Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services: a case study of child welfare workers' burnout

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LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES:
A STUDY OF CHILD WELFARE WORKERS’ BURNOUT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Work

in

The School of Social Work

by
Crystal J.Ward
B.S.W, Northwestern State University, 2006
B.G.S, Northwestern State University, 2009
A.A., Northwestern State University, 2011
May 2013
This thesis is dedicated to my parents Charles Henry Ward, Sr. and Pamela Burnom Ward. Throughout this journey, I reminisced on many “fun-filled” summers competing in the Ark-La-Tex sports festival. Year after year, I would leave the competition angry and crying because everyone, but me would come home showcasing metals they’ve won. That did not stop my dad from standing at the finish line yelling, “You better not quit, you better cross this finish line.” With tears in my eyes, feeling defeated, I would cross the finish line. My mother would be in the stands cheering and would always say, “You did good.” To my dad, thank you for waiting for me at the finish line and to my mom Thank you for cheering (even when I came in last place).

To my siblings, Yolanda, Shawn, Chaka, Charkyce and C.J, this is also dedicated to you. All things are possible for him who believes. Regardless of what others may think about your dreams or even if your journey becomes tedious…..you better not quit, you better cross the finish line. I’m cheering (loudly) (and praying louder) for you all.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout the past two years, I have been encouraged by so many people. I have experienced my Lord and Savior as my strength and my comforter and for that I continue to praise his Holy name. Dr. Priscilla “Lilly” Allen, when others told me no (literally), you took a chance and for that I say thank you for chairing this committee. Through the countless revisions and setbacks you always assured me that this journey was not over and everything would work out. There were many times that I did not believe I was going to be able to complete this (and wished I had made the decision to take the test), but when tough decisions came you stood before me and helped me to accomplish my goals. In addition, to my thesis committee members, Dr. Michelle Livermore and Dr. Cassandra Chaney, you jumped in this race with tenacity. For the time you devoted, helping me to strengthen my research and taking a sincere interest in my topic thank you. Dr. Matt Weeks of the Department of Psychology at Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana, I cannot thank you enough for all you’ve done for me. I ask that you accept my invitation in making you an honorary committee member. Desoto DCFS, in spite of it all, WE ARE A GREAT TEAM! Kamisha Bankston, thank you for listening to me rant and rave and tugging at my shirt in moments of frustration. Now I encourage you to not give up on yourself….It shall come to pass!

Dr. Rhenda Hodnett, Marcia Daniels and each individual who voluntarily completed the survey for me, this would not have been possible without your cooperation and participation. It is my hope that the results of this survey would bring about a positive impact for the State of Louisiana.

I have been blessed with two of the greatest parents, Charles and Pamela Ward. They have shown me what hard work and determination can do. I remember having to sit at the kitchen
table and study for a minimum of two hours because I received an unsatisfactory report card or
because an “F” grade in earth science somehow became an “A” by the time I made it home from
school. I remember my dad saying, “someday you will thank me” well, from the bottom of my
heart I thank you both for all you have done for each and every one of us. I LOVE YOU SO
MUCH!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................................. iii

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................................... vi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1
   Background: Roles and Responsibilities in Louisiana Child Welfare ........................................ 2

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................................... 5
   Conceptual Framework .................................................................................................................. 6
   The Job Demands Resources Model of Burnout ....................................................................... 9
   Summary ....................................................................................................................................... 14
   Hypothesis ..................................................................................................................................... 14

CHAPTER 3: METHODS .................................................................................................................. 16
   Study Design ............................................................................................................................... 16
   Measures ....................................................................................................................................... 16
   Participants ..................................................................................................................................... 17
   Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................... 18

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION ..................................................................................... 20
   Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services Burnout Results .............................. 23

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS ....................................................................... 32

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................................... 37

APPENDIX ......................................................................................................................................... 43
   A Survey monkey script .............................................................................................................. 43
   B Application of Exemption for Institutional Oversight .......................................................... 44

VITA .................................................................................................................................................. 45
ABSTRACT

Social work can be an extremely gratifying profession. However, social workers who are exposed to graphic realities related to vulnerable and traumatized individuals and families may experience challenging workload demands and increased levels of burnout. To best understand and support these key human service workers, it is important to investigate variables influencing levels of burnout. In this study, the author examined whether specific individual worker characteristics contribute to burnout among child welfare workers in Louisiana. Characteristics were compared to individual variables such as job tenure, agency department, supervisor/front line worker, and educational background. The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) was completed by 434 Louisiana Child Welfare workers. Overall, the OLBI did find that LADCFS child welfare workers were burned out, however results were examined to determine which workers were burned out. Tenure, Education or Assigned unit had no significance on the level of burnout workers experience. Researcher also found that Supervisors reported a higher level of burnout than front line worker.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Child welfare has been identified as one of the most challenging fields of employment due to the difficult nature of the work and the high demands and expectations placed on workers (Annie E. Casey Foundation [AECF], 2003, Boyas & Wind, 2010). Child welfare professionals are exposed to, and often responsible for life-changing events and life altering decisions for the vulnerable populations that they serve. Enhancing the well-being of children and protecting them from harm is the main aim of child protection, however, the level of stress that workers endure has been reported to seriously affect workers’ mental health and their desire to remain in the high stress arena of child protection (Littlechild, 2005).

This study has two major goals. The first goal of this study is to uncover whether specific individual worker characteristics contribute to burnout among child welfare worker’s in Louisiana. The second goal of this study is to contribute to the scholarly knowledge base by identifying factors that influence burnout. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide information that can inform policy and practices that can best support the needs of child welfare worker’s in a high-risk area.

Multiple factors influence worker burnout including: Interviewing children who have been physically, emotionally and sexually victimized by caregivers/people who are supposed to be responsible for and entrusted with the safety and security of the children, reading files that document cruel and abusive acts, being threatened physical harm from alleged perpetrators, being subjected to criticism from the judicial system, and being scrutinized by the public (Sprang, Craig & Clark, 2009). The overwhelming amount of paperwork, court appearances, low-paying salaries, lack of resources, difficulty working with involuntary clients paired with the hefty responsibility to protect society’s most vulnerable children are realities that contribute to
burnout in the high stress arena of child welfare (Howe, Leslie & Regehr, 1999). Mansell, Ota, Erasmus, and Mark (2011) state child protection systems across the United States appear to be in a continual crisis of confidence. This confidence crisis relates to the delicate balance of paternalism and what is best for the clientele served. Worker’s can find themselves in a no-win situation when they get criticized for not doing enough to protect some children, while at the same time are criticized for being too intrusive (Mansell et al., 2011). Worker’s who feel less control over the course of their work and the expectations that arise are more likely to face burnout (Boyas & Wind, 2009). Given burgeoning caseloads and lack of autonomy, it is no wonder some of our most valuable social workers are facing high levels of burnout. Burnout is debilitating to workers, costly to agencies, and detrimental to clients (Shinn, Rosario, Morch, & Chestnut, 1984). Burnout negatively affects the well-being of workers. This study hopes to identify and raise awareness about Louisiana’s child welfare agency and the manifestations of burnout that may occur based on several factors. The background of workers, the length of time spent in their position, their level of interaction with families in crisis, among other factors will be examined to understand burnout.

