2018

# Examining Trauma Exposure, Organizational Climate, and Job Outcomes in Child Welfare

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

Shano P. Rodgers

MA, Antioch University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Organizational Psychology

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Abstract

Exposure to traumatic situations is routine for child welfare workers in California, and the attrition rate for newly hired social workers in some states is estimated to be nearly 50% in the 1st year of employment. Prior research has indicated that reasons for dissatisfaction included dysfunctional organizational climate and culture. The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which trauma exposure contributed to secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit and to examine the degree to which organizational climate moderated the exposure among direct service child welfare employees. Kurt Lewin's field theory, Figley's theory of secondary traumatic stress or compassion fatigue, and McCann and Pearlman's constructivist self-development theory were foundational for this study. The research questions determined whether a) trauma exposure to would relate positively with secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit, b) organizational climate would relate negatively with secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit, and c) organizational climate would moderate the relationship between trauma exposure and secondary traumatic stress as well as intent to quit. Pearson correlations indicated that exposure to traumatic situations was statistically related to secondary traumatic stress but not intent to quit, and organizational climate was statistically significant in relation to secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit. Hierarchical regression analysis indicated no interaction effect on either dependent variable but might have approached significance with a larger sample. Positive social change can occur through child welfare organizations emphasizing strategies that can reduce secondary traumatic stress and turnover.

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# Dedication

This work is dedicated to my husband, Fred, and my daughter, Bailee. Fred, you are truly the best friend I have ever had. Your belief and encouragement kept me going through times of uncertainty and doubt. You always had the right words at the right time and never let me give up. Bailee, you have been so patient and understanding. We have some quality time together coming our way. I love you both more than words could ever express. This is also dedicated to my parents, Janet and George. Although I was not able to realize one dream, I was able to craft another, and I hope that this one makes you equally as proud. I love you both so much.

Acknowledgements

This achievement would not have been possible without the guidance, support, and expertise of my committee chair, Dr. Anne Morris. Dr. Morris's constructive criticism, innovative suggestions, and unwavering commitment to quality propelled me forward and kept me focused on each milestone. I would like to recognize and thank my committee members, Dr. John Astin and Dr. James Herndon. Thanks also to Dr. Vincent Fortunato for his advice and input and to the child welfare organization that graciously provided the opportunity to conduct this research. A special acknowledgement goes to my friend and colleague, Dr. Michael Rauso, who served as the catalyst that started me on this doctoral endeavor. Thanks for seeing more in me than I saw in myself.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Employees in line operations of child welfare organizations are routinely exposed to traumatic situations such as seeing children suffering from severe physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect, or working with volatile parents who are addicted to substances, engaged in domestic violence, or suffering from severe mental illness (Jankoski, 2010). Trauma can be experienced directly such as exposure to traumatized clients and indirectly, through reading client histories, or from hearing stories from colleagues and other professionals (Kahn, 2003). Approximately 83,560 substantiated allegations of child abuse and neglect were reported in the state of California from January 2013 through December 2013 (Needell et al., 2014). Although the number of substantiated allegations has decreased over the last few years, Needell et al. (2014) reported that the numbers of severe and general neglect allegations have increased along with the number of inconclusive allegations over the same period. Thus, exposure to traumatic events among child welfare workers might also have increased, and further research is needed to determine if the exposure could be associated with adverse health and job-related outcomes.

The attrition rate for newly hired social workers in some states is estimated to be nearly 50% in the first year of employment and national turnover rates range between 20% and 40% each year (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2003). Additionally, Clark (2012) observed a 10.7% decrease in the overall public child welfare workforce of social workers and supervisors and a 21.4% decrease in case carrying social workers between 2008 and 2011 in 58 California counties. Reasons for dissatisfaction

cited in the literature have included inadequate supervisory emotional support and management practices that encourage assignment of blame, dysfunctional organizational climate, and dysfunctional culture (Chen & Scannapieco, 2010; Chenot, Benton, & Kim, 2009; Dickinson & Painter, 2009; Tham, 2007; Westbrook, Ellet, & Asberg, 2012). In order to understand the degree of influence trauma exposure has on trauma response and worker intent to leave, further research is needed to isolate moderating factors. In this chapter, I briefly describe the relevant literature and theoretical foundations in relation to trauma exposure, organizational climate, secondary traumatic stress, and worker intent to leave among direct service employees in public child welfare organizations. Chapter 1 also contains the research questions and hypotheses, the significance of the study, and potential implications for social change.

## Background

### Vicarious Trauma, Secondary Trauma, and Compassion Fatigue

Vicarious trauma is a term that has been used in the same context as indirect or secondary trauma or compassion fatigue and refers to symptoms associated with firsthand experiences of trauma that manifest in professionals who are repeatedly exposed to trauma survivors and/or traumatic material; it can also manifest as a disruption of the professionals' belief systems (Bell, Kulkarni, & Dalton, 2003). A review of the pertinent literature indicated that there is overlap between the constructs of vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue. Cieslak et al. (2014) used the term secondary traumatic stress to describe the effects of exposure to traumatized clients, which included secondary Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as defined by Bride, Robinson,

Yegidis, and Figley (2004), vicarious traumatization as coined by McCann and Pearlman (1990), and Figley's (2002) compassion fatigue construct. Secondary PTSD was described by Bride et al. (2004) as symptoms resembling PTSD experienced by professionals in the position to help traumatized clients. Vicarious trauma represents a shift in "an individual's broadest beliefs about the world, including life philosophy, moral principles, causality, and locus of control" (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995, p. 61) that manifests from exposure to traumatized clients or traumatic material. Rzeszutek, Partyka, and Golab (2015) defined vicarious trauma as "personal transformations experienced by trauma workers that stem from a cumulative empathic engagement with another's traumatic experiences" (p. 213), which leads to alterations in the way the individuals view themselves, others, and the world. Compassion fatigue represents the desensitization to client distress that results from repeated exposure to traumatized clients or traumatic material (Adams, Boscarino, & Figley, 2006). I did not find definitive studies that delineate vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue as separate and nonoverlapping constructs. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic, and compassion fatigue are referred to as *secondary traumatic stress*.

Higher caseload and diffuse work goals have predicted higher levels of secondary traumatic stress (Townsend & Campbell, 2009), as did a lack of shared power (Slattery & Goodman, 2009). Researchers have also found that increased peer or workplace social support predicted lower levels of secondary traumatic stress (Slattery & Goodman, 2009). According to Elwood, Mott, Lohr, and Galovsky (2011), most researchers who have

examined secondary traumatic stress symptoms have examined the symptoms without assessing negative individual or organizational consequences. Additionally, further research is needed to understand the effects of exposure to traumatic situations over time. Ortlepp and Friedman (2002) found that some study participants indicated that they experienced symptoms of secondary traumatic stress immediately after exposure but not 6 weeks later. However, Hensel, Ruiz, Finney, and Dewa (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of risk factors for secondary traumatic stress in therapeutic work with trauma victims and found small positive effect sizes and statistically significant mean effect sizes between occupational exposure to traumatized clients, or proportional time working with traumatized clients, and secondary traumatic stress. Galek, Flannelly, Greene, and Kudler (2011) found that the number of hours spent with traumatized clients per week was the strongest indicator of secondary traumatic stress among chaplains working in hospitals in the United States and Canada. Researchers have also found that compassion fatigue was more likely to be experienced by medical personnel when exposed to traumatized clients for more than 12 hours in a day (Kahn, Kahn, & Bokhari, 2016). Additionally, increased exposure to disturbing media depicting child exploitation led to increased secondary traumatic stress among personnel working with child exploitation in both the United States and United Kingdom (Bourke & Craun, 2014). Therefore, the objectives of this study included an assessment of the relationship of exposure to traumatic situations or material, self-reported secondary traumatic stress, and intention to quit among child welfare employees.

**Antecedents of Worker Turnover**

Undesirable worker turnover has been found to be detrimental to organizations in terms of workforce stability; organizational effectiveness; and increased recruiting, selection, and training costs (Robbins & Judge, 2011). Thus, the causes of turnover are of interest to employers. Researchers have found that psychological contract breach (Clinton & Guest, 2014), workload (Bowling, Alarcon, Bragg, & Hartman, 2015), and destructive leadership (Schyns & Schilling, 2013) led to increased intent to quit; psychological capital (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011), increased perceptions of manager behavioral integrity (Prottas, 2013), trust in executive leadership (Costigan, Insinga, Kranas, & Kureshov, 2011), group cohesiveness, supervisory relations, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Heavey, Holwerda, & Hausknecht, 2013) decreased intent to quit.

Studies specific to child welfare or social service organizations have indicated that exposure to threats and violence (Tham, 2007), burnout (Rittschof & Fortunato, 2016) employee feelings of depersonalization (Dickinson & Painter, 2009), and negative perceptions of organizational culture, lack of recognition, workload, and working conditions (Spath, Strand, & Bosco-Ruggiero, 2013) increased employee intent to quit. Additionally, transformational leadership (Rittschof & Fortunato, 2016), supervisor practice support, team support, and emotional support, as well as growth and advancement opportunities decreased employee intent to quit (Dickinson and Painter, 2009). A passive, defensive organizational culture also emerged as a statistically significant predictor of intent to quit, regardless of longevity of serving within child

welfare organizations (Chenot et al., 2009). Conversely, climates oriented toward ethical practice, enhanced service delivery, and supportive interpersonal dynamics were positively related to intent to stay employed within child welfare organizations (Westbrook, Ellett, & Asberg, 2012). Further, Renner, Porter, and Preister (2009) found that supervisory effectiveness and job satisfaction contributed to retention of social workers particularly when supervisors received training and support from their managers. Thus, it follows that organizational factors as well as the traumatizing nature of the work itself are instrumental in influencing a person's intent to quit.

**Organizational Climate**

Organizational culture represents the shared meanings, beliefs, and behavioral norms within an organization that distinguishes it from other organizations, whereas organizational climate refers to individual perceptions about the interpersonal dynamics exchanged between organizational members, clients, and external stakeholders (Robbins & Judge, 2011; Schein, 2010). Researchers have widely studied organizational climate in relation to a variety of outcome variables and in a variety of industries such as health care, manufacturing, sales, science, banking, education, oil and gas, human services, criminal justice, and government (Randhawa & Kaur, 2014). Employees who perceived negative organizational climate were more likely to engage in misconduct (Andreoli & Lefkowitz, 2009; Vardi, 2001) and abusive supervision as well as increased deviant behavior such as spending time on personal rather than work related issues, avoiding work responsibilities, Internet surfing, or excessive socializing (Mawritz, Dust & Resnick, 2014, p. 739). Additionally, Zribi and Souai (2013) found that deviant behavior

resulted from perceptions of unfairness and a breach of implied promises from organizational leadership. Psychological contracts or implied promises from the employer such as a promise of promotion in exchange for additional responsibilities form the basis of trust (Rousseau, 1990). Zribi and Souai found a positive correlation between the perceived break in the psychological contract and subsequent deviant behavior defined as behavior that deliberately violates the rules and norms established by the organization. Researchers have found that organizational climate correlated positively with job satisfaction (Castro & Martins, 2010; Churchill, Ford, & Walker, 1976; Griffin, 2001; Schultz, 2013), job involvement (Biswas, 2012; Brown & Leigh, 1996; Omolayo & Ajila, 2012), organizational citizenship behaviors (Agyemang, 2013), and work performance (Fu & Deshpande, 2014; Wong, Leong, & Lee, 2014).

Organizational climate moderated relationships between human resource management and productivity (Neal, West, & Patterson , 2005) and mediated relationships between organizational culture, job attitudes, and subsequent turnover (Aarons and Sawitsky, 2006). Although these results were found among employees in industries unrelated to child welfare, recent research has demonstrated that in child welfare organizations there are positive correlations between organizational climate and child client outcomes such as problematic psychosocial functioning, as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1994), at different points in time (Glisson & Green, 2011; Williams & Glisson, 2014).

Chenot (2011) explored a phenomenon he coined “the vicious cycle” (p. 168) to describe how dysfunctional climate and culture surface and endure in child welfare

organizations. The cycle begins with child death under horrific circumstances of child abuse and neglect and draws the attention of the media. Details of the case become sensationalized; public outrage follows, and local politicians capitalize on the opportunity to champion a cause through initiating an external investigation. A concurrent internal investigation is initiated by the organization's leadership and the culture of the organization shifts to a belief that social workers cannot be trusted with making decisions. Hence, increased oversight, paperwork, policy, and procedures burden a workforce that is already stressed and morale is weakened. Workforce retention and recruitment efforts suffer and organizational reform stalls until the next child death when the cycle repeats. Chenot's experience as an employee, educator, and researcher in the field of child welfare informed his observations.

One important aspect of organizational climate that has received attention in the child welfare literature is the quality of supervision. Mor Barak, Travis, Pyun, and Xie (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 27 research articles published between 1990 and 2007. Three important dimensions of supervision emerged: task assistance, social and emotional support, and supervisory interpersonal interaction. Mor Barak et al. found that social emotional supervisory support and supervisory interpersonal interaction were negatively correlated with detrimental worker outcomes, such as burnout, depression, role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload. Thus, it follows that organizational factors might either predict or moderate other worker outcomes such as job stress or intent to quit.

**Organizational Climate and Job Stress**

Considerable research is available on workplace stress and organizational factors that contribute to symptoms of stress. A review of the pertinent literature indicated that numerous workplace dynamics and factors contribute to employee stress. Nixon et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 79 studies that examined relationships between work stressors such as organizational constraints, interpersonal conflict, role ambiguity, workload, work hours, lack of control, and physical symptoms of stress. Nixon et al. indicated that there were statistically significant relationships between interpersonal conflict, organizational constraints, and workload and the physical symptoms of sleep disturbances, dizziness, fatigue, backache, headache, eye strain, appetite, and gastrointestinal problems. Darr and Johns (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 153 studies that included samples from a variety of professions such as nurses, doctors, engineers, technicians, teachers, counselors, social workers, assembly line workers, miners, welders, cleaners, bakers, sewing machine operators, clerks, secretaries, managers, government workers, retail sales and service employees, firefighters, and law enforcement, and found statistically significant, albeit small, positive correlations between absenteeism and work strain and physical and psychological illness.

Researchers have found that organizational climate factors, such as a support system, decision making, and motivational levels, had statistically significant inverse relationships to occupational stress (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). Organizational climate, defined as organizational leadership, job description, working conditions, team, dynamism, time pressures, and cultural norms, had statistically significant negative

relationships to workplace bullying and employee physical and psychological health (Qureshi, Rasli, & Zaman, 2014). Professions such as firefighters, law enforcement, doctors, nurses, and child welfare workers have the added exposure to traumatic situations or material which has also positively correlated with physical and emotional distress (Myers & Cornille, 2002; Regehr & Bober, 2005; Von Rueden et al., 2010). What is not known is how much physical or psychological distress can be attributed to the exposure to traumatic situations or material and how much physical or psychological distress can be attributed to organizational factors such as organizational climate.

## Problem Statement

The field of child welfare inherently presents exposure to clients who have experienced trauma in the form of child abuse or neglect (Jankoski, 2010). The attrition rate for social workers remains high (GAO, 2003) and researchers have found that exposure to traumatized clients or proportional time working with traumatized clients increases the risk for secondary traumatic stress (Hensel et al., 2015) Although researchers have found that higher caseloads and disorganized work goals have predicted secondary traumatic stress (Townsend & Campbell, 2009) and organizational climate factors such as support system, motivation levels, and decision making were negatively correlated with occupational stress (Sahni & Kumar, 2012), I did not find studies with examinations of how much of secondary traumatic stress response can be attributed to organizational climate vs. exposure to traumatic situations. Only two studies to date included an examination of exposure to trauma and work stressors in relation to secondary and vicarious trauma (Dagan, Ben-Porat, Itzhaky, 2015; DeVilly et al., 2009).

However, the DeVilly et al. (2009) study was limited to trauma therapists and did not specifically include organizational climate as an independent or moderating variable. The Dagan et al. (2015) study was also limited in that did not operationalize organizational climate as a moderating variable. Further, the results of the two studies are contradictory. The DeVilly et al. (2009) study indicated no statistically significant relationship between exposure to traumatized clients and secondary traumatic stress scores, whereas the Dagan et al. (2015) results indicated that exposure to child abuse victims was a statistically significant predictor of secondary traumatic stress. Additionally, the potential moderating role of organizational climate in relation to exposure to traumatic situations or material and secondary traumatic stress or intent to quit among direct service child welfare employees has not been fully explored. Favorable organizational climate, defined as better cohesion, perceptions of supportive leadership, sufficient job challenge, and diminished role stress may lessen the effects of trauma exposure on job-related attitudes and intention to quit. Turnover is positively correlated to child abuse investigation delays and inconsistent visitation with children (GAO, 2003), which places child safety at risk and diminishes positive outcomes for families. Thus, more research is needed to determine which types of organizational interventions would be helpful to mitigate detrimental individual and organizational outcomes.

## Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study were to examine (a) the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations (IV) and secondary traumatic stress (DV), (b) the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material (IV) and intent to quit (DV), (c) the

relationship between organizational climate (IV) and secondary traumatic stress (DV), and (d) organizational climate as a moderator of the relationships between exposure to traumatic situations or material (IV) and secondary traumatic stress (DV), and intent to quit (DV).

