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Angela Ausbrooks

Introduction

Child welfare and other state and federal human service agencies are considered very stressful work environments that have been plagued with high turnover rates, performance issues, and low morale (Arches, 1991; Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], 2002; Marchland, Demers, & Durand, 2005). These issues impact not only agencies' abilities to retain staff, but they can also have a negative effect on service delivery in terms of both the volume and the quality of these services. According to the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) 2010 Standards of Excellence report the quality of service delivery can have a direct impact on client outcomes and an organization's ability to fulfill its mission and achieve its goals. In addition, an inability to retain staff affects the financial well-being of an organization because of the constant need to recruit, train, and develop qualified staff (Maceration, Gustafson, Levitt, & Bartle, 2009). For example, child welfare agencies have received overwhelming attention because of their inability to consistently retain staff, particularly those considered front-line, that is, caseworkers and supervisors.

Data indicate that turnover rates for child welfare supervisors at the federal level are 4.6% and 12.8% for caseworkers (CWLA, 2007). In a large southwestern state, turnover rates for supervisors in 2009 were 5.9%, and ranged between 16.8% and 35.2% for caseworkers, depending on the region. These rates are likely to continue increasing due to budget limitations, unrealistic public and agency expectations, and high caseloads.

Research suggests a host of factors contribute to turnover, such as stress, high caseload numbers, lack of support, burnout, a negative organizational climate, and an overall decrease in job satisfaction (Gibbs, 2001; Morris, 2005; Rycraft, 1994; Samantrai, 1992). For agency supervisors, peer and supervisor support are vital due to the volume and complexity of cases for which they are responsible (Renner, Porter, and Preister, 2009). Therefore, the lack of support can be a primary contributor to supervisor turnover. Although supervisors are essential to a child welfare agency's ability to manage the workforce and outcomes for children and their families, the majority of research in this area focuses on caseworkers (Arches, 1991; Drake & Yadama, 1996; Fox, Miller & Barbee, 2005; Gibbs, 2001; Harrison, 1980; Jayaratene, Chess, & Kunkel, 1986; Rycraft, 1994; Samantrai, 1992; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2007). There is a paucity of research in this area regarding supervisors and the personal factors and the organizational climate that affect their employment longevity (Ellett, Ellett, & Rugutt, 2003; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Marchand, Demers, & Durand, 2005).

In spite of the stress, high caseloads, lack of peer and community support, poor supervisor support, and overall decreased job satisfaction that contribute to employee burnout and turnover in child welfare agencies, some supervisors have been able to endure the stress and remain with the agency. What compels them to stay? Is it the quality of supervision they receive, the presence of a support system inside and outside the agency, or organizational benefits? The overall goal of this research project was to identify some of the personal factors and organizational climate characteristics that may affect employment longevity for child welfare supervisors. This article focuses only on the findings related to the organizational climate aspects of the overall study. The present study attempts to examine two questions: (a) how does organizational climate influence the development of resilience in child welfare supervisors? and (b) how does organizational climate influence retention of child welfare supervisors?

Angela Ausbrooks, PhD, LMSW is an Assistant Professor at Texas State University—San Marcos.

Literature Review

The literature in the area of retention and resiliency of employees covers a broad range of concepts, including burnout and related concepts, organizational climate, and organizational structure, specifically middle management. A brief overview of pertinent literature is reviewed below.

Burnout

Pines (2002) defines burnout as a physical, emotional, and mental state of exhaustion occurring when those employees who possess a high level of motivation consistently experience emotionally demanding and draining situations that they cannot resolve. Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) consider burnout to be associated with work environment and comprised of three dimensions -- exhaustion, a sense of cynicism, and perception of personal ineffectiveness. Lecroy and Rank (1986) found that several work-related factors, including satisfaction, autonomy, and self-esteem, can be considered potential determinants of burnout. When employees perceive that these factors are lacking or are unfulfilled, the result is ultimately burnout.