Background: Roles and Responsibilities in Louisiana’s Child Welfare

As of July 5, 2012, there were 3,983 individuals actively employed in Louisiana by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) (Deronica Conway, personal communication, July 5, 2012). Of those individuals 969, are assigned to the Child Welfare division (Sandra Jackson, personal communication, March 2, 2013). Changes within the agency are ongoing and may add to the experience of burnout given that new worker responsibilities are added on a regular basis. Over the past couple of years, for example, the Department of Children and Family Services has undergone massive reconstruction in order for the entire State of
Louisiana to be unified and cohesive in their practice across all parishes (Counties) in the state. This effort, referred to as “One DCFS,” is a vision to become more focused on the needs of clients. Such practices instilled in the “One DCFS” include increasing collaboration between existing programs, expediting service delivery, identifying methods to reduce work load and increasing access points for clients (Department of Children and Family Services, 2012). The three key goals for the Department of Children and Family Service are: “To work to keep children safe, help individuals and families become self-sufficient and provide safe refuge during disasters” (Department of Children and Family Services, 2012).

The Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (LADCFS) serve a large number of people. As of May 2012, the LADCFS (2012) was actively working 1,224 child abuse investigations (Child welfare) and 4,103 children foster care cases (Child welfare). Low wages, high caseloads, inadequate training, and poor supervision have been noted as key contributors to job burnout and high turnover within this population (AECF, 2003). The national turnover rate among child protective worker’s rose from 19.9% in 2000 to 22.1% in 2004 (Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], 2010). According to Conrad and Keller-Guenther (2006), as many as 50% of child protection worker’s report compassion fatigue and burnout. Compassion fatigue refers to the presence of re-experiencing, increased arousal or avoidance symptoms (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006). Furthermore, burnout is estimated to cost the economy $300 billion in sick time, long-term disability and excessive turnover (Lloyd, King, & Chenoweth, 2002). Thus, feelings of depression, anger, irritability, tension and marital dissatisfaction has been linked to excessive workloads (Baruch-Feldan, 2002).

There are various components to Child Welfare in Louisiana, and to clarify responsibilities within this unit, a brief overview of the workers within the unit will be described.
Before doing so, it is important to note that all units will be included in the study to assess if there are differences between burnout within different areas of practice.

**Child Welfare.** The Child Welfare section of the DCFS works to meet the needs of the most vulnerable individuals in society, namely children (Department of Children and Family Services, 2012). The four major components of Child Welfare include: Child Protection investigations, Family Services, Foster Care, and Adoption. Child Protection Investigators examine reports concerning neglect, physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Family Service workers provide short-term services in the home, in response to reports, of significant concern, but do not meet agency criteria for foster care placement. Children that are not appropriately cared for or who receive family services that are not showing improvements the agency requests that temporary custody be granted to the State. Parents then have to work with the DCFS and the court system to prove they are able to provide care for their children. There are situations that prevent parents from being able to obtain custody of their children. These situations cause parents’ rights to be terminated, and when this occurs, children are transferred from foster care to adoptions. The agency works with the child and placement resources to find permanent families for the children.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Freudenberger (1975), Maslach (1986), Schaufeli and Enzann (1993), Cordes and Daughtery (1998), Pines and Aronson (1988) are several of the most cited scholars that have investigated burnout. Over four decades ago, Freudenberger (1975) described burnout as a state of physical and emotional depletion resulting from conditions of work, however, six years later, Maslach and Jackson (1981) advanced and validated the concept of burnout by interpreting the individual burnout response in terms of the individual’s relational transactions in the workplace. Moreover, this interpersonal context focused attention on the individual’s emotions, and on the motives and values underlying his or her work with other people.

Burnout has been defined in various ways and despite the difficulty of finding a standard definition of this term, there are three core dimensions of burnout that remain constant. There is also a lack of clarity about the casual order of the three burnout dimensions emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment (Houkes et al., 2011). According to Schaufeli and Enzann (1998), only highly motivated individuals can burn out. Cordes and Dougherty (1993), summarized various conceptualization of the term, including, “a) to fail, wear out, become exhausted, b) a loss of creativity; c) loss of commitment for work; d) an estrangement from clients, job agency e) a response to the chronic stress of making it to the top; and f) a syndrome of inappropriate attitudes towards clients and toward self, often associated with uncomfortable physical and emotional symptoms” (p. 623). Pines and Aronson (1988), present a slightly broader definition of burnout in that they include physical symptoms and their view of burnout is not restricted to human services. They describe burnout as a “state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding” (p.9). Gryna (2004) describe burnout as physical or emotional fatigue
experienced over a significant period of time. Edelwich and Brodsky (1982) characterize burnout as a progressive loss of idealism, energy and purpose, and reveal enthusiasm, stagnation, frustration and apathy as the four stages of burnout. However, the most widely adopted definition comes from Maslach (1986) who defines burnout as a chronic response to extreme pressures and involves emotional exhaustion, feelings of low accomplishment and depersonalization. Essentially, this study will be based on a modified version Maslach’s (1986) earlier work.

**Stress.** According to Cartwright & Cooper (1997) stress is derived from the Latin word *stringere*, which means to draw tight, and was often used to describe afflictions or hardships. However, stress has taken many different meanings which are often contradictory and confusing. It is estimated that in the United States $300 billion dollars contribute annually to the cost of workplace stress in terms of absenteeism, reduced productivity and turnover (Amble, 2006). Work life in addition to environmental and personal factors all contribute to work-related stress (Buys, Matthews & Randall, 2010). However, it is argued that reducing high workloads, unrealistic performance expectations and job insecurity are key factors in significantly decreasing the occurrence of stress (Goldman, 2008). When workers are burned out the quality of service could be diminished. Job stress develops from role conflict that can be derived from unclear expectations in the workplace (Lizana & Barak, 2012). Existing evidence has shown that increased levels of role conflict and ambiguity resulted in higher levels of job burnout (Lee & Ashford, 1996). When stress in the workplace is not resolved it leads to burnout (Maslach &Jackson, 1981).