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations and secondary traumatic stress among direct service child welfare employees?

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$1): Exposure to traumatic situations will not relate positively to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees.

Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$1): Exposure to traumatic situations or material will relate positively to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and employee intent to quit among child welfare employees?

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$2): Exposure to traumatic situations or material will not relate positively to intent to quit among child welfare employees.

Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$2): Exposure to traumatic situations or material will relate positively to intent to quit among child welfare employees.

Research Question 3: What relationship does organizational climate have to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees?

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$3): Organizational climate is not related to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees.

Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$3): Organizational climate will be inversely related to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees. Specifically, a relatively positive employee perception of organizational climate will be associated with lower levels of self-reported secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees.

Research Question 4: To what extent will organizational climate moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material, secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit among child welfare employees?

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$4a): Organizational climate will not moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees.

Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$4a): Organizational climate will moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees.

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$4b): Organizational climate will not moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and intent to quit among child welfare employees.

Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$4b): Organizational climate will moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and intent to quit among child welfare employees.

## Nature of the Study

This study had a quantitative nonexperimental survey design and examined (a) relationships between exposure to traumatic situations, secondary traumatic stress, and

intent to quit among employees in a large urban public child welfare organization, (b) the relationship between organizational climate and secondary traumatic stress, (c) the moderating influence of organizational climate between exposure to traumatic situations or material and secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit. Participants in the study were child protective social workers and their supervisors who provide direct care client services in a public child welfare organization. The study site was not a site under the jurisdiction of my employer. Child protective social workers are first responders who investigate child abuse allegations and case managers who are charged with ongoing service linkage to clients and safety assessment. Participants were asked to participate in a confidential and voluntary online survey to measure trauma exposure, organizational climate, secondary traumatic stress, and intent to quit. The independent variables in the study were exposure to traumatic situations and organizational climate. Trauma exposure was measured by seven items from a scale developed by Horwitz (2006). Organizational climate was measured by the Psychological Climate Scale (Brown and Leigh, 1996).

The moderating variable in this study was organizational climate. The dependent variables were secondary traumatic stress as measured by the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (Bride et al., 2004) and intent to quit as measured by a single item as constructed by Tham (2007). Demographic information including age, race, length of service, and trauma history were collected through a web link connected to the survey. I used this information to both describe the study participants and treated these specific demographics as covariates in the study to ensure results were not confounded by these

factors. I also screened respondents to ensure they provided direct services to clients. The resulting data were analyzed using a correlation and regression modeling approach.

## Theoretical Framework

### Constructivist Self-Development Theory

McCann and Pearlman (1990) formulated constructivist self-development theory as a means for understanding the effects of vicarious trauma. Constructivist self-development theory implies that reality is highly individualized and is created through intricate cognitive schemas, including beliefs and assumptions, used to explain anything that transpires (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). McCann and Pearlman defined cognitive schemas, beliefs, and assumptions in the context of five psychological needs: safety, dependency/trust, power, esteem, and intimacy; they proposed that these needs can be influenced or distorted by trauma and might also be impacted by repeated exposure to victims of trauma. McCann and Pearlman asserted that memory or imagery of clients can also be internalized and personalized by those providing care particularly if the memory or image strikes at a need within the care provider. Repeated exposure to trauma victims might alter beliefs or assumptions about the world and the motivations of others that was not present prior to the exposure.

### Figley's Theory of Secondary Traumatic Stress or Compassion Fatigue

Figley (1995a) described secondary traumatic stress disorder (STSD) as a condition that manifests in individuals who are exposed to victims of severe trauma Figley coined the term "compassion fatigue" as a substitute term for STSD, but they essentially described the same phenomenon. Professionals such as therapists, emergency

response personnel, and child protection workers are routinely exposed to traumatized victims and are at significant risk for developing secondary traumatic stress. Figley theorized that STSD symptoms mirror those of PTSD such as recurrent intrusive thoughts or nightmares, flashbacks, avoidance of people or other stimuli that trigger recollections of the traumatic event, exaggerated startle response (American Psychiatric Association, 2015).

### Kurt Lewin's Field Theory

Kurt Lewin's field theory (1939) emerged as a method to examine environmental effects on the individual. Lewin (1958) proposed that an individual's identity in relation to status within a social group can influence his or her level of aspiration, ability, and success within that group. Hence, if the level of aspiration is too high or too low in comparison with the individual's ability, an individual could experience feelings of continuous failure and stress. Lewin's theory is foundational for understanding how organizational climate might be relevant to a person's experience of stress separate and apart from exposure to potentially traumatizing circumstances.

## Definition of Terms

*Intent to quit:* The thought process associated with the desire to leave an organization (Rodwell et al., 2014).

*Organizational climate:* The "shared perceptions organizational members have about their organization and the work environment" (Robbins & Judge, 2011, p. 524).

*Secondary trauma:* Described as a condition that manifests from extended exposure to individuals who have experienced severely stress inducing events and

frequently presents in employees of caregiver organizations that service clients exposed to severe psychological and/or physical abuse (Jankoski, 2010). Secondary trauma refers to the psychological and physical responses to trauma exposure (Robinson-Keilig, 2014).

*Trauma:* A unique and individual experience in response to an event or conditions that alter an individual's ability to intellectually or emotionally process the experience or where a person perceives a threat to an individual's personal safety or the safety of others (Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1995, p. 60).

*Trauma exposure:* Trauma exposure has been defined as repeated exposure to a singular form of trauma or repeated exposure to multiple types of trauma (Karam et al., 2014).

## Assumptions

One assumption was that participants provided complete and accurate information about sensitive areas of their experience at work and their attitudes toward the children's services organization and the work that they do. Another assumption was that study participants would accurately interpret the meaning of survey questions being asked and would share understanding of the presented concepts. Lastly, it was assumed that the variables were representational of the underlying theories associated with the model.

## Limitations and Delimitations

One limitation of this study was that the design was cross-sectional, and as such, causal inferences about observed relationships among study variables were not possible. A second limitation was that the study did not account for specific coping strategies used by individuals to mitigate exposure to trauma or control for specific interventions

practiced in individual regional offices such as support groups, wellness groups, or employee training in vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress awareness. A third limitation to this study was that it was limited to public child welfare social workers and supervisors who work in line operations within regional offices and did not include clerical or management employees who might have had some degree of exposure to traumatic situations or material or employees in other divisions that do not provide direct services to clients such as programs, contracts, training, policy, human resources, or executive management. A fourth limitation to this study was that a voluntary convenience sample was used for the study and might not have adequately represented the population. Individuals who consented to participate in the study might have differed systematically from those declined to participate. However, I made every effort to maximize participation in the study among eligible participants within the children's service organization.

## Significance of the Study

High turnover is a chronic issue identified by researchers in relation to social work staff (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; McGowan, Auerbach, & Strolin-Goltzman, 2009; Strolin-Goltzman, Auerbach, McGowan, & McCarthy, 2008; Tham, 2007). Retaining quality social workers improves consistency and better outcomes for clients. Strolin, McCarthy, and Caringi (2007) found that high turnover resulted in service gaps due to the resulting increased workload of social workers that remain. Findings from the Child and Family Services Review (GAO, 2003) indicated that diminished staffing decreased the capacity to establish meaningful relationships with clients, decreased worker capacity to

connect to appropriate services and delayed adoption or legal guardianship decisions for children. Workplace environments that provide supportive leadership, interpersonal cooperation, friendliness and warmth, sufficient job challenge, and diminished role stress might prove to be important in managing inherent trauma associated with working in the field of child welfare. The consequence of failing to isolate specific factors that contribute to or mitigate employee intent to quit among child welfare employees is in negative outcomes for children and families such as delayed decisions regarding adoptions, legal guardianships, or reunification with parents (GAO, 2003). Results from this study might influence child welfare organizations to both recognize that workplace trauma potentially affects direct service employees and establish practices to help direct service employees process workplace trauma. Further, results of this study might influence child welfare leadership to develop strategies that could reduce the impact of trauma exposure by developing strategies to improve organizational climate.

## Summary

Workforce retention in public child welfare organization continues to be of great concern. Exposure to traumatized clients is an occupational hazard for social workers. Pross and Schweitzer (2010) found that stress related symptoms in employees of caregiver organizations were minimized when they maintained appropriate boundaries with clients, when they received clinical supervision and leadership coaching, and when they used self-care programs provided by the organization. The existing literature indicated that several organizational factors such as high caseloads, lack of resources, and other working conditions underlie the impetus to leave child welfare organizations

(Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; McGowan et al., 2009; Strolin-Goltzman et al, 2008; Tham, 2007). Gibbs (2009) found that the inability to process trauma leads to task avoidance on an organizational level as well as biased judgment. This study focused on the direct or indirect exposure to traumatic situations or material and organizational climate as moderator to secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit. The results of this study may provide valuable information to leadership in child welfare organizations on the impact of trauma and how organizational factors might exacerbate or alleviate it.

In Chapter 2, I present a review of current and historical literature on the study variables as well as foundational theories to inform and support each hypothesis and variable constructs. Chapter 3 includes the research design, methodology, data collection, and procedures to test each hypothesis.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study was an examination of the relationships between trauma exposure, secondary traumatic stress, intent to quit, and the potential moderating influence of organizational climate by using a sample of child protection case managers and supervisors. Child protection organizations are responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse, which includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, or failing to protect a child from abuse that is caused by a parent or other caregiver (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Public child welfare case managers and supervisors are frequently exposed to traumatized clients and are often required to travel to dangerous areas and respond to potentially volatile situations where domestic violence or gang activity is reported. Employees might also respond to calls from law enforcement or medical providers and bear witness to or hear horrific depictions of abuse. Exposure can also occur through monitoring visits between children and their parents, meeting with parents to provide transportation assistance, telephone contact, or reading stories about clients. Recent incidents depicted in the media illustrate the very real dangers faced by child welfare workers. For example, a Vermont mother was accused of shooting and killing a social worker outside the social worker's office after the mother lost custody of her daughter, and a father abducted his 2-year-old daughter at gunpoint after a monitored visit in a county child welfare facility (Los Angeles Daily News, 2015; Midura, 2015). Both situations depict exposure to traumatizing events. Many studies have examined vicarious or secondary trauma in the context of working with traumatized clients in a

variety of professions such as law enforcement, psychotherapy, social work, medicine, chaplains, and legal advocacy Researchers have found that

1. There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between job support and secondary traumatic stress scores among forensic interviewers of abused children (Bonach & Heckert, 2012).
2. The higher the frequency of exposure to traumatic material the higher participants scored on measures of secondary traumatic stress among internet investigators of crimes against children (Bourke & Craun, 2014).
3. Higher ratings of supervisory support were inversely related to secondary traumatic stress scores among law enforcement personnel (Craun, Bourke, Bierle, & Williams, 2014).
4. The number of hours spent per week with traumatized clients was a strong predictor of secondary traumatic stress among chaplains (Galek et al.,,2011).
5. Workload perceptions were positively and statistically significantly related to secondary traumatic stress among domestic violence service providers (Kulkarni et al., 2013).
6. Emergency medical personnel scored statistically significantly higher on measures of vicarious trauma than nonemergency medical personnel (Mairean & Turliuc, 2013).

Undesirable turnover can be costly to any organization and can jeopardize stability in the workforce and create stress on remaining employees who are recipients of redistributed workload until replacements are hired. Employers must also bear the

additional costs of training and recruiting replacements (Robbins & Judge, 2011). Recent research has indicated that psychological contract breach (Clinton & Guest, 2014), workload (Bowling et al., 2015), and destructive leadership (Schyns & Schilling, 2013) increased intent to quit whereas psychological capital (Avey et al., 2011), perceptions of manager behavioral integrity (Prottas, 2013), trust in executive leadership, (Costigan et al., 2011) group cohesiveness, supervisory relations, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Heavey, Holwerda, & Hausknecht, 2013) decreased intent to quit.

Researchers in the field of child welfare have found that organizational factors such as high caseload/workload, inadequate or ineffective supervision (GAO, 2003, Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, n.d.; Strolin-Golzman et al., 2007; Tham, 2007), increased workload due to short or long term staffing shortages (GAO, 2003, Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, n.d.), internal/external scrutiny and criticism (Chenot, 2011, Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, n.d.), and a lack of clear incentives or rewards (Shim, 2010) are all factors that contribute to intent to quit among child welfare case workers. These studies, taken collectively, illustrate some of the adverse organizational factors that affect social workers and may lead to intent to quit. However, it is unknown how these factors might moderate adverse responses to exposure to traumatic situations. Staff retention is critical for maintaining consistent relationships for clients as well as timely decisions regarding foster or relative care placement and other important case issues (GAO, 2003). Therefore, factors such as vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress, which have been shown to influence intent to quit (Bride, Jones, & McMaster, 2007; Jankoski, 2010; Middleton & Potter, 2015), need to be examined within the context

of exposure levels and organizational factors. In this chapter, I aim to present clear comprehension of trauma exposure, organizational climate, secondary traumatic stress, and intent to quit by reviewing the historical literature and the foundational theories. This chapter includes a historical examination of the literature related to each of the study variables in relation to human services professions, and a complete description of the study population

## Literature Search Strategy

The search for pertinent literature included the following EBSCO databases: ABC-CLIO Solutions, ABI/INFORM Complete, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, CINAHL Plus with Full Text, JSTOR Journals, MEDLINE with Full Text, ProQuest Central, PsycARTICLES, PsycInfo, SAGE Premier, SocINDEX with Full Text, Social Sciences Citation Index database and Taylor and Francis Online. Search parameters were peer reviewed, full text articles from 1970 to 2016. The following search terms and combinations of terms were used to locate specific resources for the literature review: *vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, secondary traumatic stress, organizational trauma, child welfare, trauma exposure, intent to quit, intent to leave, turnover, predictors, organizational climate, organizational factors, supervision,* and *leadership*. Additional literature was gleaned from cited references in relevant articles as well as from my personal library of books and articles, online news resources, and personal experience as a 15-year child welfare employee.

## Theoretical Framework

### Vicarious Trauma, Secondary Trauma, and Compassion Fatigue

Theories of vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue emphasize the risks associated with working in professions that routinely expose employees to traumatized clients. The following section includes an explanation of the nuances of the terms vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue that are often used interchangeably in the literature. They are overlapping constructs that are each described as manifestations of work with traumatized clients and might occur simultaneously. I did not find definitive studies that delineate these constructs as separate and distinct constructs; therefore, for the purposes of this study, they will be treated as one construct, secondary traumatic stress, and will be measured with one instrument.

### McCann and Pearlman's Constructivist Self-Development Theory

McCann and Pearlman (1990) developed constructivist self-development theory as a framework to explain the psychological impact, or "vicarious traumatization" (p. 133) on those employed in helping professions who work with traumatized clients. McCann and Pearlman distinguished constructivist self-development theory from other constructs to relate to working with victims of trauma and proposed that the emotional vulnerability of the helper is at greater risk due to the exposure to particularly horrific imagery that accompanies severely traumatizing events. The theory is unique in that it encompasses both the circumstances of the specific trauma and the "unique psychological needs and cognitive schemas" (p. 136) of the helping professional into how the helping professional responds to client trauma. McCann and Pearlman theorized that people

construct reality based on cognitive perceptions of experiences and meaning is assigned to experiences through personal beliefs, assumptions, and expectations.

McCann and Pearlman (1990) defined schemas as "the cognitive manifestations of psychological needs" (p. 137) and identified seven psychological needs in relation to the ability to adjust to trauma: safety, dependency/trust, power, esteem, intimacy, independence, and frame of reference. Safety refers to a person's own feeling of security or the safety and security of others. Dependency/trust schemas are related to the level an individual is able to rely on others or expect the best in people. Power refers to the extent a person feels self-protective or effective in the world. Esteem represents the need to see others as kind and admirable. Intimacy refers to the ability to maintain close connection with others. Independence refers to the degree a person is able to act with autonomy, and frame of reference refers to a need to assign meaning to an experience. The need for frame of reference is represented as a need to understand why something happened and might lead to blaming the victim or continued disorientation if a helper's beliefs are continuously challenged by client trauma.

McCann and Pearlman (1990) proposed that trauma interferes with cognitive schemas according to the individual's own area of vulnerability. They theorized that this vulnerability extends to the helper's memory. For example, a therapist might have a strong need for security and, if exposed to a client who was a victim of a home invasion robbery, might experience his own fear corresponding to the fear expressed by the client. Consequently, the therapist might subsequently start having nightmares or otherwise intrusive thoughts associated with compromised safety. These thoughts are then

incorporated into the therapist's own memory. Another example of a disrupted schema is a when a helping professional experiences a shift in his or her belief system because of work with clients. For example, a social worker might see benign acts of affection between a parent and child as a sign of molestation after working with severely sexually abused children.

McCann and Pearlman (1990) emphasized the importance of using their theory to integrate effective coping mechanisms and support to environments where severely traumatized clients are serviced. McCann and Pearlman used their own experiences in therapeutic settings to apply their theory and structured specific support and processes to mitigate the impact of vicarious trauma. Support included providing groups where client challenges are discussed openly along with responses to client trauma. McCann and Pearlman encouraged helping professionals to use the theory to identify personal psychological needs and be aware of personal unresolved conflict or trauma that might interfere with an individual's ability to help victims of trauma.

