the decision to either pay a bill or feed their family when in need of financial resources (Bywaters et al., 2016). Bywaters et al. (2016) explain that malnutrition is a nonfactor when there is a bill due, such as rent or utilities. Therefore, child welfare workers are now implementing several services in the home, which initially started out with one problem, but multiplied into several problems (all due to the lack of financial assistance) (Pelton, 2015).

Research shows that the lack of healthcare is another community factor that affects burnout among child welfare workers (Flores et al., 2016). Healthcare insurance is important for every growing child; therefore, being uninsured can prohibit children from maximizing their full potential (Flores et al., 2016). Furthermore, if a child needs to register for daycare, that child needs an updated status form completed by the pediatrician or another physician. (Samuels-Kalow et al., 2016). The child welfare social worker could experience burnout due to the child being uninsured and unable to start a daycare, which would alleviate some stress on the parent (Samuels-Kalow et al., 2016).

Lastly, locating another entity that will accept the client with very limited health background can become overwhelming for a child welfare social worker, even more so when time restraints are attached (Flores et al., 2016). As of 2017, there was an average of 4.6 billion children in the United States, and 70% of the children were eligible for Medicaid, yet they were uninsured (Flores et al., 2017). Overall, increasing awareness of

the Medicaid application and why it is important is an essential community resource that may help eliminate high levels of stress that lead to social worker burnout (Flores et al., 2017).

Moreover, social workers' who experienced burnout as well as children who suffered from child abuse and neglect in comparison ultimately have an increased risk of being affected by trauma (Lizano, 2015). Emotional burnout is a factor that a child welfare social worker may experience due to the dire need of the situation (Pelton, 2015). Collectively, all the above factors can cause burnout for the professionals.

Personal Factors Affecting Burnout in Child Welfare Social Workers

There are some challenges social workers bring into the workplace, which increases their chances of burnout (Rizo-Baeza et al., 2018). On average, 40% of workers who had low performance, or a single-parent displayed higher rates of burnout (Rizo-Baeza et al., 2018). The similarities of a client having a single household go along with the correlation of a worker who is a single-parent (Rizo-Baeza et al., 2018). This is an imperative factor to consider when understanding the household structures within a family. In retrospect, a CPS social worker who has experienced workplace barriers, as well as other environmental barriers, is equivalent to a client experiencing hardships (Rizo-Baeza et al., 2018).

Summary

In summary, CPS social worker burnout is rising. The role of CPS social workers can be overwhelming. In fact, the majority of CPS social workers are unaware of what to expect on a day-to-day work schedule (Schelbe et al., 2017). Furthermore, the role of a

CPS social worker requires flexibility and compassion. Overall, child welfare can be a tedious department to work in, which requires the CPS social worker to remain confidential while providing service with integrity while having the ability to process information accurately and efficiently.

In addition, CPS social worker burnout has several key contributing factors as to why burnout among CPS social workers is on the rise. The research discussed a few contributing factors that affect issues surrounding burnout such as: practice, personal, community, and organizational factors. There is a lack of research regarding incentives for social workers to overcome burnout when experienced in the workplace.

Foundationally, looking into social workers' practice factors in a large urban city in Georgia may provide clarification on what factors affect CPS social worker burnout. This study provides in-depth research on social work burnout while looking into the organizational factors surrounding burnout. Interviewing CPS social workers within the large urban city of Georgia will provide clarification on the rise of burnout within this population.

This action research project aims to identify specific organizational factors that have a role in social worker burnout in a large urban city in Georgia. The next section will provide additional information about the study's design and methodology.

Section 2: Research Design and Data Collection

Burnout among social workers has been an ongoing problem for many child protective services departments (Kimes, 2016). While several strategies have been developed and implemented to combat social worker burnout, this problem persists. As social worker burnout has increased over the years, the profession has also experienced near doubling of turnover rates (Wagaman et al., 2015). These high turnover rates have resulted in work environments where CPS workers are faced with high demands, extensive caseloads, and myriad responsibilities. The work environment is a key contributing factor influencing social worker burnout for CPS workers (Cho & Song, 2017). Through the facilitation of action research, I sought to explore burnout among CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia.