**Conceptual Framework**

According to Rubin and Babbie (2005), a conceptual framework is a theoretical structure of assumptions, principles, and rules that holds together the ideas comprising a broad concept.
Ideally, it is a set of coherent ideas or concepts organized in a way that makes them easy to communicate to others. The conceptual framework addressed in this study will be based on the work of theorist Christina Maslach.

Christina Maslach a leading pioneer in research on burnout syndrome (Lerias & Byrne, 2003). According to Maslach’s concept of burnout, there are three stress reactions or core components: (1) emotional exhaustion; (2) depersonalization; and (3) feelings of minimal personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to demands made on people at work, emotional resources are depleted, and workers feel they are no longer able to give of themselves. Depersonalization is exemplified when clients or employees are seen as objects rather than human beings. Decreased personal accomplishment is portrayed when employees are dissatisfied with their accomplishments on the job.

Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals that work in the area of human service (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). According to Jenaro, Flores, and Benito (2007), studies have shown that there is a high of level burnout in professionals who provide care to children at risk. Existing evidence suggests that the public child welfare workforce population is exposed to significant work demands and, as a result, experiences high rates of burnout (AECF, 2003). In order to produce positive resources for children within the child welfare system it is vital to have a quality workforce “No issue has a greater effect on the child welfare system's capacity to serve at-risk and vulnerable children and families than the shortage of a competent, stable workforce” (CWLA, 2008, p.2). Burnout is a process that occurs slowly over time as the individual is exposed to chronic work stressors that have not been addressed (Dill, 2007). According to Smith and Clark (2011), Maslach, a psychologist who developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory, burnout is a coping mechanism for
workplace stress. Burnout can result from, but is not limited to, a conflict between individual values and those of the organization, an overload of responsibilities, or a sense of having no control over the quality of service provided (Salston & Figley, 2003). Emotional exhaustion, self-efficacy and cynicism are psychological symptoms of job burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Compassion fatigue is similar to job burnout, however, the key concept that distinguishes the three is the developmental nature of burnout (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Compassion fatigue refers to the presence of re-experiencing, increased arousal or avoidance symptoms (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006). Ben-Porat and Itzhaky (2009) found professionals exposed to trauma demonstrate moderate symptoms of compassion fatigue. In a longitudinal study by Poulin and Walter (1993), emotional fatigue was the condition most commonly associated with burnout (Poulin & Walter, 1993). Maslach (1998) explains job burnout is a personal experience that influences how a worker views self and others. Emotional exhaustion refers to feeling overwhelmed from the depletion of personal resources when meeting workplace demands (Maslach et al., 2001).

Depersonalization or cynicism is a protective response. This is an interpersonal dimension of burnout that emotionally and cognitively distances the worker from clients and colleagues as a method of coping with overwhelming work demands (Maslach, 1998). Depersonalization can lead to a dehumanized view of clients and detachment from colleagues (Maslach, 1998).

Lastly, a sense of inefficacy and reduced productivity develops when feelings of personal accomplishments occur (Maslach, 1998). Burnout could have a serious impact on general health and productivity of employees (Brinkborg, Michanek, Hesser, & Berglund, 2011). Some physiological symptoms of burnout include hypertension, headaches and exhaustion (Salston &
Figley, 2003). The behavioral responses include insomnia, interpersonal difficulties and/or addictions and dependencies (Salston & Figley, 2003). Existing evidence has shown that increased levels of role conflict and ambiguity resulted in higher levels of job burnout (Lee & Ashford, 1996). When stress in the workplace is not resolved it leads to burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) [See Table 1 for Burnout in the Literature].

**The Job Demands Resources Model of Burnout**

Alaya Pines (1993) expressed only highly motivated individuals burnout and argues that the loss of meaning in life causes burnout. Individuals experiencing burnout withdraw emotionally from their jobs (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Employees that work directly with clients avoid or decrease contact with their clients (Maslach & Jackson, 1985), sometimes by taking longer breaks and lunch periods (Maslach & Pines, 1977). Work overload is commonly cited as the reason for burnout. Work overload is the result of having too many things to do in a given period of time (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Conley, 1991). Excessive prolonged job demands, and drained emotional resources and energy cause emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 1982), the first of the three components of burnout.

*Job demands* refer to those physical, social and organizational aspects of the job that require physical or mental effort and are associated with physiological and psychological cost (exhaustion). The greater the effort, the greater the cost. Long term effects could result in a state of breakdown, exhaustion or burnout (Hockey, 1993). *Job resources* refer to those physical aspects of the job that may do the following: “(a) be functional in achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands at the associated physiological and psychological cost; (c) stimulate personal growth and development” (Demerouti et al., 2001 p. 506). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model of burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) can be used to predict employee burnout. The
Job Demands-resources model or the JD-R model proposes that the development of burnout follows two processes (see Figure 1). The first process consists of extreme job demands, which could lead to constant overtaxing and in the end exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001). The second process, a lack of resources complicates meeting the demands of the job, which leads to withdrawal (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Figure 1. The Job Demands Resource Model of Burnout

A longitudinal study conducted by Lizano and Barak (2012) measured workplace demands and resources in child welfare employees spanning a time frame of 12 months. The study results were obtained from an availability sample of 362 child welfare workers employed at an urban public child welfare agency. Their study concluded that organizational tenure, job stress, and work-family conflict were found to be associated with the development of emotional
exhaustion, while age, work-family conflict, and organizational support were related to the
development of depersonalization.

Another study conducted by Bride, Jones, and MacMaster (2007), measured Secondary
Traumatic Stress (STS) in child protective service workers. A total of 333 Child Protection
professionals in the state of Tennessee participated in this study, and 92% respondents reported
“occasionally” experiencing stress (Bride et al., 2007), and 34% met the core criteria for
Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS). This study concluded moderate levels of stress among child
protective workers. Furthermore, the study found a relationship between stress in child protection
service professionals and personal history of trauma, peer support, administrative support,
professional experience and size of caseload (Bride et al., 2007).