Repeated exposure to traumatizing events or individuals experiencing the traumatizing events might increase the risk of experiencing vicarious trauma over time. Positive organizational climate might lessen the effects of the exposure to trauma and vicarious trauma response. Conversely, a negative organizational climate might exacerbate the vicarious trauma response and intensify an individual's intent to quit.

**Figley's Theory of Secondary Traumatic Stress or Compassion Fatigue**

Figley (1995a) described STSD as a condition that manifests in individuals who are exposed to victims of severe trauma. Figley coined the term "compassion fatigue" as

a substitute term for STSD but they essentially described the same phenomenon. Professionals such as therapists, emergency response personnel, and child protection workers are routinely exposed to traumatized victims and are at significant risk for developing secondary traumatic stress. Figley theorized that STSD symptoms mirror those of PTSD such as recurrent intrusive thoughts or nightmares, flashbacks, avoidance of people or other stimuli that trigger recollections of the traumatic event, exaggerated startle response (American Psychiatric Association, 2015). Figley (1995a) also theorized that the difference between PTSD and STSD is that STSD fluctuates in accordance with the PTSD client's symptom improvement. Figley (1995b) described his theory as emerging from a burgeoning field of Traumatology or study of traumatic stress and noted the first appearance of PTSD as a diagnosis in the DSM-III in 1980 (American Psychological Association, 1980). Figley (1995a) differentiated STSD from burnout as he described STSD as surfacing suddenly without warning whereas burnout is characterized as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach, Scaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) that emerges over time. Figley (1995b) also theorized that those suffering from STSD exhibit "a sense of helplessness, confusion and a sense of isolation from supporters" (p. 574). Like vicarious trauma, repeated exposure to traumatic events or traumatized clients might increase the likelihood of experiencing secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit whereas perceptions of supportive climate might lessen these effects.

**Kurt Lewin's Field Theory**

Kurt Lewin's field theory (1939) emerged out of an examination of adolescent groups. Lewin proposed that a person's emotional reaction to failure can be changed by his environment and described the tendency of adolescents to desire a decisive structure for ideals and values as a means to resolve conflict. Lewin described the "marginal man" (p. 881) as a person who remains on the boundary of groups without gaining full acceptance, thereby demonstrating behavioral manifestations of emotional instability or over-sensitivity. Lewin indicated that an individual's values are determined by the social circles to which a person belongs and that social and cultural factors influence how an individual manages stress. Lewin described field theory as "a method of gradual approximation by way of a stepwise increasing specificity" (p. 889). Lewin theorized that a mutual interdependence of factors could be observed to define a given situation rather than relying on specific facts which could distort the overall point of view. Mutual interdependence of aspects in a field can be used to explain environmental effects on the individual as both the individual and environment represent parts of the same field. This concept serves as a foundation for understanding organizational climate. A supportive work environment or climate might lessen the effects of direct or indirect trauma exposure. Additionally, a negative climate might exacerbate employee response to traumatic events or material and might also influence a decision to leave the organization. Later sections in this chapter will include a review of the literature associated with relationships between these variables.

## Empirical Literature

There is considerable research related to each of the study variables individually and a growing body of research connecting aspects of this study's variables. The following section includes an outline of some of the controversy in distinguishing vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue as constructs distinct from burnout; includes an examination of available research related to trauma exposure and vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue; and includes a review of literature related to organizational climate and turnover. Additionally, literature specific to examining this study's variables in the context of child welfare organizations will also be reviewed.

### Vicarious Trauma and Secondary Trauma vs. Burnout

Researchers have conducted many studies related to the concept of vicarious trauma since first coined by McCann and Pearlman (1990). Figley (1995a) wrote about the related concept of secondary traumatic stress disorder or compassion fatigue and many researchers in studies since have used these terms interchangeably (DeVilly, Wright, & Varker, 2009). The constructs of vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress are both described as resulting from exposure to clients, patients, or citizens who have directly experienced trauma. Howlett and Collins (2014) conceptualized vicarious trauma as both a cumulative disruption of belief systems and a mirroring of symptoms displayed by clients who are victims of trauma. This characterization merges the concepts of vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress. Vicarious trauma is differentiated from burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) as burnout is characterized as a loss of

passion for a person's job and can be experienced in any profession, whereas vicarious trauma is specific to professionals who encounter traumatized clients (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Negative responses to traumatized clients are thus differentiated from workload stressors which can occur in any profession. Although burnout measurement tools were originally developed for human services organizations (Maslach et al., 2001), the construct was expanded for use in many unrelated professions. Burnout is a well researched and defined psychological construct to represent responses to job stressors and is defined by Maslach et al.as including dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of accomplishment.

Researchers have found high positive correlations between both constructs of vicarious trauma and secondary trauma as well as between secondary traumatic stress and burnout (Cieslak et al., 2014; DeVilly, et al., 2009). DeVilly et al. (2009) examined all three constructs, secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and vicarious trauma together and included a control group to test the assumption that working with traumatized clients leads to secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma. DeVilly et al. found a moderately high positive correlation between secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma ($r$ = .49, $p$ < .01) indicating symmetry of constructs. DeVilly et al. also observed a high positive correlation between secondary traumatic stress and affective distress ($r$ = .51, $p$ < .01), between secondary traumatic stress and burnout ($r$ = .69, $p$ < .01) and between vicarious trauma and burnout ($r$ = .51, p < .01). However, DeVilly et al., observed that both secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma correlated more to burnout than to each other and concluded that the constructs of secondary traumatic stress, vicarious

trauma and burnout measured the same phenomenon (burnout) and had no relationship to exposure to traumatized clients or material thus contradicting Figley (1995b) and Pearlman & Saakvitne (1995).

Cieslak et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of studies examining relationships between indirect trauma exposure, secondary traumatic stress, and job burnout. Forty-one studies were included in the analysis and represented 8,256 professionals from all over the world who worked with traumatized populations such as social workers, nurses, therapists, firefighters, physicians, chaplains, soldiers, ambulance/rescue workers, first responders, law enforcement investigators, and childcare workers. The overarching results of the analysis indicated a positive correlation between job burnout and secondary traumatic stress and the effect size was large (weighted $r = .69$). The study also aimed to fill a research gap in evaluating differences between the constructs of job burnout (Maslach et al., 2001) and secondary traumatic stress or secondary PTSD (Bride et al., 2004), vicarious trauma (McCann & Pearlman, 1990), and compassion fatigue (Figley, 2002). Cieslak et al. (2014) noted a lack of consensus for the secondary traumatic stress construct. The study included moderator analysis to assist with clarification.

Cieslak et al. (2014) found that the effect size of the relationship between secondary traumatic stress scores and burnout scores was dependent on the type of measurement tool with a stronger correlation between the ProQOL subscales and job burnout than instruments capturing PTSD symptoms such as sleep disturbance, concentration difficulty, and exaggerated startle response ($r^2 = .53$ vs. $r^2 = .37$). Additionally, results indicated a stronger correlation between measurements of secondary

traumatic stress and the emotional exhaustion factor of job burnout than the depersonalization factor or the lack of accomplishment factor of job burnout. Cieslak et al. also found differences in the type of occupation related to the amount of exposure. The type of occupation moderated the relationship between secondary traumatic stress and job burnout. Correlations were stronger in samples with occupations that exposed professionals primarily to secondary trauma ($r^2$ =.52) vs. samples with occupations that exposed professionals to both first hand and secondary trauma ($r^2$ = .44). Cieslak et al. concluded that the same professional risk factors would leave employees susceptible to vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, secondary PTSD, and job burnout. Additional research is needed to examine specific risk factors predicting the development of vicarious trauma, burnout, and STSD/compassion fatigue. This study was limited because the original studies did not assess the level of exposure to trauma due to the nature of the work. Cieslak et al.'s findings indicated that the constructs of vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue are overlapping constructs that measure the same phenomenon. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, they will be treated as one construct, secondary traumatic stress, and will be measured with one instrument.

**Predictors of Secondary Traumatic Stress**

Research results that examined predictors of vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress are varied. There is research to support that demographic factors such as age, years of experience, and personal trauma history are strong predictors of secondary traumatic stress (Bonach & Heckert, 2012; Ewer, Teesson, Sannibale, Roche, & Mills, 2015; Hensel et al.,, 2015) and vicarious trauma (Cox & Steiner, 2013; Michalopoulos &

Aparicio, 2012). Additionally, researchers have found that organizational factors such as organizational satisfaction, external/internal job support (Bonach & Heckert, 2012) as well perceptions of workload (Kulkarni, Bell, Hartman, & Herman-Smith, 2013) and perceptions of positive working conditions (Thompson, Amatea, & Thompson, 2014) have emerged as predictors of secondary traumatic stress or compassion fatigue in domestic violence service providers, forensic interviewers, and mental health counselors. Researchers have also found that the personality characteristics of neuroticism ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), extraversion ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), and conscientiousness ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .005$) were statistically significant predictors of vicarious trauma among emergency medical personnel (Mairean & Turliuc, 2013) and emotional reactivity positively predicted secondary traumatic stress disorder in trauma therapists (Rzeszutek et al.,,2015). Sprang, Craig, and Clark (2011) also found that child welfare worker status was a statistically significant predictor of compassion fatigue ($p < .001$).

The next sections will include an examination of the pertinent literature concerning the relationships between this study's variables including (a) trauma exposure and secondary traumatic stress, (b) organizational climate and job stress, (c) organizational climate and secondary traumatic stress, and (d) organizational climate and turnover or intent to quit. I will then provide a summary of the literature findings and how they provide context for the study.

**Trauma Exposure and Secondary Traumatic Stress**

There is a growing body of literature describing vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue as a response to trauma exposure in a variety of

professions including researchers investigating sexual violence, volunteer crisis counselors, sexual violence counselors, nursing, law enforcement, legal professionals, chaplains, physicians, alcohol and drug counselors, and social workers (Bourke & Craun, 2014; Coles, Astbury, Dartnall, & Limjerwala, 2014; Didham, Dromgole, Csiernak, Karley, & Hurley, 2011; Ewer, et al., 2015; Galek et al., 2011; Howlett & Collins, 2014; Kahn et al.,,2016; Schauben & Frazier, 1999; Von Rueden et al., 2010; Vrklevski & Franklin, 2008). Researchers have found in qualitative studies that employees exposed to traumatized clients or material indicated feeling overwhelmed and unprepared to deal with client depictions of physical and sexual abuse or felt angry, frustrated, and powerless to help victims (Coles et al., 2014; Howlett & Collins, 2014). Regehr and Bober (2005) conducted interviews with 50 paramedics, firefighters, and police officers using semi structured questions specific to job stressors and the impact of stress and supports and found that the overall most commonly indicated and emotionally traumatic episodes for respondents involved child abuse and neglect. Kahn et al., (2016) found that physicians who worked 12 hours or more in a shift scored statistically significantly higher on measures of compassion fatigue than their counterparts who worked 8 hour shifts ($p < .05$). Hinderer et al. (2014) observed similar results among nurses providing direct care to trauma patients. Shifts lasting more than 8 hours were positively correlated with scores on measures of compassion fatigue ($p = .006$). Bourke and Craun (2014) found that child exploitation police investigators in both United States and United Kingdom samples scored higher on the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale when the frequency of exposure to child pornography was also high. Ewer et al. (2015) found that

alcohol and drug workers who had fewer hours of clinical supervision and a larger proportion of clients with trauma histories on their caseloads scored higher on measures of secondary traumatic stress. Additionally, Furlonger and Taylor (2013) found no statistically significant relationship between supervision and vicarious trauma among telephone and online helpline counselors. However, they also observed a moderate positive correlation between trauma caseload and vicarious trauma scores.

Child welfare personnel are unique in that the nature of the work is specifically focused on child abuse and neglect and could arguably be at most risk of traumatic exposure. Cornille and Meyers (1999) examined relationships between exposure to child abuse victim's traumatic material and secondary traumatic stress symptoms in child protection services workers and found that child protection services workers who worked longer than 40 hours per week reported more anger, irritability, exaggerated startle response, hypervigilance, nightmares, and intrusive thoughts and images than the group who worked less than 40 hours per week. The over 40 hour a week group also reported increased feelings of distress, depression, anxiety, hostility, suspicion, paranoia, and delusions compared to the under 40 hour a week group. Cornille and Meyers concluded that increased exposure to traumatized individuals and traumatic material as assessed in both years and hours per week increased susceptibility to secondary traumatic stress symptoms. The intensity of the exposure had no statistically significant relationship to caseload size and severity of secondary traumatic stress symptoms. Thus, the length of time spent on cases was more relevant than the caseload size. Female respondents had higher secondary traumatic stress scores and more physiological symptoms than male

respondents. This study was limited in that it did not account for potentially moderating organizational factors.

Hensel et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of 38 studies examining risk factors for secondary traumatic stress which included samples of child protection or welfare workers in addition to samples of professional counselors, therapists, domestic violence counselors, physicians, nurses and chaplains. The strongest effect size related to exposure was for caseload ratio of traumatized clients ($r = .19$). It should be noted that the year of publication was a moderating influence on caseload frequency indicating a decrease in effect sizes in publications after 2008. The authors suggested that increased awareness of secondary traumatic stress and efforts to promote self-care as potential reasons for the decrease. Dombo and Blome (2016) conducted a qualitative study exploring administrator knowledge of vicarious trauma response experienced by child welfare employees and organizational responses to vicarious trauma from a purposive sample of child welfare agency directors in the United States. Seven themes emerged from the structured interviews including strengths, barriers to addressing vicarious trauma in workers, organizational culture, organizational responsibility, training needs, need for clinical supervision, and lack of resources. Respondents indicated that cultures of blame and pressure to respond quickly to critical incidents such as child deaths inhibited supervisors and managers from addressing worker sensitivity to vicarious trauma and stress.

There is some research indicating that secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma may not be a result of trauma exposure. Van Minnen and Keijsers (2000) found

no statistically significant difference in secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma scores between trauma and non trauma therapists. Slattery and Goodman (2009) also found no statistically significant relationship between the number of hours spent in direct service to clients and secondary traumatic stress scores. DeVilly et al. (2009) found no statistically significant relationship between exposure to traumatic client material and vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress among mental health professionals in community based and private clinical practice. Additionally, DeVilly et al. observed high correlations between vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and work stress even though the constructs are distinctly different suggesting that secondary traumatic stress might not be trauma related. Recent qualitative research has indicated that workplace climate rather than exposure to client trauma emerged as a frequently expressed stressor among investigative interviewers of child abuse victims (Powell, Guadagno, & Cassematis, 2013). In summary, the research related to exposure is inconclusive and bears further examination. Some of the reasons for the disparity in results might be the sample population, the type of client trauma exposure, or a lack of a consistent and reliable instrument for exposure among studies. Dagan et al., 2015) found statistically significant differences between child protection social workers and social workers employed in other social services departments on secondary traumatic stress scores. This study includes an examination of trauma exposure as well as organizational climate as a moderating influence on secondary traumatic stress scores.

**Potential Covariates**

Prior studies have indicated correlations between age, race, length of service, personal trauma history and secondary traumatic stress response among workers employed in such professions as child advocacy, alcohol and drug counseling, social work, and child welfare (Bonach & Heckert, 2012; Cox & Steiner, 2013; Ewer et al., 2015; Hopkins et al., 2010). Bonach and Heckert (2012) found that respondents who had experienced one or more significant losses within the past year scored six points higher on measures of secondary trauma than those who had no loss experiences within the past year ($b = 6.03$, $p < .01$). Personal experience of loss emerged as the strongest predictor of secondary trauma with a beta of .24. Ewer et al. (2015) also found that workers with personal trauma histories were more likely to experience secondary traumatic stress (88.9% vs. 79.0%; OR 2.12, 95% CI 1.01-4.16). Hensel et al. (2015) found that having a personal history of trauma was positively related to secondary traumatic stress in all 38 studies included in their meta-analysis.. Bonach and Heckert (2012) found that age was an inverse predictor of secondary trauma ($b = -.20$, $p < .01$; $\beta = -.17$). Cox and Steiner (2013) found that social workers in public and private nonprofit social service organizations employed less than three years scored high or very high on measures of vicarious trauma compared to workers employed greater than three years. Michaelopoulos and Aparicio (2012) also found that inexperienced social workers were at greater risk for developing vicarious trauma. Hopkins et al. (2010) found higher propensity for job withdrawal in African American respondents employed in child welfare agencies. Similarly, Faller, Grabarek, and Ortega (2010) found differences in job

commitment levels between races in a child welfare organization and Acker (2008) found racial differences in intent to quit among mental health professionals. Therefore, this study controlled for associations of age, race, years of experience, and personal history of trauma on the dependent variables through hierarchical regression.