Several authors examined burnout with child protection caseworkers (Arches, 1991; Baumann, Kern, McFadden, & Law, 1997; Daley, 1979; Drake and Yadama, 1996; Harrison, 1980; Jayaratne & Chess, 1984; Jayaratne, Chess, & Kunkel, 1986). Baumann et al. found professionals in helping professions tend to perceive bad case outcomes as solely their fault. This perception can contribute to burnout. However, they note that organizational factors "may [also] play a primary role in producing burnout" (p. 16). Daley (1979) identified several additional job-related factors which contribute to burnout, such as (a) excessive paperwork, (b) inability to see a case through to an outcome, (c) case recidivism, (d) lack of evidence of client success, and (e) poor working conditions, such as rodents in the office, poorly maintained buildings, and offices in crime-infested neighborhoods. Jayaratne and Chess (1984), Harrison (1980), and Arches (1991), explored the relationship of burnout and job satisfaction among social workers employed in child welfare. These authors found that child welfare workers reported higher levels of stress, more job-related conflict, and higher caseloads although they had fewer cases than community mental health and family service social workers.

In summary, the literature on burnout suggests that the workplace environment is a key contributor to the development of burnout, especially for those employees who are highly motivated to affect change and are unable to do so at a level that is satisfactory. This inability to achieve personal satisfaction is directly related to job satisfaction, thus the inability to achieve one impacts the ability to achieve the other. Daley (1979) identified several job-related factors that contribute to burnout, such as excessive paperwork, inability to see case outcomes, case recidivism, no evidence of client success, and poor working conditions. These factors are prominent in child welfare agencies.

Organizational Climate

The climate of the organization can also be a contributing factor in the turnover of its employees. According to Steib and Blome (2003) child welfare environments consist of "a high level of regulations, vast amounts of documentation, lack of respect from the public and professional groups, and persistent threats of legal liability" (p. 748). Fox, Miller, & Barbee (2003) described child welfare as one of the most stressful and thankless jobs in the public sector. A report by the CWLA (2002) states that although reform efforts have been implemented in the past, "…the child welfare work environment evolved into one characterized by lowered autonomy, heightened regimentation, and increased documentation…" (p. 2).

Baumann, Kern, McFadden, and Law (1997) summarized the literature on organizational climate (Anderson, 1991; Capel, Sisley & Desertrain, 1987; Gaines & Jermier, 1983; Maslach, 1976; Leiter, 1988; Roberts, 1991) and indicated that the lack of supervisor support, poor peer relationships, uncertainty about job roles, minimal pay, and few opportunities for advancement are organizational factors related to burnout. Ylipaavalniemi et al. (2005) state that organizational climate is primarily based on "employees' shared perceptions and interpretations of the organizational environment" (p. 112). If employees perceive their work

environment as satisfying, rewarding, and full of possibilities they are more likely to remain employed. However, if they perceive the opposite, the work climate is considered stressful and turnover may be the logical consequence. Glisson and Hemmelgarn (1998) also found "that attitudes shared by employees about their work environment (collectively labeled organizational climate) are important determinants of the organization's effectiveness" (p. 404).

Arches (1991) found that the bureaucratic structure of social service agencies contributes to job dissatisfaction of its employees. Arches describes bureaucracies as stifling environments that do not allow employees to work autonomously with clients or use the skills they possess. Marchand, Demers, and Durand (2005) believe that psychological distress experienced in an organization is related to how tasks are assigned and completed, how demanding managers and daily tasks are perceived, quality of social relationships, and rewards.

Several researchers also found that the climate of the organization affects job satisfaction, job commitment, job embeddedness, and overall stress, all of which can be utilized as predictors of turnover and retention (Cheng, Chen, Chen, & Chiang, 2005; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Koeske & Kirk, 1993; Marchand, Demers, & Durand, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2001; Steib & Blome, 2003: Ylipaavalniemi et al., 2005). If employees are stressed and consider their work environment to be adding to rather than ameliorating that stress, this perception not only impacts their satisfaction with the job, but their work product outcomes as well. Thus, the stressors experienced by the employee not only have a personal impact, but can also influence clients and the services they receive as well as the organization as a whole and its ability to achieve organizational objectives.