Mason, LaPorte, Bronstein, and Auerbach (2012) conducted a study which addressed
child welfare workers’ perceptions of social work education. This aim of this study was to
improve services to children and families and decrease retention rate (Mason et al., 2012).
Findings indicated that worker’s with a background in social work had a strong professional
identity and commitment to work.

Table 1

Burnout in the Literature

(Author and Burnout Definition)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/s</th>
<th>What Burnout Involves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maslach &amp; Jackson (1981)</td>
<td>Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals that work in the area of human service.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
(Table 1 continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/s</th>
<th>What Burnout Involves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pines (1993)</td>
<td>Burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that arise when an individual is confronted with situations that are emotionally demanding for an extensive period of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina Maslach (1998)</td>
<td>Burnout is when workers feel they are no longer able to give themselves, are seen as objects rather than humans and are dissatisfied with their accomplishments on the job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper et al (2001)</td>
<td>Burnout is an extreme case of chronic stress which cannot be controlled by the individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maslach, Schaufeli, &amp;Leiter (2001)</td>
<td>Burnout is a syndrome characterized by high levels of exhaustion, negative attitudes towards work and reduced professional efficacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burisch (2002)</td>
<td>Burnout is expressed as identifying with feelings of hopelessness, depression and exhaustion. Inner restlessness. Reduced feeling of self-confidence and demoralization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salston &amp; Figley (2003)</td>
<td>Burnout is a conflict between individual values and those of the organization, an overload of responsibilities, or a sense of having no control over the quality of service provided.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Child Welfare Workers.** Considerable research has been conducted on burnout as it relates to child welfare workers. A search of database reveals more than 6000 scientific publications with the word burnout in the title (Schaufeli, 2003). However, when searching for burnout and child welfare, the publications are reduced to a little less than 3000 articles. Deapanfilis & Zlotnik (2008) indicates that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported child welfare agencies across the United States are experiencing problems retaining child welfare staff. Key contributors to worker stress include low pay, risk of violence, staff shortages, high caseloads, administrative burdens, inadequate supervision, and inadequate training (CWLA, 2003). “Child protection workers are subject to the graphic details of violent
and, at times, heinous events and are left with feelings of helplessness and horror as they acknowledge cruelty to children in society” (Cornille & Meyers, 1999, p. 6).

Mason et al (2012) indicates there is a connection between social work education and child welfare work. Studies indicate that a Social Work education strengthens the child welfare workforce (Curry & Cardina, 2003). Social work is declared the primary discipline for child welfare work (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). Social Work values are a major factor associated with remaining in child welfare work (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). Steib and Blome (2004) asserted that social work education should be a prerequisite for child welfare work. Perry (2006) informs that not only do social work educated workers remain in public child welfare longer than others, but social work students attain better outcomes with their clients. Due to a high turnover rate, lack of work experience has been a factor in child welfare workers. Research suggests that those who are younger and have less time and experience tend to display higher levels of burnout (Bell, Kullkarni, & Dalton, 2003). It is believed that older staff members experience less trauma effects due to life experiences which have left them better able to handle stressful events as they arise (Lerias & Byrne, 2003).

Lowered social support and the inability to cope with demands of the job can lead to the increased likelihood that child protection workers will experience burnout (Adams, Boscarino, & Figley, 2006). Age, gender and education are also predictive factors of burnout (Lerias & Byrne, 2003), however, very little scholarship has examined the impact of stressors on child welfare supervisors (Dill, 2007). Supervisors are exposed to similar levels of emotional trauma as those of the front line workers they supervise. Supervisors are responsible for overseeing large caseloads and in smaller offices supervisors are monitoring multi-units. Administrative pressures can include the demand to close protection investigations prematurely, reviewing and signing off
on cases without paying attention to details, and assigning cases to over-burdened workers (Shulman, 1993). Supervisors must often make critical on-the-spot decisions with minimal background information (Dill, 2007), which can have a negative effect on their job satisfaction. To support this, Silver, Poulin, and Manning (1997) found supervisors had lower rates of job satisfaction compared to their front-line child protection colleagues.

Summary

There are several studies that have given attention to workplace burnout in the area of child welfare. A vast majority of these findings confirms that workplace demands and resources predict burnout over time (Lizano & Barak, 2012). The overall aim of this thesis is to increase knowledge and promote more understanding about the conditions that affect burnout in LADCFS and to quantify the level of perceived burnout experienced by workers. Furthermore, the following three questions are foundational to this study:

1. What is the current level of job burnout among respondents?
2. Does experience and educational background serve as predictors of burnout among those employed with the child welfare program?
3. Do levels of burnout differ among the different programs within child welfare program?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses seek to analyze whether child welfare workers’ job tenure, agency assignment, and social work background influences rates of burnout.

H1: Child welfare workers with 5 years or less will report higher levels of burnout than employees with more than 5 years at the Department of Children and Family Services.

H2: Front line workers will report a higher level of burnout than supervisors.

H3: Child welfare employees who possess a degree in social work will report lower
levels of burnout than those with other professional backgrounds.

H4: Child protection investigators and foster care workers will report a higher level of burnout than adoptions and family service workers.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Study Design

This study utilizes a cross-sectional research design to investigate whether relationships exist between types of work performed, background of child welfare workers, and burnout. Data was collected February 26, 2013 through March 13, 2013 from those currently working in the child welfare program within the LADCFS using an internet survey.

Measures

The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) was used to measure job burnout. This 16-item instrument included positively and negatively framed items to assess exhaustion and disengagement from work. Sample items include, “when I work, I usually feel energized,” “I find work to be a positive challenge” and “During my work, I often feel emotionally drained.” The factorial validity of the OLBI has been confirmed in studies conducted in the United States, Germany, and Greece (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005). The Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha determined that the OLBI had very high levels of internal consistency of .84 and hence a very high degree of reliability (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005). The Cronbach’s Alpha for the exhaustion and disengagement sub-scales was determined by Bosman, Rothmann and Buitendach (2005) as being 0.85 and 0.84 respectively, and has been found by Demerouti et al. (2003) to be a reliable and valid instrument, with both convergent and discriminant validity. A study by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Ebbinghaus (2002) found that the OLBI is suitable for use in any work context.