**The Impact of Organizational Climate**

Organizational climate is a well-researched construct that has been examined in a variety of contexts. Researchers have found that perceptions of organizational climate positively influenced organizational citizenship behaviors (Agyemang, 2013), positively correlated with job satisfaction, (Castro & Martins, 2010; Churchill, Ford, & Walker, 1976; Griffin, 2001; Tsai, 2014) and job involvement (Omolayo & Ajila, 2012). Organizational climate was negatively related to workplace bullying behaviors among university employees (Qureshi et al.,,2014) and burnout among police officers (Backteman-Erlanson, Padyab & Brulin, 2012). Researchers have also found that organizations with ethical organizational climates had less employee misconduct (Andreoli & Lefkowitz, 2009),

There is limited available research specifically identifying organizational climate as a study variable in child welfare literature. Aspects of organizational climate such as supervision, role clarity (Dickinson & Painter, 2009), autonomous decision making, role conflict, and social climate (Tham, 2007) were examined within the context of turnover intention. Recent research in the field of child welfare indicated that organizational climate contributed to child behavior outcomes (Glisson & Green, 2011) and employee turnover (Claiborne et al, 2011; Fernandes, 2016; Shim, 2010; Williams and Glisson,

2013). Additionally, Patterson Silver Wolf, et al. (2014) found disparate perceptions of organizational climate between senior managers and frontline workers in a single child welfare agency. Senior managers scored higher on positive perceptions of organizational climate than frontline workers. Organizational factors in human services studies have been measured in a variety of ways including the Perceptions of Working Conditions Scale (Thompson et al., 2014), the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1995); and the Workforce Retention Study Survey Instrument as developed by the New York State Social Work Education Consortium (Shim, 2014). The Organizational Social Context measure (Glisson, Green, & Williams, 2012) was used by researchers in child welfare in recent years to measure variables such as job satisfaction, organizational climate and culture (Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2014) and organizational climate and service outcomes (Glisson & Green, 2011). Results across studies were similar in that positive perceptions of organizational factors correlated with decreased compassion fatigue (Thompson et al., 2014), decreased intent to quit (Shim, 2014), increased job satisfaction and commitment (Glisson, Green & Williams, 2012). However, there was a lack of theoretical foundation in measures of climate as well as a lack of consistency across studies in how organizational climate was operationalized (Patterson, et al., 2005). Brown and Leigh's (1996) Psychological Climate Scale was based on the theoretical foundation of work values as interpreted by James and James (1989). Brown and Leigh's (1996) instrument has been used to measure relationships between organizational climate and productivity (Brown & Leigh 1996), psychological climate and job involvement (Biswas, 2011), psychological climate and work effectiveness (Kataria, Garg, & Rastogi,

2013), psychological climate, stress and ethical research practices (Wester, Willse, & Davis, 2010) and psychological climate and intent to quit (Shuck, Reio, &Rocco, 2011).

**Organizational Factors and Secondary Traumatic Stress**

Job stress is a phenomenon that is experienced by employees across industries. Researchers have found a statistically significant negative relationship between organizational climate and occupational stress (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). Nixon et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 79 cross-sectional and longitudinal studies to examine organizational stressors and physical symptoms of stress. The studies included for analysis used one or more measures for occupational and physical stressors at the individual level via self-report, included a correlation coefficient or a statistic that could be converted to correlation coefficient, and included study populations from only occupational settings. Nixon et al. found that organizational factors had statistically significant relationships with physical symptoms of stress. Organizational factors included organizational constraints or obstructions to completing a person's tasks such as lack of authority, unclear instructions, insufficient time or resources for completion, role ambiguity, role conflict, workload, and work hours. Organizational constraints had the strongest weighted correlation with physical symptoms of stress (*wr* = *.33*). Physical symptoms included backache, headache, eye strain, sleep disturbance, dizziness, fatigue, appetite loss, and gastrointestinal problems. It should be noted that sleep disturbances are also characteristic of secondary traumatic stress (Figley, 1995b). Nixon et al. (2011) found that role conflict positively correlated with stress symptoms (*wr* = *.27*), as did

interpersonal conflict (*wr = .22*), workload (*wr = .22*), role ambiguity (*wr = .15*), work hours (*wr = .09*), and lack of control (*wr = .07*).

Researchers found a statistically significant inverse relationship between perceptions of working conditions, as measured by the Perceptions of Working Conditions Scale (Thompson et al., 2014), and compassion fatigue ($r = -.361$, $p < .001$), as measured by the secondary traumatic stress subscale of the Professional Quality of Life Scale 5 (ProQOL: Stamm,2010). Green, Albanese, Shapiro, and Aarons (2014) analyzed levels of burnout among various mental health disciplines and programs and the influence of demographics, work characteristics and organizational factors and found that higher role clarity, cooperation, and higher perceptions of transformational leadership behaviors were positively correlated with perceptions of personal accomplishment and that higher role conflict and role overload were positively correlated to higher scores of depersonalization. Green et al. observed no statistically significant differences in levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment in relation to professional discipline. They also observed no statistically significant differences between program type and personal accomplishment or emotional exhaustion. However, a statistically significant effect emerged in relation to depersonalization between traditional case managers and wraparound providers. Wraparound providers had considerably more contact with clients.

Researchers used structural equation modeling to test a model for understanding traumatic response in child welfare workers (Regehr, Hemsworth, Leslie, Howe, and Chau, 2004). Regehr et al.'s review of the literature indicated that three latent variables

related to symptoms of post-traumatic stress: individual factors, organizational factors, and incident factors. Organizational factors consisted of workload, (high caseload, court appearances, excessive paperwork, and negative public perception) and professional supports. Incident factors included level of exposure to traumatic events in the past year and length of time since the traumatic event. Individual factors were defined as the personality factors of egocentricity, insecurity, social incompetence, and a sense of control. Results indicated that higher levels of individual factors had a statistically significant relationship to distress ($\gamma_{11} = .29$, $p < .001$). The higher a person's relational disturbances and feelings of loss of control, the higher respondents reported levels of distress. Additionally, workload stressors increased as levels of distress increased. Regehr et al. (2004) also found that levels of distress increased as the number of events in the past year increased and length of time since the last event decreased. The strongest association with distress occurred with organizational factors ($\gamma_{21} = .36$) and appeared to exacerbate the experiences of traumatic events. Regehr et al. also found that supervisory and management support had minimal impact on symptoms of distress.

Bonach and Heckert (2012) examined organizational satisfaction, organizational buffers, and job support as potential predictors of secondary traumatic stress and found no statistically significant relationship between organizational satisfaction and secondary traumatic stress ($r = -.07$, $p = .261$) and no statistically significant relationship between organizational buffers and secondary traumatic stress in the multivariate analysis. However, all three dimensions of organizational buffers: leader and secondary traumatic stress ($r = -.14$, $p = .01$, one-tailed), job efficacy and secondary traumatic stress ($r = -.11$,

$p$ = .05, one-tailed) and team cooperation and secondary traumatic stress ($r$ = -.12, $p$ = .03, one-tailed) indicated statistically significant, but weak, negative correlations with secondary traumatic stress. Job support had a moderate statistically significant inverse relationship with secondary traumatic stress ($r$ = -.38, $p$ < .01). Results also indicated two of the control variables, age and whether the respondent had experienced a significant loss within the past year, were statistically significant predictors of secondary traumatic stress. The latter was the strongest predictor of all.

**Organizational Climate and Turnover/Intent to Quit in Child Welfare**

Researchers have found organizational climate factors are often cited by respondents as instrumental in influencing intent to quit in industries such as insurance (Fu & Deshpande, 2014), nursing, science, correctional facilities, and manufacturing (Randhawa & Kaur, 2014). Researchers have found that transformational leadership has positively correlated with empowered organizational climate and lower turnover intention whereas a demoralized climate positively correlated with turnover intention (Aarons, Summerfield, & Willigig, 2011).

Many studies have examined turnover in child welfare organizations because it is a chronic problem in the industry that has impacted timely investigations of child abuse, foster or relative care placement stability, and an appropriately trained workforce (GAO, 2003). Clark (2012) conducted a California study to examine retention rates of social work graduates in 58 counties and found that there was a 10.7% decrease in the overall public child welfare workforce of social workers and supervisors and a 21.4% decrease in case carrying social workers between 2008 and 2011. Jankoski's (2010) qualitative study

results indicated that vicarious trauma was largely responsible for turnover among child welfare case workers, managers, supervisors, and support staff from focus groups conducted in 16 counties of a mid-Atlantic state. However, Johnco, Salloum, Olson, and Edwards (2014) qualitative study results indicated that system problems, high workload, overtime issues, and low compensation were the themes surrounding intent to leave among direct care case managers and supervisors from six child welfare agencies in south Florida. No theme emerged related to exposure to traumatized clients as a factor driving intent to quit in Johnco et al.'s results.

Kim and Kao (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of existing literature related to turnover intention predictors among child welfare professionals in the United States. Turnover was defined as either the intention to leave or the intention to remain employed. Twenty-two studies were included in the analysis. Studies were selected on the basis of relevance to the field of child welfare and turnover/intent to leave, sufficient sample size, correlation matrix, and reliability. Only studies conducted on or after 2008 were included in the analysis. Kim and Kao combined correlation coefficients from each study. Predictors of turnover were categorized as follows: work related, work environment, and attitudes/perceptions. Results indicated that of the demographic factors, age ($r$ = -.22), and length of employment ($r$ = -.17) were the strongest predictors of turnover intention. Both variables had a negative relationship to turnover intention indicating that older child welfare workers who had longer employment histories with the agency were less likely to leave their employers. Kim and Kao observed a small effect ($r$ = .10) with regard to level of education indicating higher turnover intentions with higher education.

Kim and Kao (2014) found that among the work related predictors that autonomy ($r$ = -.23) and inclusion in decision making ($r$ = -.35) were negatively correlated to turnover intention and that overall stress ($r$ = .60) and safety concerns ($r$ = .49) were highly positively correlated to turnover intention. Stress alone accounted for 36% of the variance in turnover intention. Role conflict ($r$ = .39), role ambiguity ($r$ = .33), and job demand ($r$ = .28) had medium effect sizes in relation to turnover intention. Organizational support was the strongest predictor of turnover intention among the work environment variables ($r$ = -.42), followed by organizational culture ($r$ = -.41), supervisor support ($r$ = -.32), coworker support ($r$ = -.24), and professionalism ($r$ = -.16). Perceptions of fairness in pay, benefits, and promotions were strong predictors of turnover intention ($r$ = -.42) as was financial reward ($r$ = -.29.). Organizational climate was categorized with attitudes/perceptions and was defined as "the overall perception about their work place environment" (p. 219). Results indicated a strong negative correlation between organizational climate and turnover intention ($r$ = -.44).

Spath, Strand, and Bosco-Ruggiero (2013) explored conditions that impacted organizational culture and worker intent to leave in one public child welfare organization. This particular study represented the third stage in a larger body of work conducted by the researchers. The previous stages involved quantitative surveys that provided information about job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Results from the previous stages of inquiry indicated that the organizational factors of supervision, working conditions, and internal supports predicted job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intent to leave (Strand, Spath, & Bosco-Ruggiero, 2010). Negative

perceptions of organizational culture positively correlated with intent to leave. The stated goal of the third phase was to gain further insight into these findings through qualitative inquiry (Spath et al., 2013). Four key themes emerged in relation to job satisfaction, organizational culture, and intent to leave: communication, lack of recognition, workload, and working conditions.

Aarons, Sommerfield, and Willging (2011) examined relationships between leadership, organizational climate, turnover intentions and voluntary turnover during a statewide behavioral health system reform. Data were collected from a purposive sample of 190 participants in 14 agencies in both rural and metropolitan counties in New Mexico at two different times following initiation of the reform. Participants in all but one agency included providers of direct services to clients, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, case managers, counselors, and psychosocial rehabilitation coordinators. Administrators and support staff were also included in the sample. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1995) was used to assess transformational leadership. Empowering and demoralizing climate was measured by selected items from the Children's Services Survey (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998). Turnover intentions were measured using five items from organizational literature and adapted for human services organizations. Voluntary turnover was evaluated through follow-up interviews with employees. Results indicated that transformational leadership practices were positively correlated with empowering climates and negatively correlated to demoralizing climates that experienced high stress related to the reform initiative. Additionally, empowering

climates negatively correlated to turnover intentions and demoralizing climates positively correlated to turnover intentions.

Chenot, Benton, and Kim (2009) examined the relationship between supervisor and peer support as well as organizational culture and child welfare worker retention at various points in a worker's career and found that supervisor support was a statistically significant predictor of staff retention whereas peer support was not. Additionally, a passive, defensive culture negatively impacted staff retention across groups. Dickinson and Painter (2009) examined predictors for turnover among child welfare employees including validating intent to leave as a predictor for actual turnover and found a statistically significant predictive relationship between intent to leave and actual turnover. Additionally, depersonalization, supervisor practice support, supervisor team support, supervisor emotional support as well as organizational commitment, shared authority, and growth and advancement opportunities had statistically significant relationships to intent to leave. Those who left were employed less than 2 years and scored lower on the supervisor practice support indicator.

Hopkins et al. (2010) examined behavioral antecedents to turnover in child welfare employees and proposed that turnover manifests as a progression of withdrawal behaviors such as lateness, absenteeism, efforts to transfer, or search for another position. Turnover was operationalized as withdrawal behaviors. Only workers who carried caseloads and conducted home calls were included in the study. Bivariate correlations were tested using Pearson's product moment correlation and hierarchical regression analysis was used to determine factors most likely to contribute to withdrawal behaviors

(Hopkins et al., 2010). Hopkins et al. found that job withdrawal accounted for 53.6% of the variance in work withdrawal. Personal factors such as age, gender, tenure and race accounted for 15.3% of the variance in job withdrawal on step 1. Organizational environment accounted for an additional 35.4% of the variance on step 2; and, attitudinal response (morale) accounted for 2.9% of the variance on step 3. Stress ($p < .001$) was the most statistically significant contributor to job withdrawal, followed by being a person of color ($p < .001$- located in areas where morale lowest and safety concerns highest). Stress was characterized as role conflict, role overload, and emotional exhaustion. Lack of inclusion in decision making ($p < .05$) and experiences with personal safety issues ($p < .05$) positively correlated to job withdrawal. Higher morale ($p < .001$), encompassing job satisfaction and organizational commitment, was positively related to lower levels of job withdrawal. The model for work withdrawal was also statistically significant and accounted for 42.7% of the variance in work withdrawal. Personal and work factors explained 10.6% of the variance on step one, perceptions of the organizational environment explained an additional 32.1% on step two, and attitudinal response (morale) accounted for no additional variance at step three. Stress ($p < .001$) was the most statistically significant contributor to work withdrawal. Longer tenure ($p < .01$), coworker support ($p < .05$), and experiences with personal safety issues ($p < .05$) also correlated with increased work withdrawal. Older age ($p < .01$), being female ($p < .05$), and higher salary ($p < .01$) were related to lower levels of work withdrawal.

Claiborne et al. (2011) examined the relationships between organizational climate and commitment, specifically agency investment, among child welfare workers employed

in private, nongovernmental organizations. Commitment was operationalized as how invested employees feel toward the agencies in which they work. Organizational climate was operationalized as individual perception of work environment and measured using the psychological climate survey as modified by Parker et al. (2003). The construct included four dimensions: role, job, organization, and supervisor. The organizational climate dimensions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree. The role dimension contained three subscales: ambiguity, conflict, and overload. Job dimension included the importance, autonomy and challenge sub-scales. The organization dimension included the innovation, justice and support sub-scales and the supervisor dimension included the trust and support, goal emphasis, and work facilitation subscales. Climate was sharply defined as the shared perception of work environment and well-being. Claiborne et al. (2011) found statistically significant relationships between the organizational climate subscales of autonomy, challenge, and innovation and the latent variable agency investment. Results also indicated autonomy, challenge, and innovation were predictors of organizational commitment.

**Relationships between Proposed Study Variables among Child Welfare Workers**

Table A1 (Appendix A) represents all published studies that investigated relationships between at least two of the proposed study variables among populations of child welfare employees. The table is ordered by author names and emphasizes the research questions or objectives of each study and the represented variables. Of the 18 studies that are summarized in Table A1, 14 studies included organizational climate or aspects of organizational climate such as supervision, role ambiguity, role overload,

workload, or autonomy in relation to intent to quit or secondary traumatic stress. Of the 14 studies including organizational climate or aspects of organizational climate in relation to secondary traumatic stress or intent to quit, only two studies included level of exposure as an independent variable (Dagan et al., 2015; Dombo & Blome, 2016). One study was qualitative (Dombo & Blome, 2016) and the other was quantitative (Dagan et al., 2015).