Glisson and Hemmelgarn (1998) state that employee attitudes about the climate of their organization are indications of organizational effectiveness. They also state that organizational climate influences not only individual employees, but service delivery as well. The authors recommend that organizations intentionally employ efforts to improve the internal climate of its organization as a means of increasing effective service delivery rather than continuing to focus solely on the external factors that influence organizational climate.

In summary, the literature suggests that the bureaucratic structure of child welfare agencies and the overall climate may exacerbate the impact of inherent systemic stressors, such as the bureaucratic structure, voluminous numbers of client cases, top-down management resulting in a lack of autonomy, and stressors related to the abuse and neglect observed daily, which are not components of work environments in other agencies. All of these factors can result in employees who report being overworked, having feelings of inadequacy, and personal and job dissatisfaction, all of which are directly related to the inability to achieve employment longevity – turnover.

Resilience

The literature of resilience also speaks to employee retention. Some employees, specifically supervisors, are able to withstand agency stressors and achieve employment longevity possibly because they have resilient characteristics. For the purposes of this study, the researcher utilized the definition of "resilience" by Richardson (2002) as the conceptual framework. This specific framework is based on the third wave of resilience research, which seeks to identify the energy or motivational sources needed for resilient reintegration after experiencing adversity, and to determine the source of this energy. Some people are motivated by external factors, such as compliments and recognition, while others are motivated by internal factors, such as pride, self-esteem, and personal values. Although most motivation is obtained from personal sources, organizations can also be identified as motivational sources. For those persons requiring external motivation, employee awards and recognition are adequate motivators and for those who receive motivation from within, doing their job well is often sufficient. The relationship between organizational climate and individual characteristics, and the one between burnout and turnover have been assessed in the child welfare field (Baumann, Kern, McFadden, & Law, 1997; Ellett, Ellett, & Rugutt, 2003).

Baumann et al. (1997) explored these concepts by comparing responses of caseworkers from Adult Protective Services (APS) and Child Protective Services (CPS) in Texas. They found CPS caseworkers appeared to be more impacted by organizational factors, and their levels of burnout were significantly higher than those of their APS counterparts.

The strengths perspective is another framework which underlies the present study's view of resilience by emphasizing personal and environmental strengths. The environment in this study is the organization of Child Protective Services (CPS) and organizational factors which constitute the infrastructure of the organization. A strengths perspective also involves viewing individuals as the experts of their lives (Bell, 2003). Langer (2004) adds that "the strengths perspective focuses on capabilities, assets, and positive attributes rather than problems and pathologies" (p. 614). Utilization of a strengths perspective impacted the overall design of the study, which sought the perspectives of CPS supervisors, the experts on the organization, and the impact that the organization had on their ability to achieve employment longevity. In addition, a strengths perspective supports the focus of the study, which was an exploration of characteristics of those supervisors who remained employed with the agency despite stressors experienced rather than those who were unable or unwilling to do so.

In conclusion, the literature on burnout, organizational climate, and resilience indicates that the interaction of personal and organizational factors is a key component of the turnover found in child welfare. Those employees who are unable to achieve personal and job satisfaction due to the bureaucratic structure of the agency, lack of autonomy and decision-making authority, inability to effect change in clients, and high caseloads are at risk of developing burnout. In addition, if employees do not possess personal or organizational support systems, they may be unable to withstand these stressors, which results in high turnover rates. This study attempts to identify the personal and/or organizational factors that enhance the ability of some child welfare supervisors to endure agency stressors and achieve employment longevity.