The eight items for exhaustion address general feelings of emptiness, overtaxing from work, a strong need for rest, and a state of physical exhaustion. Responses fall on a 4-point agree/disagree scale from 1, strongly disagree, to 4, strongly agree. Disengagement refers to
distancing oneself from the object and the content of one’s work. The answering categories are the same as for exhaustion. For both scales four items are positively worded and four items are negatively worded. In the OLBI higher scores represent higher levels of burnout. The OLBI is a valid instrument that uses the core dimensions of burnout and work engagement (Demerouti, Mostert & Bakker, 2010). The OLBI covers effective, physical and cognitive aspects of exhaustion. Disengagement concerns the relationship between employees and their jobs in respect to identification with work and willingness to continue in the same occupation. Literature has concluded that the OLBI can be used to assess burnout and work engagement simultaneously (Demerouti, et al, 2010). In comparison to other burnout instruments, the OLBI is more comprehensive. The OLBI measures the same constructs as the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (that assess only burnout) and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (that only assess work engagement) (Demerouti, et al, 2010).

Participants

**Description. Method of data collection/sample:** The sample consisted of 434 child welfare participants across the State of Louisiana. The Regional Directors (Child Welfare Specialist VII) emailed a link of the survey to the Area Directors (Child Welfare Specialist VI). Once Area Directors received email they were asked to forward the link to Parish office Managers (Child Welfare Specialist V) who then forwarded the link to their assigned units. A direct link of the survey was also made available to child welfare staff on intranet (agency news portal) from February 28, 2013 to March 13, 2013. To ensure that the attitudes and perceptions of the aforementioned subset were reflected in this study, those who worked outside of child welfare were excluded from the study as were contract workers for the Department of Children and Family Services. Once approval was received, LADCFS invited individuals to participate in
this study. Of the estimated surveys distributed, 434 of 968 surveys were completed for a response rate of 44.83%.

**Human Subjects Protection.** This study received approval by the LSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) on December 6, 2012 and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Research Board approved this study on February 28, 2013. Participation in this study was voluntary, and participants were provided with a written informed consent. The purpose of this study was explained in the introduction of the survey. Participants were able to ask questions of the researcher and to withdraw from participating at any time.

**Confidentiality.** No identifying information (e.g., names, contact information, signature) was collected. An email was sent to each child welfare worker employed by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) with a link to Survey Monkey that each participant’s identity remains anonymous.

**Data Analysis**

All of the data except for the responses to the open-ended question were analyzed using the statistical software package SPSS v.18. A t-test was utilized to compare mean differences between specific variables in this study: burnout (measured by questions on the OLBI). For example, the researcher compared whether differences exist between workers’ unit and the level of burnout experienced and whether educational background and length of time in the position contributes to the level of burnout. There was an open-ended question included in the survey. Key findings are included in the results section.

**Independent variables.** Tenure, agency department and educational background are the independent variables used in this study. The variables: job tenure (the amount of time an individual has worked for the agency), agency unit (the area in child welfare the individual is
assigned to work), supervisor/front line worker (the rank of the individual), and educational background (highest degree the individual holds) are at a nominal level of measurement. In regards to tenure, the researcher looked at those employed fewer years (less than 5 years) vs. five or more years (Benevides-Pereira & Alves, 2007; Tolomiczenko, Kahan, Ricci, Strathern, Jeney, Patterson, & Wilson, 2005). According to Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth (2002) workers that leave the agency due to burnout leave before they make five years. Also, frontline workers include trainees, child welfare specialist I, II and III’s. Child Welfare Specialist IV’s are direct supervisors of the front line or field workers. Child Welfare Specialist V, VI, and VII are administrative supervisors. These variables were chosen to confirm if LADCFS support the literature conducted on the subject of child welfare.

**Dependent variables.** The dependent variable for this study is burnout as measured by the OLBI. The burnout score is an interval level variable.

**Univariate statistics.** Percentages and frequency distributions will be reported for the participant demographics that include gender, race, and education. The central tendency and the frequency distributions of the dependent variable will be included in this discussion of the sample.

**Bivariate statistics.** All independent variables (job tenure, agency unit, supervisor/front line worker, and educational background) were analyzed with OLBI scores. Hypotheses 1-4 used a t-test for testing relationships and mean differences between groups with burnout scores.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An estimated 968 surveys were electronically sent to child welfare workers employed with the Louisiana Department and Children and Family Services. Of the 968, 434 were returned (44.83% response rate), 399 were complete. Participants had worked for the agency anywhere from 0 to 40 years. One hundred fifty-six respondents (35.9%) reported working five years or less. Workers who have been employed with the agency for five years or less had the greatest response at 35.9%. Overall, this question yielded a 91.9% response rate. Thirty-six participants (8.3%) were male and the overwhelming majority (366) were female (84.3%). Thirty-two participants (7.4%) did not report their gender. Two-hundred seventy-seven respondents (74.5%) were front line workers, eighty-nine worked in supervisory roles (20.5%), and 68 (15.7%) did not include their job title for the agency. Front line workers include trainees, child welfare specialist I, II and III’s. Child Welfare Specialist IV’s are direct supervisors of the front line or field workers. Child Welfare Specialist V, VI, and VII are administrative supervisors. Between Supervisors, Child Welfare Specialists IV had the greatest response rate of all supervisory level workers at 14.1%. Of the 402 participants who disclosed their highest level of education, 86 (19.8%) reported having a Bachelors of Social Work (BSW), 106 (24.4%) had a Masters of Social Work (MSW), 1 respondent (.25%) reported having a Ph.D. in Social Work and 3 respondents (.75%) report having a Ph.D. in a field other than Social Work. One hundred and eighty-eighty respondents (45.41%) reported having a non-Social work degree. Thirty-two participants (7.4%) did not share their highest level of education [See Table 2 for the Demographics of Participants].
Table 2
Demographics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>84.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>43.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>53.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/ Native</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple races</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree in social work</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>21.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor other than social work</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>28.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree in social work</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>26.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s other than social work</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>16.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D or DSW in social work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D other than social work</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Table 2 continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>22.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40+ years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trainee</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare Specialist I</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare Specialist II</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>33.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare Specialist III</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>15.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare Specialist IV</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>16.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare Specialist V</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare Specialist VI</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare Specialist VII</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare Specialist VIII</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Unit</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foster Care</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>40.16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Table 2 continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Unit</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Services</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI/ARFA</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>34.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Development</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoptions</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services Burnout Results**

This study included two subscales of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory. The first subscale, depersonalization, consisted of eight items; and the second, emotional exhaustion, consisted on eight items. Three hundred and seventy-nine participants answered all 16 of the questions on the Oldenburg Burnout Instrument (see Table 3). This table shows overall burnout scores for Louisiana Child Welfare workers who participated in this study.