The data collected from this study were analyzed and used to explore the influence of organizational factors on burnout of CPS social workers in this region of Georgia. In this study I explored the experiences of CPS social workers. Qualitative data were collected and analyzed using thematic analysis. This methodology allowed me the opportunity to examine and record patterns of the CPS social workers' experiences to ensure accurate data were obtained. Section 2 of this research study includes details related to the study's research design, methodology, data analysis, and ethical procedures. The methodology section has been divided into subsections, including prospective data, participants, instrumentation, and existing data.

Research Design

The social work practice problem addressed in this research project is the understanding of the influence of organizational factors that contribute to burnout of CPS social workers in a large urban city in Georgia. In this qualitative study, I used action research to explore social workers' experiences of burnout in child welfare, strategies used to address burnout, and the role organizational factors play in burnout experienced by CPS social workers in Georgia (Bortoletto, 2017; Patton, 2015). By researching the experiences of CPS social workers in Georgia related to burnout and organization factors, I was able to conduct a study that has the potential to increase awareness of the issues surrounding social worker burnout for local CPS workers. The results of this study may also provide CPS social workers with increased knowledge on managing stressful work environments amid limited workers and resources. The research questions used to guide this exploration were:

RQ1: What are the experiences of CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia related to burnout?

RQ1a: What role does the organization play in the experience of burnout?

RQ2: What strategies do CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia use to address burnout?

RQ2a: What role does the organization play in the strategies used to address burnout?

Action research was the best methodology for this research study. Through the use of focus groups, I employed this methodology to gather practice-focused knowledge

from clinicians in the field of social work. Action research focuses on enhancing practice issues, experience, and creating a robust societal structure (Newton & Burgess, 2016).

Furthermore, this methodology approach for this research has the potential of initiating change surrounding burnout among professionals. Action research provides a community approach allowing individuals to tune in to other experiences to assist them in developing a potential solution for change (Montgomery et al., 2015). Lastly, action research addresses specific issues at hand; it can be used to analyze the reason behind downfalls, and this method allows individuals to evaluate the success of a solution individually.

Methodology

Prospective Data

Data were gathered for this action research project using individual interviews. Facilitation of individual interviews allowed me to collect data from local CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia and examine the influence of organizational factors that contribute to burnout. Researchers have found the use of focus groups a successful methodology to collect data; researchers can ask participants research questions related to a specific issue while also allowing participants to elaborate more on that specific issue or concern (Rombach et al., 2016).

The data collected from the research questions in the individual interviews was used to analyze the burnout experiences of CPS social workers and to develop an understanding of the role organizational factors have on burnout. Through the facilitation of the individual interviews and the analysis of the collected data, I also explored

strategies to address burnout that could potentially be used by CPS social workers to reduce or eliminate stressful work environments.

Participants

A sample of 8–10 local CPS social workers was recruited for this study. The sample size of the participants was appropriate for this study because it provided an opportunity for participants to engage with other participants in the group actively. The size of this focus group was important primarily to ensure pertinent data were obtained. Saturation is important to maintain the quality of information being delivered. Repetitive information is not beneficial to a research study; therefore, saturation creates a point conducive to determining sample size with quality data for research and interview protocol (Saunders et al., 2018).

Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. According to Jager, Putnick, and Bornstein (2017), the convenience sampling method is the most efficient sampling method and yields excellent results due to the ability of selecting potential participants who will provide imperative data. Convenience sampling provides the participants with the opportunity to be a part of a study instead of feeling obligated. Providing this type of sampling method allows key information to be delivered, allowing for an increased understanding of burnout experienced by CPS workers.

Participants for this action research study was recruited via a posted recruitment flyer on Facebook and social work groups on this platform. I joined several private social work groups on Facebook and post flyers throughout social media during the recruitment period. The recruitment period began as soon as the researcher was approved to start

collecting research data. The participants for this study were open to any religion, ethnicity, age, gender, or political affiliation. Open-ended questions were asked for this study to avoid any bias that may exist. Alkash and Al-Dersi (2017) suggest using open-ended questions when conducting interviews to ensure participants can express their viewpoints authentically and openly.