Dagan et al. (2015) examined secondary traumatic stress scores among social workers employed in different human services settings and how exposure to traumatized children and aspects of organizational climate and years of experience might contribute to secondary traumatic stress. The study participants consisted of a convenience sample of 255 social workers, 124 of which were child protection workers, employed at least one month, and participating in conferences and training courses in a school for social work located in Israel. The researchers observed differing and statistically significant levels of exposure to cases of child abuse between the child protection social workers and the social workers employed in other departments. Child protection workers had higher levels of exposure than other social workers ($M$ = 22.93 h per week, $SD$ = 13.3, vs. $M$ = 13.6 h per week, $SD$ = 10.9); $F$ (1, 234) = 33.61, $p < .001$. Dagan et al. used the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (Bride et al., 2004) to measure secondary traumatic stress, and a scale developed by Lazar and Itzhaky (2000) to measure effectiveness of supervision. The role stress variable was measured by an instrument developed by Bhagat, Allie, and Ford (1991) and included subscales of role ambiguity, role overload, and role conflict. Results indicated that child protection workers had higher secondary

traumatic stress scores than other social workers ($p < .01$); effectiveness of supervision negatively correlated with secondary traumatic stress scores ($r = -.17$, $p < .01$); and role stress positively correlated with secondary traumatic stress scores ($r = .35$, $p < .01$). This study was limited in that it did not include intent to quit as a dependent variable and did not specifically operationalize organizational climate as a moderating variable. Only one study operationalized organizational climate factors into a conceptual framework for evaluating turnover (Hopkins et al., 2010). However, Hopkins et al. did not consider exposure to traumatized clients as a predictor variable or secondary traumatic stress as a potential outcome. None of the studies presented in Table A1 assessed the level of trauma exposure in relation to secondary traumatic stress response and intent to quit with an operationally defined moderating variable of organizational climate.

## Summary, Conclusions, and Transition

Vicarious trauma is a condition that surfaces in individuals exposed to traumatic situations, material, and traumatized individuals that is characterized by a negative alteration of cognitive schemas and worldview (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Secondary trauma and compassion fatigue are similar conditions manifesting from prolonged exposure to traumatizing material, events, or traumatized individuals and is characterized by symptoms of hyper arousal that mirror symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (Figley, 1995). Researchers have used the terms of vicarious trauma and secondary trauma interchangeably with compassion fatigue and found that symptoms vary according to training, experience, and personal histories of trauma (DeVilly et al., 2009). DeVilly et al. found a moderately high correlation between the concepts of vicarious and

secondary trauma indicating symmetry of constructs. Therefore, for the purposes of the proposed study, the terms vicarious trauma and secondary trauma will be characterized as secondary traumatic stress. Researchers have found that secondary trauma is more prevalent in occupations exposed primarily to secondary exposure than to occupations exposed to both primary and secondary experiences of trauma (Cieslak et al., 2014). Employees exposed to traumatized clients reported feeling angry, overwhelmed, and otherwise disturbed without sufficient supports in place to process secondary trauma (Coles et al., 2014; Howlett & Collins, 2014; Von Rueden et al., 2010). There is limited available research on the impact of secondary traumatic stress in child welfare organizations (Cox & Steiner, 2013) and study results have been mixed. Cox and Steiner (2013) found higher scores on vicarious trauma measures among those employed less than two years, whereas Myers and Cornille (2002) found higher scores on measures of secondary traumatic stress in workers employed greater than five years than those employed less than five years.

Researchers have found that secondary traumatic stress is a factor in voluntary turnover among child welfare professionals (Jankoski, 2010; Regher et al., 2004) and that organizational factors such as organizational/psychological climate, perceived supervisory/management support, and inclusion in decision making are statistically significant predictors of turnover in human services or child welfare organizations (Aarons et al., 2011; Claiborne et al., 2011; Chenot et al., 2009; Dickinson & Painter, 2009; Hopkins et al., 2010; Kim & Kao, 2014,Spath et al., 2013). A review of the pertinent literature indicated that organizational factors, such as supervisor support and

workload are predictors of secondary trauma response (Allen, 2010; Bonach & Heckert, 2012; Regehr et al., 2004). Regehr et al. (2004) also considered level of exposure as a factor in traumatic response and included clerical and management staff as part of the organizational sample. However, Regehr et al. did not include organizational climate as a moderating factor and did not consider reading traumatic material or hearing traumatic stories as exposure to trauma. The two remaining studies were also limited in that neither study included trauma exposure as an independent variable or organizational climate as a specific moderating variable. None of the three studies included intent to quit as a variable.

Some studies have indicated that trauma exposure is not related to secondary traumatic stress (DeVilly, 2009; Slattery & Goodman, 2009; Van Minnen & Keijsers, 2000). Child protection workers are more likely to experience secondary traumatic stress than social workers employed in other organizations (Dagan et al., 2015; Sprang et al., 2011) and organizational aspects of supervision and role stress contribute to higher secondary traumatic stress (Dagan et al., 2015). However, recent qualitative findings indicated that organizational climate is more likely to cause stress than exposure to traumatized clients or material (Powell, Guadagno, & Cassematis, 2013). More research is needed to examine trauma exposure in relation to secondary traumatic stress and how organizational climate might moderate the exposure and/or intent to quit. Therefore, this study examined relationships between these variables while controlling for the potentially confounding variables of age, race, length of service, and personal trauma history. Chapter Three will include a detailed description of the methodology for data collection

and testing each hypothesis, as well as the research design, sample, and measurement instruments.

# Chapter 3: Method

The purposes of this study were to examine (a) the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations (IV) and secondary traumatic stress (DV), (b) the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material (IV) and intent to quit (DV), (c) the relationship between organizational climate (IV) and secondary traumatic stress (DV), and (d) organizational climate as a moderator of the relationships between exposure to traumatic situations or material (IV) and secondary traumatic stress (DV) and intent to quit (DV). This chapter will include a description of the research design and methodology including the sample population, data collection methods, statistical analysis and validity and reliability of the measurement instruments used for this study.

## Research Design and Rationale

In this cross-sectional study, I used survey methods to study multivariate relationships including exposure to trauma, organizational climate, secondary traumatic stress, and intent to quit among a sample of child protection employees in California. The survey was administered online, and participants were recruited through an e-mail solicitation containing a web link sent by the administration of a child protection services agency and were completely anonymous. Participants were asked to complete a structured survey that covered the following topics: exposure to potentially traumatizing situations and/or material, supportive management, role clarity, contribution, recognition, challenge, post-traumatic stress symptoms, intent to quit, and demographics. Organizational research entails the evaluation of individuals, groups and the effects of organizational structure and processes that impact worker behavior and organizational

functioning (Robbins & Judge, 2011). Employee perceptions of trauma exposure, organizational climate, secondary traumatic stress, and intent to quit are data that cannot be manipulated through experimental or quasi-experimental methods. Therefore, a survey design was most appropriate for the study.

## Methodology

### Population and Sampling

The site for the study was a public child welfare organization in the state of California. The study population consisted of employees that currently work in regional offices where direct services are provided to clients. Clients in the community represented a population varied in ethnicity/race and economic status. Client services included child abuse/neglect investigation, case management, and adoption services. The study site contained social workers who perform investigative and case management functions, supervisors, managers, and support staff who perform visitation monitoring, foster placement searches, and various clerical functions. Employees who volunteered to participate in the study were classified in the following categories: supervisors and children's social workers.

Consideration of statistical power, effect size, expected variability, and alpha level are necessary in calculating an appropriate sample size (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). An alpha of .05 and statistical power of .80 was used to minimize both Type I (rejection of null hypothesis by mistake) and Type II (retaining null hypothesis when it should be rejected) errors. A medium to large effect size for multiple regression analysis ranges from .15 to .35 (Cohen 1992). The effect size estimate in current literature

between cumulative trauma exposure and vicarious trauma ($r$ = .31), secondary traumatic stress ($r$ = .17; Vrklevski & Franklin, 2008; Furlonger & Taylor, 2013), indicates medium to large effect and a desired sample range between $N$ = 63 and $N$ = 123 (Soper, 2016). The proposed sample was no less than $N$ = 123. This estimate was based on the assumption that there were a total of two predictor variables, organizational climate, and trauma exposure and four control variables: age, race, years of experience, and personal history of trauma. I controlled for associations of age, race, years of experience, and personal history of trauma on the dependent variables of secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit through hierarchical regression. However, the total sample used in the analyses was $N$ = 67.

**Procedure for Recruitment and Data Collection**

Participants were recruited through e-mail after obtaining a letter of cooperation from the identified public child welfare organization. The letter of cooperation is provided in Appendix B. Because the survey was voluntary and completely anonymous, each participant was provided informed consent in writing via electronic link to the survey which included clear descriptions of the procedures, anticipated risks, and potential benefits from participation. A statement that clicking on a link to the survey indicated consent to participation appeared prior to respondent direction to the survey. Participants saw a statement that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time for any reason. No names or employee numbers were requested, and participant identities remained unknown to me. Surveys were delivered and received through survey monkey to ensure the anonymity of the respondents. All applicable IRB-

approved (06-19-17-0348069) procedures were followed, in accordance with IRB guidance on study conduct.

**Instrumentation and Materials**

The source of data for this study was confidential online survey responses to four separate instruments measuring (a) exposure to traumatic situations or material as measured by seven items from a scale developed by Horwitz (2006); (b) secondary traumatic stress, as measured by the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (Bride et al., 2004); (c) organizational climate as measured by the Psychological Climate Scale (Brown & Leigh, 1996); and (d) intent to quit as measured by a single item as constructed by Tham (2007). Permissions to use these instruments are documented in Appendix G. Demographic information related to age, length of service, and race were also collected.

**Exposure to traumatic situations or material.** The independent variable in this study was exposure to traumatic situations or traumatic material and was operationalized as the degree to which an employee is exposed to traumatized clients, hears, or reads stories about traumatized clients, and the frequency of the exposure. It was measured by seven items from a scale developed by Horwitz (2006). Factor analysis results for the seven items indicated that there are two items related to direct exposure ($r = .50$, $p < .000$). The three items indicating indirect exposure were loaded together as a composite variable with an alpha reliability of .7380. Two additional items were described as infrequent occurrences and analyzed separately. The items are rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 6 where 1= never having had the experience, 2 = having had the experience 1 to 5 times in the past three months, 3 = having had the experience 6 to 10

times in the past three months, 4 = having had the experience 11 to 15 times in the past three months, 5 = having had the experience 16 to 20 times in the past 3 months, and 6 = having had the experience more than 20 times in the past 3 months. Similar scales have been developed for specific populations such as nurses and employees of the legal profession (Hinderer et al., 2014; Vrklevski & Franklin, 2008). Other researchers have used qualitative methods to determine exposure (Didham et al., 2011; Furlonger & Taylor, 2013; Jankoski, 2010).

**Secondary traumatic stress.** One dependent variable was secondary traumatic stress response and was measured by the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (Bride et al., 2004). Bride et al. (2004) developed the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale to assess what Figley (1995) described as symptoms that mirror PTSD symptoms, as defined by the DSM IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2004), that result from indirect exposure to traumatic events through helping individuals who have directly experienced such events. The Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (Bride et al., 2004) is a 17-item measurement instrument derived from three indicators of post-traumatic stress: intrusion, avoidance, and arousal symptoms using a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 = Never, 2 = rarely, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Often, and 5 = Very often. The original 36 items were vetted by five subject matter experts in secondary traumatic stress who confirmed content validity. A 65-item version of the scale was pilot tested to reduce the number of items using a convenience sample of 37 direct service providers.

Cronbach's alpha (α) has been used to ensure that repeated measurements of an instrument will demonstrate the same result and scores closer to 1.00 indicate higher

consistency of items (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The coefficient alpha for the 50-item version of the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale was .97 (Bride et al., 2004). Coefficient alphas for each of the subscales were as follows: intrusion (α = .92), avoidance (α = .89), and arousal (α = .94). Ting et al. (2005) conducted confirmatory factor analysis of the instrument using a sample of 275 social workers. Factor loadings ranged from .46 to .82 and t values ranged from 9.27 to 15.12. The three dimensions of the instrument were highly correlated to each other (Intrusion-Avoidance $r$ = .96, Intrusion-Arousal $r$ = .96, Avoidance-Arousal $r$ = 1.0). According to Bride et al. (2004), high correlations between these factors are to be expected. However, such high correlations might indicate the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale is a one-dimensional instrument rather than one that measures three separate constructs. Bride et al. used coefficient alpha to assess internal consistency of items and affirmed the underlying construct by means of internal consistency. Means, standard deviations and alpha levels for the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale and its subscales were: Full Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale ($M$ = 29.49, $SD$ = 10.76; α = .93), Intrusion ($M$ = 8.11, $SD$ = 3.03; α = .80), Avoidance ($M$ = 12.49, $SD$ = 5.00, α = .87), and Arousal ($M$ = 8.89, $SD$ = 3.57, α = .83).

**Intent to quit.** The other dependent variable in the study is intent to quit and was measured using a single item as described by Tham (2007). Dickinson and Painter (2009) found a significant negative correlation between workers' experiences of supervisor practice support and supervisor emotional support and intent to leave child welfare organizations and further established intent to leave as a predictor to actual turnover. Tham's single item "How likely is it that within the next year you will be actively

looking for a new job?" (p. 1232) is measured using four choices: 1) not at all likely, 2) not very likely, 3) fairly likely, and 4) very likely. Responses were analyzed by reducing responses to two alternative choices.

**Organizational climate.** The moderating variable in the study was organizational climate and was measured using the Psychological Climate Scale (Brown & Leigh, 1996). Brown and Leigh (1996) developed the 21-item measure based on Kahn's (1990) theory that organizational factors contribute to engagement and disengagement at work. Each item was rated on a 7-point Likert type scale with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Brown and Leigh's instrument also had a foundation in James, James, and Ashe's (1990) higher order factors of psychological climate. Brown and Leigh also incorporated self-expression, perceived contribution, and recognition in their operational definition of organizational climate. Two higher order factors of psychological safety and meaningfulness were evaluated in relation to six dimensions of climate using second-order confirmatory factor analysis. Psychological safety was defined as the degree to which an employee is able to exercise self-expression "without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" (Kahn, 1990, p. 708). Brown and Leigh posited that three dimensions of psychological climate were likely to align with psychological safety: supportive management, clarity, and self-expression. Brown and Leigh defined psychological meaningfulness as the degree and employee feels their work is "challenging, worthwhile, and rewarding" (p. 360). The three dimensions of psychological climate to align under this higher order factor were perceived meaningfulness of contribution, recognition, and challenge.

Brown and Leigh (1996) tested their model on two independent samples of salespeople. Goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = .781, root mean square residual =.141, and root mean square error of approximation = .083. The GFI of this model was then compared to a model that included one second order factor as described by James et al. (1990) as a general psychological climate factor resulting in GFI =.781, root mean square residual = .141, and root mean square error of approximation = .083. The correlation between psychological safety and meaningfulness was high between both samples (.888 and .965) indicating the single factor described by James et al. was represented by this instrument. There were no statistically significant differences in factor loadings of climate between the two samples indicating construct validity. The instrument was also reliable with coefficient alphas ranging between .70 and .85 for each item. Brown and Leigh's instrument has been used in a number of studies to test relationships between organizational climate and job involvement, effort, performance, work engagement, organizational effectiveness, and levels of perceived stress (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Kataria et al.,,2013; Wester et al., 2010). Reliability coefficients for the instrument in studies using this instrument were .84 (Kataria et al., 2013) .87 for the psychological safety factor and .85 for the psychological meaningfulness factor (Wester et al., 2010).

**Participant characteristics.** Age, race, length of service, and personal trauma history were measured to describe the sample. Age and length of service were measured on a continuous scale. Race was measured by asking participants to select the race that best describes them from the following: White, Black/African American, American Indian or Alaskan native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, multiple

races, and Other race. Personal trauma history was measured by using a modified checklist based on life events that have been associated with the development of PTSD including combat or war-like circumstance, life threatening accident, natural disaster, witnessing someone being badly injured or killed, being physically or sexually abused or neglected as a child or adult, being threatened with a weapon or kidnapped, or seeing one of these events happen to someone close to the participant (Updegraff, Taylor, Kemeny, & Wyatt, 2002). These data will be used to both describe the participants and treated as block covariates on the first step of hierarchical regression. Early data were assessed to ensure that all measures were completed and correlated in the expected direction, and assessed for patterns of missing data.

## Data Analysis Plan

I used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 24.0 software to analyze data collected from survey responses. I screened and cleaned data for outliers, missing data, and assumption violations. I also used scatterplot diagrams and other methods such as frequency histograms with normal curves to screen for outliers. Outliers, or cases with extreme values, were examined individually to determine variable differences and evaluated for data entry error. I then explored remedies to address the impact of outliers on the distribution of scores for a variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations and secondary traumatic stress among direct service child welfare employees?

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$1): Exposure to traumatic situations will not relate positively to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees.

Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$1): Exposure to traumatic situations or material will relate positively to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and employee intent to quit among child welfare employees?

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$2): Exposure to traumatic situations or material will not relate positively to intent to quit among child welfare employees.

Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$2): Exposure to traumatic situations or material will relate positively to intent to quit among child welfare employees.

Research Question 3: What relationship does organizational climate have to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees?

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$3): Organizational climate is not related to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees.

Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$3): Organizational climate will be inversely related to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees. Specifically, a relatively positive employee perception of organizational climate will be associated with lower levels of self-reported secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees.

Research Question 4: To what extent will organizational climate moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material, secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit among child welfare employees?

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$4a): Organizational climate will not moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees.

Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$4a): Organizational climate will moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees.

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$4b): Organizational climate will not moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and intent to quit among child welfare employees.

Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$4b): Organizational climate will moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and intent to quit among child welfare employees.