Methodology

Research Methods

An exploratory, qualitative research design was utilized to explore two research questions: (a) how does organizational climate influence the development of resilience in child welfare supervisors? and (b) how does organizational climate influence retention of child welfare supervisors? A qualitative design was chosen because of the lack of research on those child welfare employees who remain employed despite the organizational stressors which contribute to high levels of turnover. Specifically, a grounded theory approach was utilized to determine a theoretical perspective regarding the participants' views of the personal and organizational characteristics needed to achieve employment longevity. The grounded theory process allows the research participants to speak for themselves and continues until the data collected are considered exhaustive by the researcher. The process also involved having participants identify the organizational factors that may have contributed to the development and maintenance of resilience. This study is also characterized as exploratory because it sought to examine from their own perspectives why some employees were able to endure the stress inherent in Child Protective Services (Rubin & Babbie, 2001).

The research consisted of discussions with four focus groups and individual interviews with 50 Child Protective Services supervisors in the four primary regions of a large southwestern state (north, south, east, and central). Study participants were asked to identify and apply their own meaning to organizational characteristics they perceived as significant in developing and enhancing their resilience levels. Although this study sought to explore the resilience levels of CPS supervisors, the author did not equate resilience with length of employment.

Study Participants

Study participants were 50 current CPS supervisors in four of the main regions in Texas, all of whom had been employed with CPS longer than

two years. It was assumed that those supervisors who have been employed more than two years possess resilient qualities that have contributed to their ability to remain employed. This assumption was based on the fact that turnover rates are indicative of the high number of employees who were unable to remain employed longer than two years. Twenty-five supervisors participated in the focus groups and 25 additional supervisors were interviewed individually. There were 39 women (78%), and 11 men (22%) of diverse ethnicities (European American, African American, Latino, and Japanese American), and their average age was 42 years.

Female	Male	Total
39	11	50
78%	22%	100%

European American	African-American	Latino	Asian	Total
31	11	6	1	50
62%	24%	12%	2%	100%

Collectively, the participants had been employed with CPS for an average of 11 years, and had an average of four years supervisory experience.

	Range	Average	Total
# Years with the Agency	3-33	11	556.5
# Years Supervising	1-31	4	188.5
Age When Started	22-65	31	1548
Current Age	28-65	42	2108

The participants represented all program areas of the agency, such as Investigations, Family-Based Safety Services, Conservatorship, Preparation for Adult Living (PAL), and Foster and Adoptive Home Development. In addition, their offices were located in both urban and rural areas.

INV	CVS	FBSS	FAD	PAL	OJT/Training	Total
24	12	8	3	1	2	50
48%	24%	16%	6%	2%	4%	100%

INV: Investigations   CVS: Conservatorship
FBSS: Family-Based Safety Services
FAD: Foster and Adoptive Home Development
PAL: Preparation for Adult Living
OJT: On-the-Job Training Supervisor

Urban	Rural	Total
37	13	50
74%	26%	100%

Degree	Bachelor's	Master's	Total	%
Biology	1		1	2%
Business Management	2		2	4%
Counseling	0	1	1	2%
Criminal Justice	4		4	8%
Elementary Education	1		1	2%
English	1		1	2%
Geology/Anthropology	1		1	2%
Health Care Administration	1		1	2%
Psychology	7	1	8	16%
Science	2		2	4%
Social Work	10	12	22	44%
Sociology	6		6	12%
Total	36	14	50	100%
%	72%	28%		100%

Thirty-six of the participants had bachelor's degrees, 14 had master's, 22 had social work degrees (10-BSW's and 12-MSW's), and 28 had non-social work degrees. Diligent efforts were made to insure that the focus group and interview samples were representative of the supervisor demographics within the agency related to office location (urban and rural), ethnicity, gender, age, and years of service/employment.

Data Collection

To conduct this qualitative research, both individual interviews and focus groups were utilized. Focus groups provided triangulation of the information provided by each participant, increasing credibility and validity of their responses. The researcher recorded all focus group and interview responses in writing and via audiotape.