Convenience sampling was used in the recruitment efforts. This sampling allowed participants who are interested in this research topic to be a part of the individual interviews. The sampling method also allows those who schedule accommodates the selected interview time. This method provides a seamless process of gathering interested participants to provide valuable feedback. The economic feasibility of this sampling method is an advantage for this research study. If the convenience sampling method did not result in an adequate number of participants, a backup recruitment plan was to use purposeful sampling method.

The purposeful sampling method would recruit directly from those who work with CPS and are social workers. One advantage of using this sampling method was that the participants selected must have gainful experience and knowledge about organizational factors surrounding burnout.

Instrumentation

For this purpose, I collected the data by facilitating an individual interview using the interview protocol. This method, which I used, is an excellent way to gather data because clinicians can build upon each other experiences and feedback. I developed my interview protocol based on the research questions.

I obtained permission from the CPS social workers by asking them to complete an informed consent form. I used open-ended questions throughout the interview protocol. I had 10 in-depth interview protocol questions. At the beginning of the interview, I asked each participant to state how long they have been working with CPS as a social worker. Furthermore, I had the ability to obtain information on each CPS social worker's level of experience that would guide the interview on the different level of expertise that was present.

Data Analysis

I collected the data by facilitating an individual interview using the interview protocol. This method was chosen because it allowed the social work participants to build upon each other experiences and feedback. Researchers describe the interview protocol method to construct and categorize potential interview questions (Yeong et al., 2018). I analyzed the data collected from my individual interviews using thematic analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Thematic analysis is beneficial with organizing data based upon shared or similar experiences (Braun et al., 2019).

I audio record and transcribe data from each individual interview session verbatim. At the beginning of the individual interview session, I asked each participant to state their name and the population they have worked with. This initial information assisted me with identifying each participant's voice precisely when transcribing the recorded data. I used a Word table format to organize my data and separate it based on pattern codes. I later place each code under specific categories from the most relevant

patterns to the least relevant patterns (Vaughn & Turner, 2016). After I code and categorize responses, I analyzed and formulate themes.

Qualitative rigor is important when conducting this research study (Haber et al., 2017). Therefore, to validate my explanation of the data and to ensure credibility, I used the member checking method (see Smith & McGannon, 2018). Using the checking method supports truthfulness by allowing the participants to provide feedback to the information I transcribed (see Smith & McGannon, 2018). Moreover, I ensured accuracy by allowing each participant to review and verify the transcription to maintain credibility. Transferability describes the process whereby readers can determine if the findings from this research are transferable to any other setting (Haber et al., 2017). To assure transferability, I provided in-depth descriptive data that included but not limited to the individual interview sample size, socioeconomic status of participants, demographics, clinical background, interview questions, and procedures.

Dependability for this research study was supported through extensive documentation of data, methods, and designs used to formulate this study (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I ensured all documentation was consistent and aligns with procedures and guidelines to maintain reliability throughout the process of the study. Lastly, confirmability was critical when conducting this study to ensure all findings were guided based upon all respondents (see Abdalla, 2018). Furthermore, I reported and reflect on my role as the researcher as it relates to my analytical position for the findings to preserve respondents' experiences.

Ethical Procedures

It was essential to ensure that all ethical measures are taken throughout this research study. The IRB approval number for this research study is 07-10-20-0554413. Each participant who replied to the email and expresses interest to be a part of the research study received informed consent. According to the NASW Code of Ethics (2017), it is vital to provide informed consent to participants, which must be voluntary and written. The informed consent will include a description of the background of the study, procedures for participants who voluntarily agree to be a part of the study, and sample questions.

Additionally, the informed consent provided details on the nature of the study, the risk and benefits of being in the study, incentives, along with privacy guidelines for the research. Reducing and preventing ethical dilemmas was essential when conducting a research study (Winfield et al., 2017). The informed consent provided information ensuring participants understand they can stop participation at any time of the study. Before beginning the individual interview, participants had the opportunity to review the informed consent document and ask questions before deciding to agree to the form and participating in the interview session.