I used Pearson product-moment correlations to examine Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. Hierarchical regression analysis was used to examine Hypotheses 4a and 4b. Spearman correlations were used with categorical covariates. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), "the statistical analysis must measure and test the differential effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable as a function of the moderator" (p. 1174). Baron and Kenny offered that consideration of moderator-mediator analysis is dependent on the strength of the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables. If the relationship is strong with one classification or subpopulation but not another, a moderator is indicated. To test for an interaction effect, I created an interaction term by multiplying the variables of organizational climate and trauma exposure. I entered the

interaction term as a last step in the regression analysis after controlling for the covariates and main effects of organizational climate and trauma exposure. If the interaction term was statistically significant or marginally significant ($p < .10$), I intended to generate a plot for the continuous variable of trauma exposure and distinct values of organizational climate in order to understand and interpret the impact of organizational climate on vicarious/secondary trauma response and intent to quit (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

## Threats to Validity

Survey instruments with established records of validity and reliability were selected to measure trauma exposure, organizational climate, secondary traumatic stress, and intent to quit in an effort to minimize threats to validity. However, threats to a) internal validity, b) external validity, c) construct validity, and d) statistical conclusion validity were possible. One threat to internal validity was the confounding of causal relationships. The study design was non experimental. Therefore, causal relationships could not be determined (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Selection bias might have been a threat to internal validity with this design. Self-reporting responders might have differed from non responders in systematic ways. Demographics of participants and overall organizational members were compared to account for potential variations. Voluntary participants might not have provided a clear picture of the degree of differentiation related to both trauma exposure and secondary trauma response among all line social workers and supervisors since there were variations in the type of work performed in each category. Children's Social Workers (CSWs) could be categorized as emergency response, dependency investigators, family maintenance and reunification, adoption, or

specialized program workers. All of these variations might have contributed to different results within each group in terms of trauma exposure and secondary traumatic stress response as well as perceptions of organizational climate. Additionally, personal trauma history, years of experience, age and /or race might have also impacted results. Prior studies indicated that these factors were related to secondary traumatic stress response or intent to quit which could have confounded results of this study. Personal trauma history of respondents positively correlated with secondary trauma response (Baird & Kracen, 2006; Ewer et al., 2015; Hensel et al., 2015). Researchers found that years of experience inversely related to secondary traumatic stress scores (Cox & Steiner, 2013; Michalopoulos & Aparicio, 2012). Bonach and Heckert (2012) found that age was inversely related to secondary traumatic stress scores and Hopkins et al. (2010) found important differences between the reported race of participants and job withdrawal indicators among child welfare workers. Acker (2008) found that white workers reported higher intent to quit than nonwhite workers among mental health service providers whereas Faller et al., (2010) found that nonwhites reported lower levels of job commitment than whites in a child welfare agency. Controlling for these factors through hierarchical regression aided in the interpretation of the stated hypotheses.

The three major threats to external validity are people, place, and time (Trochim, 2006). This study measured variables using instruments in an online survey format. Participants completed the survey at different times and in different places. This fact might strengthen generalizability to larger populations of child protection workers. Perceptions of organizational climate might vary between offices as well as between

managers or supervisors. Another potential problem is in low response rates for surveys. Overall response rates to surveys are estimated to be between 4.0% and 32.7% (Griffis, Goldsby, & Cooper, 2003). However, smaller samples that are targeted to specific populations and contain a topic respondents identify as relevant to their position have demonstrated higher response rates to internet surveys (Hoonakker & Carayon, 2009). Hoonakker and Carayon also found that number of contacts also predicted higher response rates. Other factors that influenced response rates were survey length, personalized cover letters, and follow-up reminders. Follow-up reminders and personal invitations to participate in the study via presentations at regional general staff meetings were included in the design plan. However, the partner organization declined personal presentations.

One threat to construct validity is the preoperational explication of constructs. DeVilly et al. (2009) found that the constructs of secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma were moderately highly correlated ($r = .49$, $p < .01$) indicating convergence of constructs and did not find sufficient discriminant validity between the constructs of secondary traumatic stress and burnout. However, Cieslak et al. (2014) found stronger effect sizes between the emotional exhaustion subscale of burnout and secondary traumatic stress than any other subscale of burnout particularly when instruments measuring secondary traumatic stress measured symptoms of PTSD such as the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale. Additionally, Bride et al. (2004) and Ting et al. (2005) were able to establish construct validity for the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale through convergent and discriminant validity as well as factorial analysis. Brown and Leigh

(1996) established construct validity for the Psychological Climate Scale through confirmatory factor analysis.

Hypothesis guessing and evaluation apprehension are threats to construct validity since participants consisted of volunteers. Results might be skewed if those experiencing the effects of trauma or are experiencing negative feelings toward the organization or their direct supervisor or manager are more or less likely to volunteer to complete the surveys. I outlined the relevance and importance of participant contribution to what is known about trauma exposure and work related outcomes as part of the informed consent in an effort to minimize the threat.

Threats to statistical conclusion validity can be described as either missing a relationship that exists or concluding that there is a relationship when there is not (Trochim, 2006). The selected measurement instruments for the study all demonstrated good reliability (Bride et al., 2004: Brown & Leigh, 1996; Horwitz, 2006, Tham, 2007).Therefore, conclusion validity threats were minimized.

## Ethical Considerations

Study participants reported both history of personal and job-related trauma exposure as well as perceptions of organizational leadership as implied by psychological climate. Thus, maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of participants was crucial for their protection. Subjects received an introductory email stating that the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the internet survey at any time. I used survey monkey as a means of data collection and did not collect any personally identifying information from participants. Participants received right to privacy and

confidentiality disclosures prior to data collection via informed consent. As some of the question content might have been perceived as upsetting to participants, I provided my contact information and contact information for the Walden Institutional Review Board to answer any questions or concerns participants might have had about any aspect of the study. Additionally, I informed participants that they were under no obligation to participate in the study and could withdraw at any time.

## Summary

This chapter contained a description of the methodology used for collecting and processing data to examine potential relationships between exposure to trauma, secondary traumatic stress, and intent to quit with organizational climate as a potential moderator. The chapter also contained a description of the study population and the minimum number of participants needed for analysis. I included a description of the measurement instruments and a description of the procedures that were used to analyze the collected data. I also evaluated potential threats to validity as well as ethical considerations.

# Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine relationships between exposure to traumatic situations and organizational climate, secondary traumatic stress, and intent to quit among child social workers and supervisors in a public child welfare organization. Another purpose was to examine the extent to which organizational climates moderated the relationships between exposure to traumatic situations, secondary traumatic stress, and intent to quit among social workers and supervisors in a public child welfare organization. I expected trauma exposure to be positively correlated with secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit. I expected organizational climate to be statistically significant and inverse with both secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit. I also expected organizational climate to moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations and the dependent variables controlling for age, race, length of service, and personal trauma history among study participants.

Child protective social workers and supervisors were invited to participate in a confidential online survey. Participants had 4 weeks to complete the survey. The first reminder e-mail was sent in the second week of data collection. One final reminder was sent during the last week of data collection. A total of 86 participants initially responded to the survey. However, 17 subjects were disqualified due to no direct client contact as part of their job responsibilities. Two additional participants were removed from the analysis due to the preponderance of missing values. I also examined the data for outliers in which 12 scores (two scores in workplace events, one score in secondary traumatic stress, four scores in supportive management, one score in role clarity, three scores in

contribution, and one score in job challenge) were identified as potential outliers. Original mean and trimmed mean scores were compared and found to be similar. Therefore, scores from 67 participants were included in the analysis. Although the initial target sample, $N = 123$, was not reached, the final sample $N = 67$ still fell in the range of the literature ($N = 63$ to 123). Twenty-seven of the 67 participants included in the study did not answer the first item of the Job Challenge subscale of the Psychological Climate Scale, rating the degree to which the respondent considered, "My job is very challenging." Item 2 of the subscale, "It takes all my resources to achieve my work objectives" was highly correlated with item 1 ($p < .01$) and yielded 64 out of 67 responses. Therefore, item 1 of the Job Challenge subscale was removed to improve the normality of the distribution for the analyses and item 2 alone was used to determine the Job Challenge subscale.

In this chapter, I explain how data were collected and how missing values were managed. I also discuss descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation coefficients, multiple regression analysis, and hierarchical regression. Lastly, I conclude and summarize the findings.

## Sample Characteristics

Two (3%) participants identified as Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific, 13 (19.4%) identified as Black/African American, 20 (29.9%) identified as Hispanic, 22 (32.8%) identified as White/Caucasian, nine (13.4%) identified as Multiple races, and one (1.5%) identified as other. Ages of the participants ranged from 25 to 67, $M = 42$, $SD = 9.97$. The total length of service reported ranged from 1 year to 28.3 years, $M = 10.4$, $SD = 10.1$.

The majority of participants (38.8%) reported no personal trauma history, 25.4% experienced one traumatic event, and 35.8% reported more than one traumatic event in their personal history. Complete sample characteristics are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

*Characteristics of Social Workers and Supervisors Employed in a Child Welfare Organization (N = 67)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Race: n (%) | Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 2 (3.0) |
| | Black/African American | 13 (19.4) |
| | Hispanic | 20 (29.9) |
| | White/Caucasian | 22 (32.8) |
| | Multiple Races | 9 (13.4) |
| | Other | 1 (1.5) |
| Age (years) | Minimum | 25 |
| | Maximum | 67 |
| | Mean | 42.0 |
| | SD | 9.97 |
| Length of Service in Years | Minimum | 1 |
| | Maximum | 28.3 |
| | Mean | 10.4 |
| | SD | 6.1 |
| Personal Trauma History: n (%) | No Trauma History | 26 (38.8) |
| | One Traumatic Event | 17 (25.4) |
| | More than One Traumatic Event | 24 (35.8) |

## Research Questions and Hypothesis Testing

### Research Question 1

The first research question in this study was, "What is the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations and secondary traumatic stress among direct service child welfare employees?" The related hypothesis was that exposure to traumatic situations or material would relate positively to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between exposure to traumatic situations or material and secondary traumatic stress, $r = .39$, $p <$

.01, one-tailed, indicating that the degree an employee experienced traumatizing events, directly or indirectly, in the past three months was associated with higher levels of secondary traumatic stress. Table 2 includes the complete means, standard deviations, coefficient alpha estimates of reliability, and Pearson product-moment correlations for the study variables. Bonferroni correction was applied to control for increased risk of Type I error with multiple tests, and an alpha of .01 was the threshold for statistical significance.

Table 2

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients among Study Variables*

| Subscales | *N* | Mean | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Workplace events scale | 65 | 2.12 | .75 | (.78) | | | |
| 2.Composite OC | 57 | -- | -- | .09 | (78-.90) | | |
| 3. Secondary traumatic stress | 65 | 5.10 | 1.42 | .39** | .40** | (.93) | |
| 4. Intent to quit | 63 | 5.80 | 1.01 | .04 | -.34** | .27* | -- |

*Note.* Coefficient alpha estimates of reliability are on the diagonal; alpha reliability for organizational climate is the range of the original subscales; Bonferroni correction indicated $p <$ .01 needed for statistical significance. Means and standard deviations for composite OC scores are derived from principal components analyses and are standard scores not in original scale units and thus not presented here.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$ (one-tailed).

**Research Question 2**

The second research question was, "What is the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and employee intent to quit among child welfare employees?" The related hypothesis was that exposure to traumatic situations or material

would relate positively with intent to quit. Results indicated no statistically significant correlation, $r = .04$, $p = .39$, one-tailed, between the exposure to traumatic situations or material and employee intent to quit. In other words, the degree an employee was exposed to directly or indirectly traumatizing events in the preceding 3 months was not related to the employee's intent to leave the organization.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question was, "What relationship does organizational climate have to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees?" The related hypothesis was that organizational climate would be inversely related to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees. Specifically, positive employee perceptions of organizational climate would be associated with lower levels of self-reported secondary traumatic stress and conversely, negative perceptions of organizational climate would be related to higher levels of self-reported secondary traumatic stress. A single factor, reducing the five subscales of the Psychological Climate Scale, was derived through principal components analysis and captured 56% of the total variance in the five subscales. Communalities from the principal components analysis are depicted in Table 3. Recognition and contribution loaded most heavily on the derived factor. The frequency responses indicated that the setting was highly supportive, but weak on employee recognition and appreciation for their contributions. Results indicated that there was a statistically significant negative correlation between the derived organizational climate factor and secondary traumatic stress $r = -.40$, $p < .01$, one-tailed.

Thus, employees reporting lower levels of organizational climate reported higher levels of secondary traumatic stress.

Table 3

*Principal Component Analysis for the Psychological Climate Subscales*

| Subscales | Initial | Extraction |
|---|---|---|
| Supportive management subscale score | 1.000 | .555 |
| Role clarity subscale score | 1.000 | .558 |
| Contribution subscale score | 1.000 | .607 |
| Recognition subscale score | 1.000 | .744 |
| Self-expression subscale score | 1.000 | .346 |

Although not included in the original research question and hypotheses, it should be noted that there was a positive relationship, though not statistically significant due to Bonferroni correction, between secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit, $r = .27$, $p < .05$, one-tailed indicating that employees reporting higher levels of secondary traumatic stress also reported stronger intent to leave the organization. Additionally, there was a negative correlation between age and intent to quit, $r = -.25$, $p < .05$, one-tailed. In other words, older employees had lower intention to quit.

**Research Question 4**

The fourth research question posed was, "To what extent will organizational climate moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material, secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit among child welfare employees?" The

related hypotheses stated that organizational climate would moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees and that organizational climate would moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and intent to quit among child welfare employees. There was a statistically significant negative correlation between the derived organizational climate factor and intent to quit $r = -.34$, $p < .01$. There was also a statistically significant negative correlation between the derived organizational climate factor and secondary traumatic stress as previously stated.

**Hierarchical regression analysis and data reduction.** Hierarchical regression was used to assess the ability of two control variables (exposure to traumatic situations or material and organizational climate) to predict levels of secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit after controlling for the influence of age, length of service, race, and personal trauma history. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violations of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. It was necessary to reduce the number of correlated predictors for the regression analysis to avoid problems associated with multicollinearity (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2013).

*Hierarchical regression analyses.* The models for both dependent variables were the same in that age, length of service, race and personal trauma history were entered at Step 1, the derived organizational climate factor and exposure to traumatic situations or material were entered at Step 2, and the interaction variable was entered at Step 3. The ethnic group variable was re-coded into white/minority after running one way analyses of variance on the two dependent variables by ethnic group. There did not seem to be

differences across ethnic groups, so black, Hispanic, and other were combined to create one "minority" category. The interaction variable was created by multiplying the organizational climate factor by the exposure to traumatic situations or material. The full results are depicted in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4

*Hierarchical Regression Analyses: Factors Affecting Secondary Traumatic Stress among a Sample of Child Welfare Social Workers and Supervisors (N=57).*

| Predictors | Model 1 | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1: Covariates | *B (SE)* | *β* | *t* (DF) |
| Age | -.08(.16) | -.08 | 4.88(4) |
| Length of service | -.10(.27) | -.06 | -.37(4) |
| Race | -1.9 (2.97) | -.09 | -.65(4) |
| Personal trauma history | 1.02(1.62) | .09 | .63(4) |
| Adjusted $R^2$=.-.05<br>F=.30(4), $p$ = .88 | | | |
| Step 2: | *B (SE)* | *β* | *t* (DF) |
| Exposure to traumatic situations or material | 4.17(1.70)** | .31 | 2.47(6) |
| Organizational climate | -3.71(1.26)*** | -.37 | -2.95(6) |
| Adjusted $R^2$=.19<br>Change in $R^2$=.25<br>F change in $R^2$=8.75(2), $p$ <.01 | | | |
| Step 3: | *B (SE)* | *β* | *t* (DF) |
| Exposure X organizational climate | -3.41(1.81)* | -.73 | -1.88(7) |
| Adjusted $R^2$=.23<br>Change in $R^2$=.05<br>F change in $R^2$=3.56(1), $p$ =.07 | | | |

*$p$.<.10 **$p$.<.05 ***$p$.<.01.

Age, length of service, race, and personal trauma history explained 2.3 % of the variance in secondary traumatic stress. The derived organizational climate factor and exposure to traumatic situations or material were entered at Step 2 and the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 28%, $F$ (6, 50) = 3.18, $p < .05$ for secondary traumatic stress. The two control variables explained an additional 25% of the variance in secondary traumatic stress after controlling for age, length of service, race and personal trauma history, $R$ squared change = .25, $F$ change (2, 50) = 8.75, $p < .01$. The two control measures were statistically significant in relation to secondary traumatic stress with the derived organizational climate factor scoring a higher beta value ($\beta$ = -.37, $p$ <.01) than the exposure to traumatic situations and material ($\beta$ = .31, $p < .05$).