Table 3

**Overall Burnout Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall Burnout Score (higher values = higher burnout)</th>
<th>Disengagement</th>
<th>Exhaustion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.2729</td>
<td>2.4050</td>
<td>2.1238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>.51809</td>
<td>.53198</td>
<td>.56406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>-.097</td>
<td>-.242</td>
<td>.132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contrary to previous findings in the literature that child welfare workers experience high levels of burnout (Adams, Boscarino, & Figley, 2006), child welfare workers of Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services do not significantly report high levels of burnout (M=2.27, s=.51). A mean score ≤2.5 would indicate high levels of burnout.

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** A t-test was conducted to determine if there is a significant difference between tenure with the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services and burnout levels. An alpha of .05 was used to determine if the difference in levels of burnout were statistically significant. This was used for all hypotheses unless otherwise noted.

The bivariate statistics are reported in Table 4 below. A t-test revealed that the average level of burnout among child welfare workers who have worked 5 years or less (M = 2.23, s = .55) and those who have worked more than 5 years (M = 2.29, s = .50), were not significantly different t(348) = 1.078, p = .282 (see Table 4). Thus, these findings fail to reject the null hypothesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5 years with agency</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>1.078</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>.282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;5 years with agency</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research shows that burnout and turnover in child welfare are strongly correlated (Tziner & Vardi, 1984). According to Nissly et al., (2005), length of time at an agency was not related to burnout or staff intention to leave. Typically, those workers employed with LADCFS who reported working 5 years or less are in Child Welfare Specialist Trainee and Child Welfare
Specialist I positions. Respondents who reported working for the agency more than five years are more than likely to be in Specialist II through Specialist VII positions. In this study, workers in these two groups did not have a statistically significant difference in their burnout scores (see Table 4). Child Welfare is a stressful career at all levels of experience. Perhaps the causes of burnout are different for those workers in their inaugural year at the LADCFS than for those in their twentieth year at the agency. More experienced workers generally carry more complex cases and more of a case load. Recently, policy changed at the Department of Children and Family Services to allow first years workers to carry a maximum number of cases (n=7), to increase the level of supervision and to help the worker establish a plan of action for their particular case load.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). A t-test was conducted to determine if a significant difference existed between front line workers and supervisors. It revealed a statistically significant difference between front line workers (M = 2.20, s = .52) and supervisors (M = 2.36, s = .44), t (322) = 2.46, p = .014 (see Table 5). Supervisor’s reported significantly higher levels of burnout than front line workers.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front Line Workers</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>.014*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Front Line workers and Supervisors, *p<0.05

A social work supervisor is an agency administrative staff member to whom authority is delegated to direct, coordinate, enhance, and evaluate on-the-job performance of the supervisees.
for whose work they are held accountable (Borland, 1981). Front line workers are those individuals who reported being a trainee, Child Welfare Specialist I, Child Welfare Specialist II, and Child Welfare Specialist III. Front line workers consisted of 74.5% of respondents. The majority of the responses were Child Welfare Specialist II’s. Supervisors consisted of Child Welfare Specialists IV, Child Welfare Specialists V, Child Welfare Specialists VI, and Child Welfare Specialists VII. Child Welfare Specialist IV’s are the direct supervisors for Child Welfare Specialist I, II, and III.

Dill (2007) expressed, “Supervisors are the heart of everything. They empower their workers; they are the ones who make the system happen. They are pivotal to the direction of the agency.” A heavy work load represents a great demand on workers. Child Welfare front line-workers can have caseloads ranging from 11 children (which is considered standard) to 25 plus children. Supervisors have this same load multiplied by the number of workers they supervise in addition to all administrative work for which they are held accountable.

Supervision is a major form of social work support and social workers often turn to their supervisors for assistance with cases (Collings & Murray, 1996). While there is minimal information pertaining to supervisors and burnout, Himle et al. (1989), reported that emotional support by supervisors are associated with lower levels of burnout and work stress. Social workers who perceive their supervisors as supportive have less potential for burnout.

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** A t-test was conducted to determine if there is a significant difference between workers who possess a degree in social work and those who do not hold a degree in the field of social work (see Table 6). A t-test revealed the difference between participants who hold a social work degree (M = 2.22, s = .51) and those who do not hold a
social work degree (M = 2.27, s = .50), t (322) = .978, p = .329 to not be statistically significant. Thus, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Also, if we compare respondents with a Bachelor’s degree in social work (M = 2.17, s = .45) with those who possess a bachelors in a field other than Social Work (M = 2.25, s = .50) (see Table 7), their mean burnout score is not significantly different than those who possess a Master’s degree in social work (M = 2.25, s = .55) in comparison to those who hold a Master’s degree in a field other than social work (M = 2.30, s = .55) (see Table 8). Twenty six percent of respondents who reported having a Bachelor’s degree in a field other than social work completed the survey and those possessing a Master’s degree in Social Work trailed at a completion rate of 24.4%.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SW Degree</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.51983</td>
<td>.978</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>.329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-SW Degree</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>.50153</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors in SW</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>.45077</td>
<td>1.088</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.50106</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master’s in SW</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.53723</td>
<td>.577</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other master’s degree</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>.56035</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A study conducted by Mason et al., 2012, indicated social workers who hold a masters degree were less likely to leave the field due to burnout compared to those who do not hold a master’s degree in social work. Also, child welfare workers who participated in the study indicated gaining a great appreciation of work place issues and feeling more empowered (Mason et al., 2012).

**Hypothesis 4 (H4).** A t-test was conducted to determine if there is a significant difference in burnout rates between Child Protection Investigators and Foster Care Workers and Family Service and Adoption workers. Child Protection Investigators and Foster care workers accounted for 66.3% of the sample. Family Services and Adoption Workers accounted for only 12.5% of the sample, and 11.1% of child welfare workers did not respond to this question. A t-test revealed that the difference between workers in child welfare foster care and child protection units (M = 2.17, s = .45) and those who work in family services and adoptions (M = 2.25, s = .50), \( t (168) = 1.088, \ p = .278 \) was not statistically significant (see Table 9). Thus, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.
Table 9
Child Welfare Units CPI/FC/Adoptions/Family Services and Burnout Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPI and Foster care</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.51045</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>.931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Services and Adoptions</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>.51316</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Pines (2003) worker involvement is seen as being the antithesis of burnout. Workers involved, engaged and interested in their work are less likely to burn out than those who are exhausted and have adopted a cynical attitude. Child Protection Investigators and Foster care workers usually have a negative stigma about their work in child welfare. In most situations, family involvement with these workers is involuntary. Families are then separated, visits are limited and classes are mandated before the children are allowed back in the home. Family Service workers are involved with families who have volunteered to have child welfare workers in the home. At any time these families can refuse services from the agency. Adoption workers are involved with the families that could not complete the court-ordered case plan. Rights are then terminated and the case is transferred to a worker to find a permanent home. These workers do not work with the parents, only the children. Because of the aforementioned concerns, it was hypothesized that foster care and CPI workers would report higher levels of burnout. Findings of this study revealed there was not a significant difference between foster care and CPI and Family services and Adoption workers.