Participants of this research study was provided confidentiality, as stated in the privacy section of the informed consent. Each participant was given a pseudonym. Participant's information and data was secured using a serial lock safe box. Pertinent information, including but not limited to transcripts, data, notes, recording devices, was secured in the safe. Data and information were placed on a backup drive that was

password encrypted and maintained in the safe for 5 years as mandated by Walden University. Lastly, after 5 years, I will professionally shred all documents and factory reset any recording devices. I am a single researcher and the only individual that have access to secured data.

Summary

This qualitative action research study explored social work burnout and organizational issues related to burnout among CPS social workers. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants for the individual interview to provide information on CPS social worker experiences. The results of this study were discussed in the next section.

Section 3: Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to explore burnout among CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia. Seeking to explore burnout among these social workers can provide an exploration into the organizational factors surrounding the social worker's experience of burnout. Eight CPS social workers were interviewed to explore their experiences with burnout and the organizational factors surrounding their experiences with burnout. The research questions and subquestions guiding the interview questions were as follows:

RQ1: What are the experiences of CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia related to burnout?

RQ1a: What role does the organization play in the experience of burnout?

RQ2: What strategies do CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia use to address burnout?

RQ2a: What role does the organization play in the strategies used to address burnout?

Action research was used to gather information from the participating CPS social workers. Data were collected from interviews that were conducted with eight experienced CPS social workers who had worked for at least 2 years' experience in the field. Participants for this research study were recruited using social work community groups on Facebook. Recruitment specifically within a social work community group for state of Georgia employees on Facebook yielded tremendous response from potential participants. With each potential participant, I confirmed they were in a role as a CPS

social worker and that they met all other qualifications to participate in the study. For the research study, participants were individually interviewed using 10 open-ended interview questions that were formulated from an interview protocol (Appendix) intended for this research study that allowed for insightful feedback from each participant. Each interview was audio recorded to ensure accuracy. Throughout each interview, I also noted of vital points that were discussed in the interviews. Each participant was emailed a copy of the informed consent and a transcript of their interview after the interviews were completed.

In Section 3, I provide in-depth narrative on data analysis techniques used in this research study, including the findings from this study and an explanation of the validation and limitations of the research study. Section 3 will also include a summary regarding research questions and the identified themes.

Data Analysis Techniques

Following IRB approval for this qualitative research study, I began recruiting potential participants during the month of July 2020. Using social media, I posted recruitment flyers in 10 different social work Facebook community groups that each had members ranging from 5,000-30,000. These initial recruitment efforts provided a few potential participants who met specific criteria for this study. From the initial recruitment, 5 CPS social workers who worked for the Georgia Department of Human Services met the criteria for the study and agreed to participate. two weeks following the initial recruitment, I reposted the recruitment flyer on Facebook in the social work community groups. During the second recruitment phase, three additional CPS social workers who met the criteria agreed to participate. After recruiting 8 CPS social workers who worked

in Georgia, each participant was emailed the informed consent that provided them more information about the study. Participants were given the opportunity to review the informed consent and ask any questions or express any concerns. Participants were asked to respond to the email acknowledging that they reviewed the informed consent and that after review they were consenting to participate in the research study. A scheduled interview time was established after each participant agreed to participate. The individual interviews were scheduled based on each participant's schedule. The individual interview sessions occurred online via Zoom rather than in person due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to beginning each interview, participants were given another opportunity to review the informed consent and discuss any questions or concerns. Each participant was informed of the use of audio recording and agreed to be audio recorded before the interview started. In facilitating the interviews, I simultaneously interviewed each participant while recording notes during the interview. After the end of each session, the audio recordings were uploaded to Rev.com for transcription. After the data from each interview were transcribed, the data were coded, and themes were identified. Participant transcriptions along with the notes I obtained during the interviews and the identified themes were emailed to each corresponding participant for them to review and confirm accuracy through member checking. It is important to ensure all data collected are accurate and validated through the member-checking process (see Smith & McGannon, 2018).