Analysis

The audio recordings of focus groups were transcribed after each session to facilitate the on-going assessment and analysis of data inherent in grounded theory. Ongoing analysis included identification of themes, missing data, and negative cases. Negative cases include those that do not match other cases or responses and can be considered exceptions. However, no negative cases were identified. All of the participants provided the same information, albeit in different words, resulting in comprehensive responses and data. The researcher utilized analysis as an opportunity to modify questions for the next focus group, to obtain responses for the data missing, or solicit information not previously provided or requested. The researcher also conducted check-ins with all focus group participants to clarify and obtain consensus on responses provided by previous focus group participants. Specific data analysis procedures included the following: (1) identification of themes -open coding, (2) coding of data into categories and sub-categories -axial coding, (3) memoing regarding the meanings underlying the responses, (4) and identification of general core cat-

egories and related categories - selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process continued after each of the four focus groups to assist with identification of the evolving theory. The ongoing process of data analysis allowed full exploration of the topic and research questions and development of an exhaustive list of personal and organizational resilient characteristics.

Individual interviews were also audiotaped. Initially, audiotapes were transcribed at the conclusion of each interview, but due to time restraints, the majority were transcribed after all interviews were completed. The same structured, ongoing data analysis procedures described above was also utilized to analyze the interview responses.

Findings/Results
Focus Groups

When participants in the focus groups (N=25) were asked why they were staying at the agency, several participants (20%, n=5) indicated that they remained at the agency because they had nowhere else to go or felt they had no options. This feeling of not being mobile was expressed by one participant who said, "Sometimes we feel stuck. I don't really know where else to go. Sometimes I would like to leave, but I don't really have anywhere to go." Participants identified support (from peers and their supervisors) as a primary protective factor, a significantly positive aspect of working at the agency, and vital to longevity, but they reported that it was not always readily available from their immediate supervisors (program directors). Therefore, peer support could serve as a coping mechanism. Being able to build a support system appeared to be even more vital for supervisors in smaller or more rural areas because they are usually isolated from their peers. Two participants stated:

"I know I'm there because of (P.D.) support. She's wonderful."
"You don't have someone there working with you side by side that you
can like vent or get support from. You're just out there. We all kind of
talk and say are you still there, are you still alive?

Eight participants (32%) stated that job satisfaction included the benefits of the job, including flexibility, human resource benefits, technology, training, and advancement opportunities. Responses included the following:
"I still have room to grow… I can move up."
"They're getting a lot of training in. So I think things are changing for the positive."

For twelve (48%) participants, personal satisfaction was attributed to fulfillment of personal missions, empowerment experienced as a result of being a change agent, and successes which they deemed evidence of their efforts. One participant stated:
"You can help change lives of families, children, anybody you come
in contact with."

When asked about the negative aspects of working at CPS as a supervisor, participants offered more responses for this question than for any other question explored during the focus groups. The responses related to the negative aspects of working at CPS were divided into two categories: internal stressors and external stressors. Unrealistic expectations (40%, n=10), agency climate (4%, n=1), and staff issues (16%, n=4) are sub-categories of internal stressors. Participants cited the agency's focus on immediately reducing caseworker's high caseloads (20%, n=5), increasing supervisory workload responsibilities (36%, n=9), long workdays (12%, n=3), and lack of resources (16%, n=4) as evidence of the unrealistic expectations of the agency administrators. For example:
"…You're telling us that we have to audiotape everybody, but you don't
provide us with tapes."

"…they have put so much pressure on us. When, if I have five workers in
my unit and each one of my workers is carrying 50 cases, you multiply
that by five, that's 250 cases. I'm not even talking about each child, there
may be six kids in one case. So, that means that I then have responsibility

for my five workers, their families, these 250 families, and all of their
children, all of the services, then the pending reports, then this kind
of report, the tracking log, the annual time and leave report, doing their
annual evaluations that now have to go into a system that nobody knows
how to use because they haven't trained us."

Twenty-eight percent (28%, n=7) of supervisors expressed feelings of guilt because they are required to continue assigning cases, holding staff accountable, and reprimanding them even though they are aware that these supervisory tasks can negatively impact morale of their workers. Supervisors indicated that they did not agree with the agency methods of addressing the backlog of cases because those methods do not take personal obligations and stressors into consideration. However, due to their middle management status, their comments suggested they have no power to change the process. Two supervisors stated:
"If we try to do our job, then we're trying to push our people too hard to the
point where we're basically pushing them out the door because of the
unrealistic tasks we're giving them."