Table 5

*Hierarchical Regression Analyses: Factors Affecting Intent to Quit among a sample of Child Welfare Social Workers and Supervisors (N=57).*

| Predictors | Model 1 | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1: Covariates | *B (SE)* | *β* | *t* (DF) |
| Age | -.03(.02) | -.31 | -2.03(4) |
| Length of Service | .04(.02) | .24 | 1.57(4) |
| Race | .17 (.28) | .08 | .60(4) |
| Personal Trauma History | .07(.15) | .07 | .48(4) |
| Adjusted $R^2$=.03<br>F=1.45(4), $p$ = .23 | | | |
| Step 2: | *B (SE)* | *β* | *t* (DF) |
| Exposure to Traumatic Situations or Material | .02(.18) | .02 | .90(6) |

*(table continues)*

| Predictors | Model 1 | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Organizational Climate | -.28(.18)* | -.29 | -2.20(6) |
| Adjusted $R^2$=.09<br>Change in $R^2$=.08<br>F change in $R^2$=2.44(2), $p$ = .10 | | | |
| Step 3: | *B (SE)* | *β* | *t* (DF) |
| Exposure X Organizational Climate | .16(.20) | .35 | .80(7) |
| Adjusted $R^2$=.20<br>Change in $R^2$=.01<br>F change in $R^2$=.64(1), $p$ =.43 | | | |

*$p$.<.05.

Age, length of service, race, and personal trauma history explained 10.4% of the variance in intent to quit. The derived organizational climate factor and exposure to traumatic situations explained 19% of the variance, $F$ (6, 48) = 1.83, $p$ = .11 for intent to quit. The two control variables explained an additional 8.3% of the variance in intent to quit after controlling for age, length of service, race, and personal trauma history, *R* squared change (2, 48) = 2.44, $p$ = .10. The two control measures had no statistical significance in relation to intent to quit.

In the final model, the interaction effect of organizational climate and exposure to traumatic situations or material on intent to quit had a beta value of .35, $p$ = .10. At Step 3, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 33% $F$ (7, 49) = 3.37, $p$ < .01 with secondary traumatic stress as the dependent variable. The interaction effect of organizational climate and exposure to traumatic situations or material on secondary traumatic stress scores had a beta value of -.73, $p$ = .07. The interaction effect of organizational climate and exposure to traumatic situations or material was not

statistically significant with either dependent variable in the regression analysis. However, results approached statistical significance with secondary traumatic stress as the dependent variable and might have indicated statistical significance in a larger sample that was powered to detect an interaction effect. Exploratory analysis was conducted to examine the approaching significance of the interaction effect. Two new variables were created to dichotomize the single organizational climate factor and the exposure to traumatic events or materials variables at the median. The cell means indicated that participants who scored above the median on trauma exposure and below the median on organizational climate also had higher secondary traumatic stress scores (38.93) than those who scored above the mean on organizational climate (26.19). Therefore, organizational climate appeared to have a moderating effect on exposure to traumatic situations or material in relation to secondary traumatic stress. The interaction is $p < .10$ and the power is very low (.39). Thus Hypothesis 4 is partially supported in relation to secondary traumatic stress. Although the effect is not statistically significant, it is underpowered to detect an interaction. Results of the interaction between the two variables on secondary traumatic stress scores are illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Interaction Effect of Organizational Climate and Trauma Exposure on Secondary Traumatic Stress

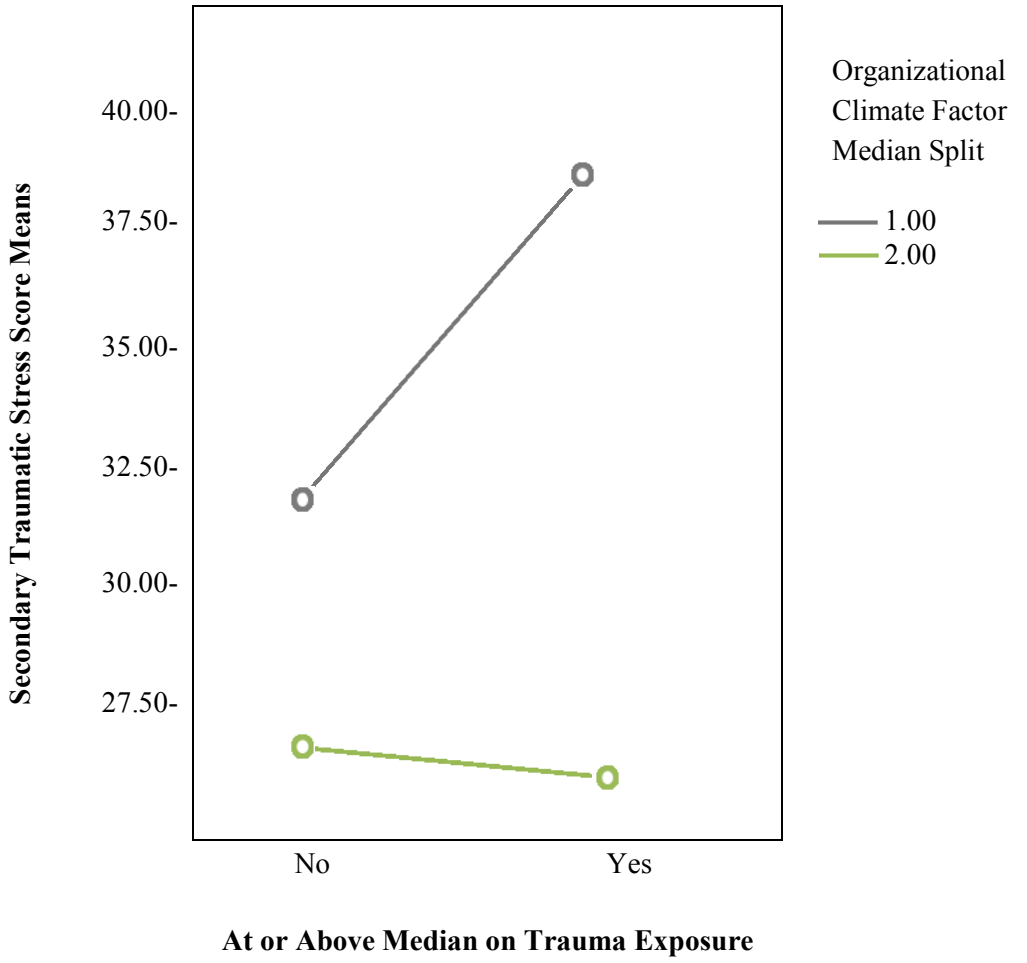


*Figure 1.* Interaction effect of organizational climate and trauma exposure on secondary stress.

**Evaluation of Research Hypotheses**

The statistical analyses indicated partial support for the study hypotheses. Hypothesis number one stated that exposure to traumatic situations or material would relate positively to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees. This hypothesis was supported as there was a statistically significant positive correlation between exposure to traumatic situations or material and secondary traumatic stress. Hypothesis number two stated that exposure to traumatic situations or material would relate positively to intent to quit. This hypothesis was not supported. Hypothesis number three stated that organizational climate would be inversely related to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees. This hypothesis was supported as there was a statistically significant negative correlation between the organizational climate factor and secondary traumatic stress. Hypothesis number 4 stated that organizational climate would moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and secondary traumatic stress as well as intent to quit among child welfare employees. Although there were statistically significant correlations observed between the organizational climate factor and both secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit, there was no support for organizational climate as a moderator to exposure to traumatic situations or material. Chapter Five will include an interpretation and discussion of these findings as well as recommendations for future study and implications for social change.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Exposure to children who have experienced traumatizing circumstances is endemic to social workers and supervisors in child welfare organizations. The volume of severe abuse and general neglect allegations have increased over the last few years in the state of California (Needell et al., 2014), and the workforce of social workers and supervisors was diminished 21.4% between 2008 and 2011 across 58 California counties (Clark, 2012). Researchers have found that reasons for dissatisfaction have included inadequate supervisory support and punitive management practices as well as dysfunctional climate and culture (Chen & Scannapieco 2010; Chenot et al., 2009; Dickinson & Painter, 2009; Tham, 2007; Westbrook et al, 2012). Researchers have also found that exposure to traumatized clients can manifest in vicarious trauma (Rzeszutek et al., 2015), secondary traumatic stress (Hensel et al., 2015), or compassion fatigue (Adams et al., 2006). Predictors for secondary traumatic stress included higher caseloads (Townsend & Campbell, 2009), a lack of shared power (Slattery & Goodman, 2009), and the number of hours working with traumatized clients (Galek et al., 2011).

Retaining a strong child welfare workforce is necessary to preserve continuity for clients and to ensure timely decisions related to permanent placement for children (GAO, 2003). Organizational factors such as workload (GAO, 2003; Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, n.d.), ineffective or inadequate supervision, (Strolin-Golzman et al., 2007; Tham, 2007), and a lack of clear incentives and rewards (Shim, 2010) contribute to intent to quit among child welfare workers. Vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress have also predicted intent to quit for child welfare workers (Bride et al., 2007;

Jankoski, 2010; Middleton & Potter, 2015). Based on my literature review, previous child welfare studies have not included an examination of both exposure to traumatic situations or material and organizational climate in relation to secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit. Thus, the purpose of this study was to not only examine the relationships between exposure to traumatic situations and material and secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit but to also examine how organizational climate might influence the trauma exposure in relation to secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit. The study results supported Hypotheses 1 and 3 but not 2. Hypothesis 4 is partially supported in relation to secondary traumatic stress. Although the findings indicated no statistically significant interaction effect of trauma exposure and organizational climate on secondary traumatic stress or intent to quit, exploratory analysis indicated there might have been statistical significance in relation to secondary traumatic stress with a larger sample.

**Interpretation of Findings**

Hypothesis 1 stated that exposure to traumatic situations or material would relate positively to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees. The degree of exposure to traumatic situations and materials in the three months prior to the survey was proportional to the levels of secondary traumatic stress. This result was consistent with the literature (Bourke & Craun, 2014; Coles et al., 2014; Didham, et al., 2011; Ewer et al., 2015; Galek et al., 2011; Howlett & Collins, 2014; Kahn et al., 2016; Schauben & Frazier, 1999; Von Rueden et al., 2010; Vrklevski & Franklin, 2008). Hypothesis 2 stated that exposure to traumatic situations or material would relate positively to intent to quit. Contrary to expectation, this hypothesis was not supported. It appeared that the level of

trauma exposure itself was not a statistically significant factor in determining an individual's intent to quit even though participants reporting higher exposure also reported that their jobs were highly challenging. Exposure to traumatic situations or material in the past 3 months had no statistically significant relationship to employee intent to quit. However, employees with strong intent to quit also reported high levels of secondary traumatic stress which was consistent with prior research (Bride et al., 2007; Jankoski, 2010; Middleton & Potter, 2015). Thus, an individual's intent to quit might have resulted in a cumulative effect of exposure that was not measured or factors aside from exposure contributed to secondary traumatic stress. The largest percentage of the sample consisted of participants employed 10 years or longer and the mean age was 42. Age was positively related with length of service and there seemed to be a negative relationship between age and intent to quit. However, the result was not statistically significant. The findings indicated that older employees with greater length of service were less likely to quit in spite of the stressors and challenges of the job. Benefits in public service increase over time for represented employees including paid vacation, sick leave, and vestment in retirement programs. It is possible that the longer a person remains employed, the more difficult it is to leave in spite of the negative aspects of the job. Pensions in the private sector are rare (Cobb, 2015); thus, public sector child welfare employees might be fulfilling their jobs to the best of their ability but are unable to leave and unable to change much about their current positions. It is also possible that that these social workers and supervisors have developed coping strategies or social supports that mitigate stress and challenges.

Hypothesis 3 stated that organizational climate would be inversely related to secondary traumatic stress among child welfare employees. Hypothesis 3 was supported as there was a statistically significant negative relationship between the organizational climate factor and secondary traumatic stress. Thirty one percent of participants expressed that they did not feel the organization recognized the significance of their contributions, while 24% expressed either ambivalence or that they did not feel like key members of the organization, and 11% did not agree that doing their jobs well made a difference. Employees with positive perceptions of organizational climate reported lower levels of secondary traumatic stress and employees with negative perceptions of organizational climate reported higher levels of secondary traumatic stress. Participants also indicated that the more challenging they perceived their jobs, the higher the levels of secondary traumatic stress they reported. The majority of participants expressed agreement that their supervision was supportive and that job expectations were clearly defined and understood by management. It is possible that having supportive climate and role clarity may buffer the deleterious effects of secondary traumatic stress. This may, in turn, improve the quality of care by allowing workers to function more effectively. Stress has negative effects on work performance and health (Nixon et al., 2011). Organizational climate may have protective effects and prevent adverse outcomes such as secondary traumatic stress and workforce turnover.

Hypothesis 4a stated that organizational climate would moderate the relationship between exposure to traumatic situations or material and secondary traumatic stress. Although there was a statistically significant relationship between the organizational

climate factor and secondary traumatic stress, the regression analysis indicated no statistically significant interaction effect of organizational climate and exposure to traumatic situations or material on secondary traumatic stress. However, further exploratory analysis indicated that there was approaching significance in relation to secondary traumatic stress and might have achieved significance in a larger sample.

Hypothesis 4b stated that organizational climate would moderate the relationship between the exposure to traumatic situations or material and intent to quit. This hypothesis was not supported. Although there was a statistically significant negative relationship between organizational climate and intent to quit, the level of a person's exposure to traumatic situations or material did not appear to be related to a person's intent to quit and organizational climate did not moderate the relationship. This result might indicate that the exposure to traumatic situation in the past three months by itself is not a predictor for intent to quit but rather it is how the employee responds to the exposure as a stressor that predicts intent to quit. Organizational climate also appeared to be directly related to intent to quit. Thus, secondary traumatic and organizational climate together may influence the decision to quit.

## Limitations of the Study

As stated in Chapter 1, there were a number of limitations to this study. The main limitation that surfaced during the interpretation of results was the limited sample size. The convenience sample might not have adequately represented the population and the study did not take into consideration coping strategies of social workers and supervisors, nor did it include other employees such as managers and support staff that might have a

degree of exposure. Also, the instrument used to measure exposure did not capture all potential means of exposure a person might experience in child welfare nor did it capture cumulative exposure. The study did not consider the number of offices in the organization as organizational climate might have varied according to leadership in each office. Caseload size and workload scope were also not considered as potential organizational factors that could have influenced both secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit.

## Recommendations

A mixed method study might be beneficial in exploring survey responses as the ability to interview participants might deepen understanding of study results. A more expansive study in a larger organization with multiple regional offices or with multiple organizations might provide a broader understanding of variance in organizational climate and accounting for differences in regional leadership. Future studies might also include considerations of gender differences and different measurement instruments to assess reliability of this study's findings.

## Implications for Positive Social Change

The social change implications indicated for child welfare organizations include possible staff recognition and appreciation efforts and programs that might decrease occupational stress and mitigate negative perceptions of organizational climate, increase staff retention and by extension, improve consistency for clients. Child welfare social workers and supervisors might feel increased contribution if shared decision making

models are used when considering implementation of new initiatives or regulation and policy changes.

**Theoretical Implications**

Constructivist self-development theory (McCann & Pearlman 1990) and Figley's theory of secondary traumatic stress (1995a) or compassion fatigue are theories relating specifically to the psychological impact of working with traumatized clients. McCann and Pearlman (1990) proposed that helping professionals are at risk of developing unique needs and altered perceptions of their experiences due to continued exposure to traumatized clients. Similarly, Figley (1995a) theorized that helping professionals are at risk of developing symptoms akin to PTSD, such as nightmares and exaggerated startle response, as a result of continued exposure to victims of trauma. This study supported both theories as participants with higher exposure to traumatized clients reported higher levels of secondary traumatic stress. This result is consistent with prior research (Bourke & Craun, 2014; Coles et al., 2014; Didham et al., 2011; Ewer, et al., 2015; Galek et al., 2011; Howlett & Collins, 2014; Kahn et al., 2016; Schauben & Frazier, 1999; Von Rueden et al., 2010; Vrklevski & Franklin, 2008).

Kurt Lewin's field theory (1989) indicates that a number of reciprocal relationships interpreted together define specific situations and that social and cultural factors contribute to the degree an individual is able to manage stress. This study supports Lewin's theory in that the interdependence of specific organizational aspects contributed to negative job outcomes of individuals, specifically secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit.

**Methodological Implications**

Patterson-Silverwolf et al. (2014) observed that the lack of theoretical orientation underlying many organizational climate instruments has resulted in numerous and evolving organizational climate factors. The implication from this study is that recognition, contribution and self expression were the dimensions of organizational climate that resonated most with study participants in relation to their perceived environment. Prior research indicated that supervision was a factor (Mor Barak et al., 2009; Renner et al., 2009). However, supervision was not a strong factor in the principal components analysis conducted for this study. There are numerous interpretations of organizational climate and a variety of instruments used to depict aspects of organizational climate. Using instruments designed specifically for child welfare organizations in mixed methods studies might provide greater consistency in results across studies.

## Conclusion

This study indicated consistency with prior research in that exposure to traumatic situations and material has a positive relationship with secondary traumatic stress. Although this study's results indicated no direct relationship between the exposure to traumatic situations or material and intent to quit, study results indicated that secondary traumatic stress was related to intent to quit and organizational climate had statistically significant negative relationships to both secondary traumatic stress and intent to quit.. Organizational climate did not emerge as a moderator to secondary traumatic stress or intent to quit. However, exploratory analysis indicated statistical significance might have

been achieved with regard to secondary traumatic stress had the sample been larger. Therefore, organizations with members who are exposed to high levels of stress, including child welfare organizations, should consider implementation of strategies and practices that encourage employee contribution recognition and free expression of ideas. Additionally, examination of the study variables across an entire workforce of a single organizations and across multiple child welfare organizations before and after implementation of specific strategies to improve organizational climate would provide further insight into workplace stressors and staff retention.