To ensure the privacy of each participant in this research study, I did not use participants' authentic personal identification. To maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned an alias that was used during the transcription and analysis of the data. When coding the data, the collected data were categorized based on information that was equivalent to other data collected using the content analysis method. The use of content analysis for identifying key words helped me analyze meanings of specific words (Stemler, 2015). I used direct phrases from participant interviews to formulate a theme chart in an MS Word document. Content analysis provided information on the psychological state of each person while identifying specific patterns in communication. The codes were color coded to explore comparison in this study. Four themes were generated from the coding of the collected data. The identified themes were (a) lack of positive social interaction, (b) physically and mentally exhausted from field work, (c) impact of stress on work demands, and (d) lack of incentives on the job.

Validation Procedures

I wanted to ensure qualitative rigor was maintained throughout the study; therefore, each finding was evaluated based on credibility and reliability (see Smith & McGannon, 2018). Member checking was used throughout each interview session to validate information for this research study. Member checking was an important phase of validating information discussed during the session. I repeated participants' feedback after implementing the interview protocol to ensure accuracy was maintained. After incorporating member checking, data collected were transcribed. Reliability was vital in this research to measure data obtained. I reviewed notes, audio recordings, and transcripts

several days after the study. Throughout this process of reviewing information, I identified comparisons of words or phrases noted in the data collected.

Limitations

There was little to no issues while capturing data for this study. Furthermore, all participants were transparent and actively engaged during the interview sessions. Participants for this study had various lengths of experience. However, one limitation was that none of the participants had experience of 10 years or more.

Findings

The findings for all interviews completed during the month of July 2020 are reported in this section. Data were collected throughout each interview through open-ended questions tailored to the research questions of this study. The data collected from the findings correspond directly with the research questions provided. The sample for this research study consisted of six women and two men of diverse races and ethnicities; all participants held a degree in social work and had 2 years or more experience working with the Georgia Department of Human Services as a CPS social worker. The findings from the data collected adhered to the following themes: lack of positive social interaction, physically and mentally exhausted from field work, impact of stress on work demands, and lack of incentives on the job.

The next section includes an overview of identified themes specifically from each individual interview. Feedback that assisted with the advent themes while facilitating the interview protocol is provided in the following section. The section wraps up with an in-depth summary on results.

Theme 1: Lack of Positive Social Interaction

Positive social interaction is important on every level in the workplace that ultimately begins with leadership (Boekhorst, 2015). The individual interviews were facilitated, I asked each person about the length of employment as a CPS social worker and how would they classify their work life. The participants were asked what role do you believe an organization plays in the experience of burnout?

Tonya stated,

With that, you have your supervisor, your direct supervisor. And when you do not have a supervisor that is willing to assist you, that supportive, you can really experience the burnout because if you're going to this person, you're usually going to this person for that encouragement, prior to you becoming burned out. And if they are just not attentive and not being encouraging and give you some words of affirmation, then the burnout is, I believe is higher because you do not have that person that is willing to help you. And they could be experiencing burnout themselves, but as a supervisor or the organization itself, there are things that, they do have a role in that, in which they should assist us.

Desiree stated,

I feel as if they should get our input on things and see what is working and what is not working to try to make the job easier for us instead of people being burned out and finding another field or another job. And then they must replace the jobs and it is just like a cycle versus fixing the issue.

Theme 2: Physically and Mentally Exhausted from the Workplace

Exhaustion resulting from being physically and mentally overworked can play a significant impact of the performance of that worker (Salvagioni et al., 2017). Interview participants were asked how do they experience burnout in their role as a CPS social worker?

Desiree stated,

I experience burnout in my role because I feel as if my case load is too much. You must see 24 families a month. You must document it, you have to chase them down sometimes, put in service authorizations, reach out to this person and that person. And it is just a lot.

Tonya stated,

It is just constant stress, you worry about your clients, you want them to be safe, you want them to be protected, if there is a predator or whatnot. A lot of the times I take it home with me and I try not to, but when it comes to children, they really can't defend themselves. So just constantly thinking about it, worrying about it. And when I get to that point of overwhelming, I typically just start to, like I said, get stressed and just other physical things that starts to happen with my body.