"And, when the workload is so great that everyone is overwhelmed, you're
still demanding of them… You feel like the bad guy, you really do."

The climate of the agency was an extreme source of stress for 32% (n=8) of participants. These participants stated that it was very difficult to work in the agency now because of the punitive climate. Participants also stated that recent policy decisions have caused them to feel de-valued, unheard, disrespected, powerless, and caught in the middle.
"You're assigning them more work, so on the other side of it you've got
upper management coming down and saying we've got to get this backlog
down, we've gotta get cases turned in, so it kind of puts you in the middle of

that."

"Middle management is very difficult because you have the higher-ups,
the P.D.'s [saying] you need to tell your over-worked caseworkers that
they need to do it this way, this way."

Forty-four percent (44%, n=11) of participants also expressed feeling frustrated because they are not included in agency decisions although they are the ones doing the job. Two participants expressed the following:
"And even when they ask for input, they don't want it. Like the other day,
we got some e-mail about FBSS and conservatorship stuff…. Friday night
after everyone had left and they needed a response by noon Monday morning.
You don't want my response, you don't care… so why even send it out?"

"It's unfortunate that many times people in the agency are treated like units of
business, like furniture. If you need this file cabinet to be over in this office
instead of this one, just move it. You can't treat people that way."

When discussing the climate of the agency, two (8%) participants shared that the emphasis on accountability has resulted in a punitive approach to resolution of issues.
"I can say this is the roughest culture right now. Your decisions
will be scrutinized forever and picked at. You're responsible. It's kind
of like a witch hunt to some degree. So it's automatically perceived as punishment."

"Percentages and a list of who's delinquent and how many cases people are
delinquent and… if you have people on that list and they're over 10 cases,
then you have to be in front of your program director's office every Monday
explaining why your people have more cases, more delinquent cases and what

is your plan to get those cases down."

When asked what contributes to employment longevity, eighty-four percent (84%, n=21) of participants identified agency benefits, 12% (n=3) identified changing policies, and 20% (n=5) identified concerted retention efforts as significantly contributing to their employment longevity.
"Well, there are training opportunities."

"I think the communication has gotten much better than it used to be…
gotten much better from the top. It helps us to know what we're going to
get smacked with."

"They instituted the Supervisor Advisory council up again… They really
need things like that for input from below."

Individual Interviews
Participants in the interviews (N=25) provided the same or similar responses to the questions related to employment longevity with only a little variation. Sixty-eight percent (68%, n=17) of participants regarded their peers and the camaraderie they enjoyed as significant protective factors contributing to their employment longevity.
Internal stressors were identified by 88% (n=22) of participants and they include those stressors that supervisors experience as a result of their workloads, caseworker's caseloads, people management, unrealistic expectations, and the bureaucratic structure of the agency. These were the same internal stressors identified by the supervisors who participated in the focus groups. Supervisors interviewed individually described the climate of the agency as negative and they were unable to provide many positives related to the agency.
The supervisors interviewed offered many comments about the difficult and negative aspects of working for the agency. Forty percent (40%, n=10) of supervisors believe that the agency has unrealistic expectations about the amount of work and time involved in dealing with the staff turnover, high caseloads, and low morale inherent in the agency. Fifteen supervisors (60%) reported

that their workload responsibilities, including forms, policies, cases, and people management, are also indicative of the unrealistic expectations of agency administrators. Three (12%) supervisors are also carrying their own caseload because they are short-staffed and cannot continue to overload caseworkers. All of these stressors are impeding the supervisors' abilities to achieve job satisfaction and/or personal satisfaction.
"I don't like the way management has changed. There's much more
micro-management going on now. I understand and support
accountability; however, the current climate… it's become more and
more difficult to work here and to feel happy in the work."

"The sheer volume of the e-mails, personality issues, and caseloads are
much too high."