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# Appendix A: Previous Studies on Child Welfare Workers

Table A1

*Studies on Child Welfare Workers*

| **Study** | **Study Design (*population, methods, etc)*** | **Main Research Objectives/Study Questions** | **Organizational factors assessed** | **Trauma Exposure as Variable?** | **Key Findings** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bride, Jones, and MacMaster (2007) | Web-based survey of 187 Tennessee Child Protective Services workers | What are the correlates of secondary traumatic stress in child welfare workers? | Peer support, administrative support, intent to remain employed in child welfare, caseload size | No | Higher levels of STS inversely related to intent to remain, inverse relationship between secondary traumatic stress and peer support as well as secondary traumatic stress and administrative support, positive correlation between secondary traumatic stress and higher caseloads, strong correlation between secondary traumatic stress and personal trauma history |
| Claiborne et al. (2011). | 643 employees (subsample of 441 direct service workers, i.e., residential and child care workers, clinicians, and educators) | Understanding how organizational climate influences child welfare intent to stay employed with the agency. | Organizational climate, worker commitment | No | Autonomy, challenge, and innovation statistically significantly positively related to increased worker commitment |
| Cornille and Meyers (1999) | Survey research design of 205 child protective services workers in a southern state | What are the effects of working with traumatized children? | None | Yes | Scores of secondary traumatic stress in survey sample was significantly higher than comparison study of normative scores for nonpsychiatric patients. Majority of respondents reported high level of exposure |
| Dagan, Ben-Porat, and Itzhaky (2015) | Cross-sectional survey of convenience sample consisting of 255 child protection workers and social services workers in Israel | What are the factors that contribute to secondary traumatic stress response among child welfare workers and how do they differ from other professional groups? | Effectiveness of supervision, role stress (role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload) | Yes | Statistically significant difference between groups on child abuse exposure; child protection workers scored higher levels of secondary traumatic stress, inverse relationship between perceived social support and secondary traumatic stress, higher stress and exposure to child maltreatment led to secondary traumatic stress, also past traumatic experiences led to secondary traumatic stress |

*(table continues)*

| Study | Study Design (*population, methods, etc)* | Main Research Objectives/Study Questions | Organizational factors assessed | Trauma Exposure as Variable? | Key Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dickinson and Painter (2009) | Survey research design from a sample of 157 child welfare social workers from 100 North Carolina child welfare agencies | What are the predictors of child welfare worker turnover? | Workload, role clarity, role expectations, supervisor support, shared authority and mission, growth advancement and opportunities | No | Depersonalization, supervisor support, shared authority, growth and advancement opportunities, age and education were statistically significant univariate predictors of undesired turnover |
| Dombo and Blome (2016) | Exploratory qualitative research design using a purposive sample of child welfare administrators | What do child welfare leaders think about turnover and vicarious trauma? | Organizational supports, culture | Yes | Culture of blame when critical incident occurs, morale is an indicator of vicarious trauma, staffing deficiencies contribute to vicarious trauma |
| Fernandes (2016) | Survey of 359 child welfare workers employed in eight New York nonprofit child welfare agencies | Does organizational climate influence intent to quit among child welfare employees? | Organizational climate, intent to leave | No | Four organizational climate factors predicted decrease of intent to leave, whereas perceptions of organizational justice was the most predictive of intent to leave followed by organizational support, work overload, and job importance |
| Hopkins, Cohen-Callow, Kim, and Huang (2010) | Cross-sectional survey design using stratified sample of 544 child welfare employees across 23 jurisdictions | What organizational/environmental, personal/job, and attitudinal factors increase the odds of, work withdrawal, job search behaviors and quitting | Organizational climate, turnover | No | Personal and work factors explained 15.3 % of the variance in withdrawal, perceptions of work environment accounted for an additional 35.4% of the variance. Stress was the most statistically significant contributor to job withdrawal, |
| Johnco, Salloum, Olson, and Edwards (2014) | Qualitative study using focus groups of 25 child welfare direct care case managers and supervisors from six child welfare agencies in South Florida | What do child welfare employees think are the reasons for turnover in the industry? | Intent to leave | No | 76% of the study sample indicated that they had looked for another job in the past year, 44% indicated that likely to leave within the next 6 months, Themes associated with intent to leave were system problems, challenging work demands (high workload and overtime issues), low compensation |

*(table continues)*

| **Study** | **Study Design (*population, methods, etc)*** | **Main Research Objectives/Study Questions** | **Organizational factors assessed** | **Trauma Exposure as Variable?** | **Key Findings** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kim and Kao (2014) | Meta-analysis of 22 studies examining predictors for turnover intention in public child welfare workers in the United States | What are the predictors of turnover among child welfare employees? | Organizational, supervisor, and coworker support, decision making, turnover intention | No | Well-being emerged as strongest demographic predictor (negative) of turnover intention, autonomous and inclusion in decision negatively related to turnover, overall stress positively correlated to turnover, organizational culture strong predictor of turnover intention as well as perceptions of fairness in pay, benefits and promotion, negative relationship between organizational climate and intent to turnover |
| Middleton and Potter (2015) | Survey of purposive nonrandom sample of 1192 administrators, supervisors and caseworkers from one state administered public child welfare agency in a southern state, two county child welfare agencies in two different Midwestern states, and two tribal child welfare sites in an upper Midwestern state | What is the relationship between vicarious trauma and intent to leave? | Intent to leave | Yes | Statistically significant path between vicarious traumatization and intent to leave, 33% of the variance in child welfare professional's intent to leave was in common correlated with vicarious traumatization |
| Patterson Silver Wolf (Adelvunegv Waya) et al. (2014) | Survey of 1273 frontline employees (direct service contact with children and families) and 26 senior managers and top agency executives in the largest child and family service agency in Western and central New York State | Validation study for a new measure of organizational climate | Organizational culture and climate | No | Senior managers scores related to perceptions of proficient and less rigid organizational climate and culture were much higher than the frontline group by about 2.5 standard deviations for both scales. Scores indicated that senior managers perceived the organization as more engaged and functional compared to the average frontline worker. Senior managers were similar to average frontline worker only in level of perceived resistance and stress |

*(table continues)*

| **Study** | **Study Design (*population, methods, etc)*** | **Main Research Objectives/Study Questions** | **Organizational factors assessed** | **Trauma Exposure as Variable?** | **Key Findings** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Powell, Guadagno, and Cassematis (2013). | Qualitative open-ended interview questions presented in online forum by invitation to participants in online forensic interview training program-study sample consisted of 68 Australian police officers and child protection workers | What are the sources of stress among child protection investigators? | Workload | No | Inadequate recognition of specialized skills, high workload/caseload demands, and interagency tension were identified as stressors that undermined job satisfaction and performance but not the nature of the work itself |
| Regher et al. (2004) | Quantitative survey purposive sample of Canadian child protection employees consisting of 156 front line, clerical, and management employees | What factors predict post traumatic stress in child welfare professionals? | Workload Stressors | Yes | Individual, organizational, and incident factors all had statistically significant effects on distress (as length of time since event decreased and number of events increased, distress increased). Organizational factors (workload, difficult clients, organizational change, and public scrutiny) had strongest relationship with distress, and levels of distress were significantly and positively related to post traumatic growth. |
| Shim (2014) | Survey design using sample of 766 caseworkers and supervisors from 25 Public child welfare agencies in New York State | What are the differences in culture and climate between low and high turnover child welfare agencies? | Organizational culture and climate and intent to quit | No | Emphasis on rewards was significantly higher in Low turnover agencies than high turnover agencies; workload is statistically significantly higher in low turnover agencies than high turnover agencies |
| Sprang, Craig, and Clark (2011) | Survey design using sample of 668 Licensees in social work, psychology, and marriage and family therapy across six U.S. states and Toronto, Canada that had high rates of pediatric deaths | How do experiences of secondary traumatic stress differ across professional groups? | None | No | Compassion fatigue was significantly related with burnout, males scores statistically significantly higher on measures of compassion fatigue than females, Hispanics scored statistically higher on measures of compassion fatigue than Caucasians, rural residents were more likely to report compassion fatigue than urban residents, child welfare worker status was a statistically significant predictor of compassion fatigue and burnout, no religious participation statistically predicted compassion fatigue and burnout |

*(table continues)*

| **Study** | **Study Design (*population, methods, etc)*** | **Main Research Objectives/Study Questions** | **Organizational factors assessed** | **Trauma Exposure as Variable?** | **Key Findings** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Westbrook, Ellett, and Asberg (2012) | Sample drawn from population of 3227 caseworkers, supervisors and administrators from state Department of Family and Children's Services | What if any organizational culture elements influence child welfare employees to stay employed in the field? | Organizational culture (supervisory and administrative support, professionalism, collegiality, organizational ethos, autonomy, beliefs about parents (clients), intent to remain employed | No | Employees who rated their organization higher in organizational culture factors scored higher on intent to remain employed than those who rated their organization lower in organizational culture factors |
| Williams, Nichols, Kirk, and Wilson (2011) | Mixed methods Survey research design using convenience sample of 260 child welfare workers from public child welfare agencies in the State of Georgia | What factors influence child welfare employee retention? | Salary, workload, coworker and supervisor support, opportunity for advancement, organizational commitment to and valuing of employees | No | 50% of the sample reported taking steps to look for another job, 3% reported feeling satisfied with their salaries, 3% reported not feeling burned out, 12% felt that their workload was reasonable; respondents indicated supervisors did not show leadership, no incentives are provided for good work, little recognition and respect from supervisors, |

# Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation from Study Site

[redacted]

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES
CHILDREN'S SERVICES DIVISION

**Letter of Cooperation from Research Partner** [redacted]

[redacted]

March 23, 2017

Dear Shano P Rodgers:

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Examining Trauma Exposure, Organizational Climate and Job Outcomes in Child Welfare within [redacted]. As part of this study, I authorize you to send email to our social workers and their supervisors with an electronic survey link; follow up through email reminders to encourage study participation, and provide in-person presentation to administrators and staff regarding dissemination of study results. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: providing access to use email server and Children's Social Worker and Supervisor distribution lists. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

The student will be responsible for complying with our site's research policies and requirements, including adherence [redacted] External Research Policy (DP17-402) and the following:

1. Immediate written notification if changes occur to the project scope, schedule, research methodologies, sampling techniques, data elements, or data collection methodologies
2. Documentation of IRB re-approvals for projects that extend beyond the approved project time duration.
3. Project status reports every six month covering completed and ongoing activities six month look-ahead, and any issues. Status reports will continue until the final report is received by [redacted]
4. An executive summary of the research finding and conclusions submitted no later than 60 days after the scheduled project completion date
5. Written and electronic copies of one-page abstract and final report submitted no later than 180 days of the project completion date. Wit[redacted]pproval, an interim report may be submitted if the final report is not completed within this time period. The interim report is not a substitute for the final report.
6. Copies of all publications resulting from the research project. An abstract will be submitted [redacted] for review prior to publication

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in Proquest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

Appendix C: Questions from the Workplace Trauma Events Measure

**Workplace Trauma Events**

Instructions: Please rate the following items on a scale from 1 to 6 where 1= *never having had the experience,* 2 = *having had the experience 1 to 5 times in the past three months*, 3 = *having had the experience 6 to 10 times in the past three months*, 4 = *having had the experience 11 to 15 times in the past three months*, 5 = *having had the experience 16 to 20 times in the past three months*, and 6 = *having had the experience more than 20 times in the past three months*.

1. Spoken abuse from a client

2. Placed in fear of safety by a client

3. Physical assault by a client

4. Property damage by a client

5. Work with children in distressing circumstances

6. Unable to do enough for a specific client

7. Unable to do enough for clients in general

Appendix D: Questions from the Psychological Climate Scale

**Psychological Climate Scale**

Instructions: Please rate the following items on a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = slightly agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree.

**Supportive Management**

1. My supervisor/manager is flexible about how I accomplish my objectives.

2. My supervisor/manager is supportive of my ideas and ways of getting things done

3. My supervisor/manager gives me the authority to do my job as I see fit.

4. I'm careful in taking responsibility because my supervisor/manager is critical of new ideas.

5. I can trust my supervisor/manager to back me up on decisions I make in the field.

**Role Clarity**

1. Management makes it perfectly clear how my job is to be done.

2. The amount of work responsibility and effort expected in my job is clearly defined.

3. The standard of performance in my unit/section is well understood and communicated.

**Contribution**

1. I feel very useful in my job.

2. Doing my job well really makes a difference.

3. I feel like a key member of the organization.

4. The work I do is very valuable to the organization.

**Recognition**

1. I rarely feel my work is taken for granted.

2. My superiors generally appreciate the way I do my job.

3. The organization recognizes the significance of the contributions I make.

**Self-Expression**

1. The feelings I express at work are my true feelings

2. I feel free to be completely myself at work.

3. There are parts of myself that I am not free to express at work.

4. It is okay to express my true feelings in this job.

**Challenge**

1. My job is very challenging.

2. It takes all my resources to achieve my work objectives.

Appendix E: Questions from the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale

**Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale**

Instructions: The following list of statements made by persons who have been impacted by their work with traumatized Clients. Read each statement then indicate how frequently the statement was true for you in the past seven (7) days. 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Often, 5 = Very Often

NOTE: "Client" is used to indicate persons with whom you have engaged in a helping relationship.

1. I felt emotionally numb.

2. My heart started pounding when I thought about my work with clients.

3. It seemed as if I was reliving the trauma(s) experienced by my client(s).

4. I had trouble sleeping.

5. I felt discouraged about the future.

6. Reminders of my work with clients upset me.

7. I had little interest in being around others.

8. I felt jumpy.

9. I was less active than usual.

10. I thought about my work with clients when I didn't intend to.

11. I had trouble concentrating.

12. I avoided people, places, or things that reminded me of my work with clients.

13. I had disturbing dreams about my work with clients.

14. I wanted to avoid working with some clients.

15. I was easily annoyed.

16. I expected something bad to happen.

17. I noticed gaps in my memory about client contact

| | |
|---|---|
| Intrusion Subscale (add items 2, 3, 6, 10, and 13) | Intrusion Score |
| _____ | |
| Avoidance Subscale (add items 1, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, and 17) | Avoidance Score |
| _____ | |
| Arousal Subscale (add items 4, 8, 11, 15, and 16) | Arousal Score |
| _____ | |
| TOTAL (Add Intrusion, Avoidance, and Arousal Scores) | Total Score |
| _____ | |

Appendix F: Single Item Measure for Intent to Quit

**Intent to Quit**

How likely is it that within a year you will be actively looking for a new job?

1 = not at all likely, 2 = not very likely, 3 = fairly likely, 4 = very likely

# Appendix G: Permission to use Survey(s)

## Permission to use Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale

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SAGE Publishing

Title: Development and Validation of the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale
Author: Brian E. Bride, Margaret M. Robinson, Bonnie Yegidis, et al
Publication: Research on Social Work Practice
Publisher: SAGE Publications
Date: 01/01/2004
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**Hi Shano,**

**Permission granted.**

**Best,**
**Brian**

**Brian E. Bride, Ph.D., M.S.W., M.P.H.**
**Distinguished University Professor**
**Director, School of Social Work**
**Georgia State University**
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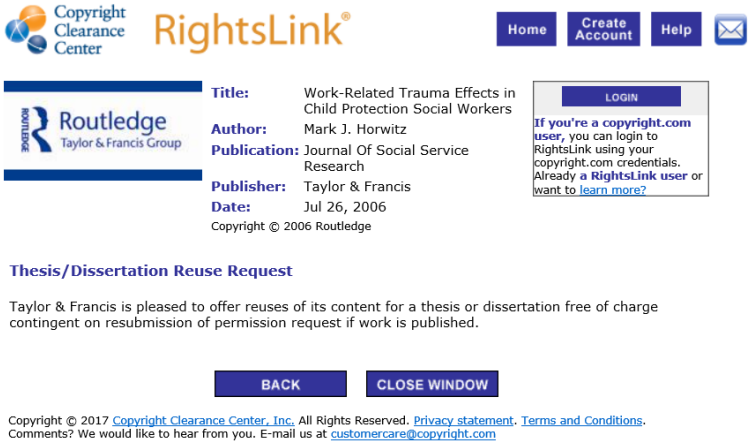
## Permission to use Trauma Exposure Measure



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Title: Work-Related Trauma Effects in Child Protection Social Workers
Author: Mark J. Horwitz
Publication: Journal Of Social Service Research
Publisher: Taylor & Francis
Date: Jul 26, 2006
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**Permission to use Psychological Climate Scale**

Thanks for your note, Shano. You may certainly use the scale, with appropriate citation of the source. I am attaching a copy of the article, which lists the measurement items in the Appendix. The original questionnaire is proprietary, but you can easily formulate your own with the information provided. Here's wishing you all the best on your research!

Cordial regards,
Steve Brown

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

**Permission to use Single Item Measure for Intent to Quit**

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