Anthony stated,

So, how I experienced burnout was that I was not taking care of myself. My burnout was that I was stress eating. Everyone deals with things in different ways, so my burnout would be stress eating and stress drinking. So, it would be those negative things to relieve stress. I did not have the right self-care, positive self-

care to deal with those issues. So, when I experienced the burn out, I was just in a real negative place and I could not be a good... I mean, I did my work, but I felt like I was not good overall, mentally, and emotionally.

Mike stated, "I am just mentally and physically exhausted to the point of no return. Right now, because of staffing issues, my caseload has increased tremendously and having a hard time keeping up with everything."

Theme 3: Impact of Stress on Work Demands

Increase work demands placed additional stress on the employer which increases burnout (Salvagioni et al., 2017). Participants were asked what challenges does burnout create for CPS Social Workers in case management?

Claire stated,

I think one of the things is, you get tired. You get tired quick. It wears on your body, physically, you know, and people do not know that, but it is a long-term effect. And I dealt with now, I am always drain and just tired just working with so many caseloads. Sometimes it becomes overwhelming, you know, and I just really try to not get tired.

Tammy stated,

Like I said, physical and mental health, second guessing yourself always, not getting enough sleep and then that is when you start making mistakes. You start forgetting to do things. For lack of better words, it is almost like a paranoia type thing. You are so afraid that something is going to happen on your watch that you could have prevented, by simply remembering something. Or, like I said, did I

make the right decision? Did I do enough in this area? Is that child going to be okay. Your weekend does not belong to you anymore. Your days and nights really do not belong to you. You are constantly reassessing and reassessing in your mind, which I think is a good thing.

Ann stated,

I think I hit on it a little bit, is a decrease in work performance. So, for example, that can mean that a worker might not show up to work on time because they feel like, "Okay, I've been ripping and running the previous day doing cases. And now time they get home, it is about seven or eight o'clock and then now it's time to prepare for their next day. So instead of coming to work on time, they might, like I say, arrive to work a little later. And then, of course, they might not give out their best work. And also, as far as work performance, like I say, if a person is not fully energized or mentally, emotional, or, like I say, physically, they cannot output to another person their best selves because they are, like I say, lacking in an area.

Tonya stated,

Like I said before, some people have quit the jobs because of burnout. You must think about health issues because... I know for me there... Because of stress and burnout, I developed a diagnosis of high blood pressure. And just doing your job to the best of your ability, sometimes you just completely burn out. You are doing it, but it is almost like you are just going through the emotions of burnout.

Theme 4: Lack of Incentives on the Job

Incorporating appropriate incentives boost the overall health performance within the employer while enhancing the moral of the workplace (Martinsson et al., 2016).

Participants were asked how important is receiving a reward?

Tonya stated,

It is important because you know that you are doing the work and you're value yourselves. But sometimes you do want to be rewarded, get that recognition and the acknowledgement that others see your hard work that you do because it is extremely hard. And when you do not receive that acknowledgement or those rewards, it kind of makes you feel like no one cares. We can always sit and say, well, it does not bother me what other people say, but it does because when you are doing your job and you are exceeding, going above and beyond, you want and need that recognition.

Tammy stated, "As far as incentives, sometimes it's just a word that, 'Hey, you did a good job. That was a great job. That was a right decision that you made.'"

Unexpected Findings

During the individual interviews Tonya stated, maybe having more trainings on it, just so that people understand and especially prior to you coming into the job. During the individual interview with Tammy she commented, "If you have family, if you have children, if you cannot leave work until seven, eight o'clock at night, where are your children going to be? So, I think you have to also have to plan for yourself in place."

Summary

In summary, the in-depth exploration on the insight surrounding the experiences of CPS social workers related to burnout and the role of the organization surrounding burnout. The analytical view has provided clarity and information on the qualitative research questions discussed in the study. Implementing content analysis method guided the coding process in which four themes were identified. The four themes that played a tremendous role in this study are: lack of positive social interaction, physically and mentally exhausted from field work, impact of stress on work demands, and lack of incentives on the job. Overall, all interview participants concur that significant changes are needed within the organization to create a healthy work environment.