People management was also a significant stressor for 44% (n=11) of supervisors. Managing the varied personalities of staff, addressing personnel issues, and holding staff accountable were also identified as stressors. The inexperience of new staff, who might also be immature, was an additional stressor because of the time needed to supervise, train, and hold them accountable.
"Having to do corrective actions or when you just cannot seem to get them
to do anything in a timely manner… trying to get somebody to put it together
is like pulling teeth. And a lot of it is, I think it's the younger generation.
I'm old enough to be some of their mothers or older really, we're getting them
so young nowadays. Their idea of work is different than what I was raised with."

Although supervisors in the focus groups and individual interviews provided very similar and sometimes identical responses, the supervisors who participated in individual interviews had more difficulty identifying positive aspects of employment and the agency itself. More of the

supervisors who participated in interviews were carrying their own caseloads due to the shortage of caseworkers to whom these cases could be assigned. In addition, supervisors in the focus groups appeared to support each other and provided solutions to any issues expressed. Supervisors in individual interviews did not have this built-in support when discussing the agency and the stressors associated with it.

Discussion

The climate of the organization appears to influence resilience development as evidenced by the participants' utilization of available resources to endure the stressors associated with the agency. Although the climate of the agency is reported as negative, supervisors have utilized the support of their peers and program directors, and their relationships with staff as buffers against agency stressors, which serves to enhance their resilience development. In addition, the negative climate of the agency also appears to serve as a bonding agent, which allows the supervisors to experience a sense of camaraderie and belonging. Thus, in spite of, rather than because of, the negative agency climate, they are assisted in developing resilient qualities in the bonding process.

Most of the supervisors have been able to utilize support from peers and administrators and their personal mission as protective factors against the stressors inherent in the child protection system, thus reducing burnout to a tolerable level. However, a few supervisors appear to be having difficulty warding off burnout and if these supervisors are not burned out, they appear close. As previous studies found (Pines 2002, 2004; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Lecroy & Rank, 1986), many of the supervisors in this study seem to be experiencing emotional and mental exhaustion (burnout) manifesting itself as anger. Participants expressed anger about the agency's lack of support, and consistent requirements that they hold caseworkers accountable in spite of their understanding that caseworkers are overwhelmed. One supervisor became emotional and began crying when she recounted a personal experience of having to take personnel action against a caseworker although she didn't agree with the action and con-

sidered it unnecessarily punitive. Several participants were also angry about the lack of resources available to accomplish required tasks, such as the mandate to audiotape client interviews without being provided audio recorders to do so. Some of the supervisors appear to possess the three dimensions of burnout identified by Mashlach, Shaufeli, and Leiter – exhaustion, a sense of cynicism, and perception of personal ineffectiveness.

Due to the volume of negative responses regarding the agency and agency climate, these supervisors appear to be experiencing job dissatisfaction because their work-related satisfaction, autonomy, and self-esteem have been diminished or left unfulfilled, supporting the findings of Lecroy and Rank (1986). The findings of this study also support the assertion of Baumann et al. (1997) that organizational factors "may play a primary role in producing burnout" (p.16). For example, all of the supervisors reported the agency climate has become more punitive and authoritative, and they no longer experience the autonomy they once enjoyed as a supervisor. Decisions are imposed and they have little to no input. As noted by Pines (2002, 2004), the findings of this study suggest that the supervisors are experiencing emotionally demanding and draining work conditions that they are having difficulty resolving. However, they remain at the agency in spite of these factors, which could indicate the presence of personal resilience.

The ability to actually save children from abuse and neglect, and sometimes death, provides a sense of power to supervisors that enhances self-esteem and personal pride. These feelings of power are also important because supervisors feel powerless regarding agency decisions. They are allowed very little input into decisions and changes but must abide by the decisions handed down or imposed from above. Therefore, being able to exert power and influence in a positive manner over their caseworkers and clients provides them with opportunities to utilize their knowledge and skills to make positive, life-changing decisions. Most supervisors expressed additional feelings of pride and self-worth regarding their ability to see

the successes that they cite as evidence of their efforts.