An additional open-ended question was posed to survey respondents seeking information about the factors they think contribute to becoming disconnected with their work. Respondents
were asked, “Think about times when you have become disconnected with your work. What factors do you think lead to this?”

To identify the themes that emerged from the written responses to this question, grounded theory and an open-coding process (Holsti, 1969; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) was used. In keeping with open-coding techniques, no a priori categories were imposed on the written data. Instead, themes were identified from the written responses. In order to clearly abstract themes from the written responses, words and phrases were the units of analysis.

An analysis of the responses revealed the following three primary themes: (a) Unclear Expectations and Frequent Criticism; (b) Failure to Respect Proper Child Welfare Worker Boundaries; and (c) Unrealistic Timeframes. The identity of all participants was protected by pseudonyms.

Theme 1 (Unclear Expectations and Frequent Criticism) was offered by four participants in the study. In particular, these child welfare workers lamented they are constantly criticized for what they do wrong and receive little guidance to correct their mistakes from their supervisors. Alice, a foster care worker said, “I feel like a robot.” Leslie, a child protection investigator, offered this perspective, “My supervisor is constantly telling me what I’m doing wrong, but never has taken the time to show me the right way.” The feelings just mentioned were supported by Lora, a family services worker who shared: “Just today, I received 6 emails regarding changes in how I need to record my case notes.” The aforementioned assessments were further reiterated by Chandler, a foster care worker who wrote: “I am always told what I’m doing wrong, but I am only doing what my supervisor has asked.” These feelings could also explain the higher levels of disengagement scores (M= 2.40, s=.53). Thus, feeling frustrated, anxious, and pressured...
by high and increased expectations, may in large speak to the work overload aspects of these roles.

Theme 2 (Failure to Respect Proper Child Welfare Worker Boundaries) was provided by two participants in the study. One respondent, who has worked for the agency approximately 4 years, indicated their supervisor calling at 4:30am for something that could have been postponed until they reported back to work. Marsha, a foster care worker, lamented, “I literally have nightmares about my work” or “It’s no longer about the children or families only numbers.” Ashley, an adoptions worker commented, “I don’t know who to put first my family or my clients.” Essentially, the participants indicated there are fewer workers, fewer resources, and feeling trapped by an increasing number of policies and procedures.

Interestingly, Theme 3 (Unrealistic Timeframes) was one of the greatest concerns for child welfare workers, and four workers added their voices to this theme. For example, Joyce, a foster care worker noted, “Paperwork could be submitted timely if so much of the information was not repetitive.” This perspective was the sentiment of Tamera, who has only been with DCFS for 2 years, who expressed: “I am no longer asked how my clients are doing. I’m simply asked if I saw them this month.” Micah, a foster care worker who has been with the agency for fourteen years said, “I am supposed to see 25 children within the first two weeks of the month, this is in addition to the weekly family visit, when exactly do I breath.” These workers, who have wide ranges of experience, are made to feel uncertain regarding what is best for these families. Workers are being questioned whether the recommendations they provide pertaining to the families they visit on a weekly basis and speak with almost daily are relevant or important. This can be demoralizing to these workers. Additionally, resources for clients are being cut across the state, yet workers are expected to produce the same results with their clients.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overall, 75% of Louisiana Department of Children and Family services workers reported feeling some level of burn out. Burnout is not a sudden issue and is considered to be a process of stressors building up over time (Maslach et al., 2001). It is always challenging to work with such a vulnerable population. Although there are many studies on child welfare, only a few studies have examined child welfare and burnout. To address the absence of this material in the literature, this paper examined the prevalence of burnout in Louisiana Child Welfare workers. The demands of the profession are similar to other high stress careers and have the potential to result in increased levels of burnout (Conrad & Keller, 2006). Thus, burnout may have deleterious effects on child welfare workers who tend to put the needs of others before their own and thus neglect their own personal health (NASW, 2008).

Child Welfare Workers are at a substantially higher risk of being burned out than other human service workers (Adams, Boscarino, & Figley, 2006). Workers never know whether a ferocious dog, a meth lab or a violent parent is waiting for them in the field or if cases are being piled on their desk waiting for their return. These experiences directly impact how a job is performed. Burned-out workers can miss critical information about the children and families which in turn increases the chances of making inaccurate and ineffective decisions (Kim, 2007).

This study focused specifically on burnout among Louisiana Child Welfare Workers. Child Welfare’s greatest loss is when empathic and passionate people leave because the demands of the job were more than they could or were willing to physically, psychologically, or emotionally handle. Findings in this study indicate that tenure with agency and education were not related to the level of burnout, but surprisingly, supervisors were found to report higher levels of burnout than front line workers.
It is interesting to note years of experience in this profession were not a significant predictor of burnout. Perhaps the grouping of tenure with agency needed to be revamped. Instead of 0-5 years, workers should have been able to just inform of the exact number of years they have worked for the agency. This could be an interesting aspect of future studies.

Professional Development is needed. There is minimal research concerning the impact of social work in child welfare, although, social workers dominate the field. Although there was no significance between participants who did hold a degree in social work and those who did not, workers need to continually develop knowledge in their field. Also, with child welfare supervisors reporting higher levels of burnout we have to look at how we can empower and effectively carry out administrative and supportive functions. Weaver et al., (2007) express that many supervisors do not receive proper training before moving from a front line worker to their supervisory roles. Proper training could help alleviate the level of burnout, build confidence and provide intervention strategies for those they supervise (Weaver et al., 2007).

The finding that the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services workers who participated in this study were at risk for burnout was not surprising. There are several limitations that must be noted and should be addressed in future studies, the first being the gender representation of this sample. An overwhelming majority of the respondents identified as female, leaving on 36 male respondents. This may be due to any number of factors, one of which being that social work is a predominately female profession.