Section 4 will complete this qualitative research study. This next section will provide an overview on application for professional ethics in social work practice, recommendations for social work practice, implication for social change with a closing summary.

Section 4: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

This qualitative research study was performed to explore burnout among CPS social workers in a large urban community in Georgia. In seeking to explore burnout among these social workers, I also explored the organizational factors surrounding the social workers' experiences of burnout. Burnout has been experienced by CPS social workers, and incidence of burnout continue to rise significantly (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017). CPS social worker participants were able to explore and provide in-depth information on the lack of positive social interaction, physical and mental exhaustion from fieldwork, the impact of stress on work demands, and lack of incentives on the job.

The key findings were pertinent within this research study. In the individual interviews, the lack of positive social interaction was discussed by each participant. Participants discussed ways to modify the lack of positive social interaction that started with leadership. Participants discussed being physically and mentally exhausted from fieldwork. Participants discussed increase levels of stress that causes burnout. Interview participants expressed the need to reduce responsibilities to alleviate physical and mental exhaustion. According to the participants, the impact of stress on work demands was reported to have a significant role on the increase of burnout among CPS social workers. Participants expressed the need to reduce high caseloads. Furthermore, participants expressed the lack of incentives on the job can be frustrating at times.

Understanding the experience of CPS social workers related to burnout is vital. Findings from this qualitative research study emphasize ubiquitous experiences that can assist with enhancing experiences among CPS social workers. CPS social workers morale

have the potential to increase by providing an additional outlet throughout the month to engage with team members and upper leadership. The findings from this study can help increase attention surrounding the issue of burnout among CPS social workers. The information and data collected from this study can assist organizations will provide additional credibility on the need to implement changes within the organization through revamping roles and effectively communicating with employees. Social service organizations can benefit from this study by improving the overall well-being of social workers through enhancing and redesigning the hiring process for new employees and the follow-up process with existing employees.

The next section provides an exploration of the application of the study to professional ethics in social work practice. Recommendations for broader social work practice will be discussed, which include a plan to achieve change based on this study's findings. Lastly, implications for social change will be discussed.

Application to Professional Ethics in Social Work Practice

The findings from this study illustrate the importance of identifying burnout among CPS social workers to ensure the NASW code of ethics coincides with all core values of social work-related organizations, including child welfare organizations. Social work values play a major role in how workers assist communities. CPS social workers display the importance of human relationships by developing meaningful relationships in the community. CPS social workers often exceed expectations to support those they are serving in the community. Social workers tend to extend themselves at times, operating in burnout while attempting to carry out the ethical principles of their profession.

Service is another social work principle that was identified within this study. Interview participants discussed how service delivery is important to them and ways they go about implementing this ethical principle. This ethical principle promotes social workers networking with community stakeholders to address specific social issues. Specifically, social workers exhibit service in the community by striving to locate resources to alleviate hardship within the community, which in turn places additional demands on the worker, resulting in burnout. Due to limited resources, social workers find themselves expending substantial time searching the community to locate needed resources to fulfill the services at the core of their professional practice.

Integrity is another significant principle that was identified in the data collected for this study. Participants expressed various ways this ethical principle plays a role in their daily work. This ethical principle focuses on social workers placing emphasis on being honest and trustworthy. Many become overwhelmed by the pressure and expectations of knowing integrity plays an influential part in social work practice, which can increase anxiety and cause burnout.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice

Based on the findings in this qualitative research study, I would recommend for the organization that employ CPS social workers to adjust duties and responsibilities while improving awareness surrounding burnout. During initial training, new CPS social workers should be educated on the challenges and barriers within the organization. This process is important so that a worker clearly understands the duties and roles assigned to them and the potential difficulties they may experience. Providing this type of guidance

and adjusting expectations among the workers may address burnout and turnover rates within the organization. Workers will better understand the challenges and expectations of the organization. This action step could reduce stress levels among workers and provide them the ability to map out a potential workday in advance, which can also help to decrease burnout.