Those who stay employed consider themselves to be part of an elite group. This ability to stay also appears to give them a sense of strength and resilience because they are able to do something that others cannot.

Supervisors were only able to name a few positives about working in the agency. As stated above, a number of supervisors exhibited feelings of anger toward the agency. One of the main negatives and the source of much anger was the lack of input in agency decisions. Supervisors appeared to be particularly resentful of having no input when the decisions involved policy and hiring decisions. They also believe that policies are imposed by people who do not understand how those policies will impact staff and clients. As Arches found in his study (1991), supervisors in this study are experiencing job dissatisfaction because of the bureaucratic structure of the agency, which contributes to the lack of connectedness and scarcity of communication supervisors experience with administrators at the top of the bureaucracy.

Supervisors were satisfied with the training they received in the agency, but they were dissatisfied with not always being able to participate in it. Although the agency is providing training specifically for supervisors in an effort to enhance their supervisory and people management skills, some supervisors were unable to attend this training until after they had been supervising for several months. The supervisors believed that the training would have been much more beneficial if they were allowed to attend training prior to taking on the role of supervisor. They believed they would have made fewer mistakes if they had received information regarding policies, procedures, and effective supervision prior to assuming the supervisor position. Training is especially vital for those people who assume supervisor positions in a program area in which they have no experience or have less than two years total experience in the agency.

Implications and Recommendations

The results of this study regarding organiza-

tional climate and its impact on supervisors' resilience could be utilized to begin to improve organizational environment and overall effectiveness. Identifying resilient characteristics and improving the climate within the organization could positively impact turnover rates and improve employee and organizational effectiveness. In addition, providing adequate and timely training for potential and newly hired supervisors could not only improve their effectiveness and the quality of supervision they provide, but would also enhance their sense of autonomy and job satisfaction.

Supervisors who are more prepared, who are provided support and the resources needed to fulfill their job responsibilities, and who feel valued by an organization experience higher levels of job satisfaction than those without these advantages. Supervisors who are satisfied both with their work and with their employers are more apt to remain in their positions and to achieve a higher level of performance than those who are dissatisfied. An indirect result of an effort to improve the organizational climate might also enhance the resilience levels of supervisors.

Developing caseworkers prior to promoting them to supervisory positions would address some of the issues identified by the supervisors in this study. Supervisors are sometimes placed in positions and expected to know how to do that job with little or no instruction, which causes extreme stress. Training, guidance, and mentors should be provided to new supervisors to assist them in developing the skills they will need to become effective and successful supervisors. Training should be provided before an individual assumes a supervisory position, which would help eliminate avoidable mistakes. In addition, the development of a Basic Skills Development training program for supervisors is recommended. This training program would consist of instruction on policy, procedures, best practices, personnel management, and developing caseworkers – those areas identified by the supervisors as lacking.

Although retention of competent supervisors is an agency goal, it is also imperative that child welfare agencies be evaluated periodically to ensure they remain productive and provide effective

service delivery. A supervisor who is no longer productive contributes to the stress levels not only of other supervisors but of caseworkers as well, who have to assume additional casework responsibilities due to the ineffectiveness of the supervisor and the high turnover rate. With a large number of tenured and productive supervisors the organization can provide effective service to clients and achieve desired goals.

Although the study population was representative of agency supervisors and indicates some potential factors that could be utilized to reduce supervisor turnover, the results cannot be generalized beyond this population due to the small number of participants (n=50). Therefore, it is recommended that this exploratory qualitative study be replicated with a larger sample to verify the results and to determine whether they are representative of the population of child welfare supervisors overall.

The child welfare setting is a difficult and demanding field, but high turnover adds further burdens to child protection systems that are already fraught with extremely overwhelmed employees. Attempts to enhance the employment longevity of child protection employees, especially supervisors, are needed to achieve the desired outcomes of services provided to the populations of vulnerable children and youth in our society.

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