Another limitation is 12.7 % of respondents did not complete the entire survey. Participants had the opportunity to not proceed with the survey at any moment. However, we have to examine what other factors could have contributed to why some workers did not complete entire survey. Were some workers too busy with their work load and disregard the
survey or could some individuals not believe the impact their response could have made. Also, the way the survey was made available could have limited the number of respondents. Regional Administrators were asked to provide a link of the survey to the Administrative Directors. Administrative Directors were to send link to parish office managers who would send to supervisors and front line workers. There was no way to determine if the Regional Administrators submitted the link and made it available in their assigned region. Even if the Regional Administrators did make link available because of the chain the link submitted through there could have been a lost connection and some workers were left off the email.

There were also ambiguities in the definition of burnout. Throughout the literature, the term burnout was rather inconsistent. For example, in the burnout literature, many studies used the term burnout, while others used stress interchangeably. A further limitation was that this study only examined workers currently employed by LADCFS. Representation is difficult to be determined due to the study not looking at the reason former LADCFS left the agency. The national turnover rate among child protective workers rose from 19.9% in 2000 to 22.1% in 2004 (Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], 2010).

LADCFS Child Welfare Workers not only expressed (a) unclear expectations and frequent criticism; (b) child welfare worker boundaries; and (c) unrealistic timeframes, but inquired about merit increases, lack of promotional opportunities and not being permitted to take leave when needed. Leslie, a child protection investigator, indicated, “If I could meet with my supervisor once a week for a face-to-face staffing, rather than getting in touch by email, a lot of my stress could be alleviated.” Because of the heavy caseloads, lack of support from supervisors and administration, lack of resources to perform job duties adequately in addition to vivid depictions of horrific events may be a source of burnout that is evident in Child Welfare worker.
These employers should be aware of harmful effects exposures can cause, recognize these effects, and address them (Sprang et al., 2007). Workers are encouraged to seek professional intervention or counseling when they feel overwhelmed or burnout (Sprang et al., 2007).

According to Lederer (2007), individuals may be experiencing symptoms of burnout without being cognizant of this fact. Furthermore, noted below are recommendations for further research:

1. Since this study only provided a "snapshot" of burnout, a longitudinal study would more clearly identify the factors and/or conditions that lead to burnout. In particular, it would clarify the points in time when child care workers are more or less likely to be stressed.

2. Closer examinations of the stressors experienced by supervisors are needed. In particular, studies related to stress would identify the responsibilities and/or demands that make supervisors stressed.

3. A qualitative exploration would lead to a greater understanding of why people are attracted to the job, what makes them remain in the job, and how they minimize stress in their lives. In particular, a phenomenological approach would allow child welfare workers and supervisors to provide rich "stories" regarding the joys and frustrations associated with their work.

Louisiana has worked hard to protect children from physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect and to help families get the services they need to end abusive behavior and provide for their children’s needs. Enhancing the well-being of children and protecting them from harm is the main aim of child welfare (Littlechild, 2005). Burnout is debilitating to workers and detrimental to clients (Shinn, Rosario, Morch, & Chestnut, 1984). Where can the line be drawn?
Workers can find themselves in a no-win situation when they get criticized for not doing enough to protect some children, while at the same time are criticized for being too intrusive (Mansell et al., 2011). The question now has to be asked, “Where does the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services go from here?”
REFERENCES


37


Appendix A

Script for Survey Monkey

To my fellow child welfare workers, I want to just say THANK YOU for all your hard work and dedication. As a front line worker I understand the job but want to know more about the views of my coworkers.

I am currently enrolled at Louisiana State University Masters of Social Work Program. I have chosen to write a thesis on Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services: A Study on Workers' Burnout. The study hopes to contribute to the knowledge base by identifying factors that influence worker perceptions of their jobs and to help the social work field identify policies and practices that best meet the needs of workers in a high risk area.

I know we are all busy, however I am asking that you take the next 10 minutes to help me by completing this survey. Although your participation would be greatly appreciated, it is strictly voluntary. I anticipate minimal risks are associated with this study. No identifying information (e.g., names, contact information, signature) will be collected.

This study has been approved by the LSU IRB. For questions concerning participant rights, please contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Robert C. Matthews, 578-8692, or irb@lsu.edu.
Appendix B

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, all LSU research projects involving human subjects, samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

- Applicant: Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-F. Listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at [http://research.lsu.edu/Compliance/PoliciesProcedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard%28IRB%29/item/20737.html](http://research.lsu.edu/Compliance/PoliciesProcedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard%28IRB%29/item/20737.html)

- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
  - Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts A-F (if any).
  - A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 16-20).
  - Copies of all instruments to be used.
  - If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
  - The consent form that will be used in the study (see part 1 for more information).
  - Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection: Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: [http://sppr.lsu.edu/login/login.php](http://sppr.lsu.edu/login/login.php)

1) Principal Investigator:

Priscilla Allen

Dept: Social Work
Ph: (225) 578-1325
E-mail: aallen@lsu.edu

2) Co-Investigators (please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each)

Crystal Ward - Student

3) Project Title:

Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services: A Study of Workers Burnout

4) Proposal? (yes or no)

No

If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

Also, if YES, either

- This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant
- More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (i.e., psychology students)

Employees of Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services

- Circle any "sensitive populations" to be used: (children ≤ 18, the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, etc.). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature

[Signature]

Date 12/14/2011

**I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later altered, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study, if I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.**

Screening Committee Action: Exempted

Signed Consent Waived: Yes

Reviewer Signature

Date 12/14/2011
VITA

Crystal Ward was born in Shreveport, Louisiana. She is the daughter of Charles and Pamela Ward of Rodessa, Louisiana and the sibling of Yolanda Burnom (LSU Alumni), Shawn McCullough, Chaka Ward, Charkyce Ward and Charles Ward, Jr. Crystal attended North Highlands Elementary, Donnie Bickham Middle School and Northwood High School in Shreveport, Louisiana. She received her Associate of Criminal Justice, Bachelor of Social Work and Bachelor of General Studies (Social Sciences) from Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana. From there, she went on to pursue her Master of Social Work from Louisiana State University. She performed her field work at Willis Knighton South Hospital (Behavioral Unit) in Shreveport, Louisiana. Crystal resides in Shreveport, Louisiana with her family and friends. She has been employed for 7 years with the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services. She is active in ministry at Higher Ground Ministries, Inc. in Mansfield, Louisiana, where she faithfully teaches and ministers through song.