Providing CPS social workers an opportunity to meet with upper leadership frequently, perhaps every two weeks, while providing complimentary snacks could assist in increasing positive social interactions, improving workplace culture, and alleviating suppressed stress. Workers would have the opportunity to debrief with managers and leadership while engaging with other workers. This action step could provide workers self-care and allow them time to engage with their coworkers. Therefore, this bi-weekly action step could increase morale and rebuild motivation within the workers.

Personal Application

The findings of this action research study have influenced my role as a social work practitioner in various ways. I work currently with low-income pregnant mothers seeking assistance. I hope that sharing the findings from this study with leadership will assist with improving the morale of the company and workers. The findings have the potential to increase understanding and insight of CPS social workers and their experiences of burnout.

Transferability

Findings from the study to the field of clinical social work practice would be transferable. The findings from the study could heighten awareness of social work

burnout and organizational issues surrounding burnout. The study also increased understanding on the impact stress can have on a social worker. Furthermore, the findings could reposition not only CPS social workers but any worker within the social service profession.

Limitations

In this research study, there was three limitations present in this study. First, the setting in which the individual interview took place. Each individual interview was conducted via zoom due to the ongoing pandemic crisis. Some participants encountered minor glitches sporadically from the zoom platform. A few participants experienced a slight pause during the interview attempting to correct the problem immediately. Therefore, they were not able to maintain constant focus at times during the interview.

Second, as mentioned, interviews were conducted via zoom, which limited the ability to successfully facilitate interviews face to face in a group setting as originally planned. Participants had the ability to provide feedback based upon their experiences. However, participants did not have the ability to provide feedback to each other. Face-to-face sessions would have been ideal if a global pandemic crisis were not active during this period.

Third, all participants were recruited via a small social work group on social media. The participants were from various regions within the state and provided different experiences. Furthermore, using social workers from a specific region may have produced more similar experiences. Obtaining this information could have displayed more common patterns of CPS social worker experiences surrounding burnout.

Dissemination

I will present the findings from this research study to the State of Georgia Department of Human Resources State Office. Further dissemination could be to present the findings to the local social service agencies to bring awareness to individuals who currently carry out similar work duties.

Implications for Social Change

The findings from this study can make a positive impact, which would create social change within the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of this profession. Social workers may have the ability to understand their role and expectations within the micro level. The social change within the mezzo level can bring awareness to leadership about the experiences of CPS social workers. Heightening awareness with leadership could provide effective one-on-one training and increase incentives for workers. Ultimately, the macro level for social change would be advocating for the need to hire more CPS social workers while providing competitive salary compensation and benefits. If leadership implements change on the mezzo level, workers may be retained for longer stay with the company. Working together on each level is important for social change to be effective on each level.

Additionally, it is vital to ensure each worker understands their role and can meet the expectations of the organization so that stress levels are minimized to prevent burnout. The findings from this study are crucial for employers to address high turnover rates and increase retention. Implementation of the recommendations from this study could not only be used to reduce social workers stress levels but boost the morale of the

worker while promoting self-care. By taking care of the social worker mentally, physically, and emotionally the worker can be more effective and productive. The more productive the worker performs, the outcome metrics for the organization have the potential for being met.

Summary

In summary, this qualitative action research study noted the increase of burnout among CPS social workers. During individual interviews, participants expressed their experiences as a CPS social worker regarding burnout. Participant's insight and feedback guided this study with exploring barriers that exist for workers. CPS social workers emphasized that high case assignment and stress levels were experienced as a significant barrier for workers in this profession. The recommendation and action steps mentioned for this study are crucial building blocks for the success of CPS social workers and organizations.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol Questions for Focus Groups

1. How long have you worked as a CPS social worker?
2. How do you define burnout?
3. How do you experience burnout in your role as a CPS social worker?
4. What role do you believe an organization plays in the experience of burnout?
5. What strategies do you use to address burnout?
6. What strategies do the organization use to address burnout?
7. Who is responsible for screening a social worker for burnout? Describe how or if this screening is done in your setting.
8. What challenges does burnout create for CPS social workers in case management? Can you elaborate on this with an example?
9. How can decreasing CPS social work burnout assist clients? Please provide examples of your ideas.
10. Do you have any other information you would like to share about the topic of burnout?