

An Exploration of Supervisor's and Manager's Responses to Child Welfare Reform

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ABSTRACT. This mixed methods study attempts to identify stress in child welfare supervisors and managers in light of recent changes in practice and increased demands on child welfare services. The quantitative component of this study revealed high rates of exposure to critical events and high levels of accountability. In the end, 48.7% of managers and supervisors fell in the high or severe range of post-traumatic symptoms on the Impact of Event Scale. The qualitative component underscored the stressors associated with high staff turnover, increased accountability and the pressure to support staff in light of these factors. A concerning outcome was the risk that highly skilled and experienced leaders in child welfare are giving up [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2002 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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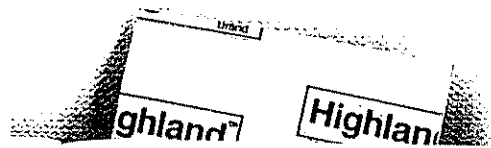
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A rich literature has emerged regarding the stressors encountered by child welfare workers. Sources of stress identified by researchers include excessive workloads (Collings & Murray, 1996; Guterman & Jayaratne, 1994; Hutchinson, 1993; Bradley & Sutherland, 1990) low salary and poor working conditions (Vinokur-Kaplan, 1991) and a limited sense of accomplishment (Vinokur-Kaplan, 1991). Child welfare workers are exposed to personal risk in terms of threats and assault at a rate considerably higher than that of other mental health workers (authors, in press; Newhill & Wexler, 1997). Finally, child welfare practice is fraught with social and political pressures. Workers are often faced with conflicting pressures of the best interest of the child, concerns for the parents and shifting public policies (Guterman & Jayaratne, 1994). In recent years, these competing forces have been accompanied by an increased demand for accountability to the public. Criminal and civil courts have found child welfare workers liable for breaching family member's rights to remain together and conversely for failing to protect children at risk (Alexander, 1995; Alexander & Alexander, 1995; Reamer, 1995). As a result of these combined stressors, authors have cited a two year turnover rate of 46 percent to 90 percent in child welfare practice (Drake & Yadama, 1996).

These stressors would not be expected to stop at the front line. Supervisors and managers in their multiple roles as mentors, trainers, overseers of quality control and public relations officers, would also seem to be affected by these changes. Yet, while researchers for many years have considered the impact of stress on child welfare workers, the experiences of supervisors and managers remain relatively unexplored. This mixed methods study attempts to identify the experience of child welfare supervisors and managers in light of recent changes and renewed burdens on child welfare services. The specific questions addressed are as follows:

1. What is the nature of the stressors experienced by supervisors and managers following a process of child welfare reform?
2. What is the impact of the stressors on managers and supervisors?
3. How do the stresses encountered by managers and supervisors compare with those of front line workers?



LITERATURE REVIEW

In response to the stressors encountered by front line child welfare workers, some authors point to the importance of supervisors and managers for mediating the multiple demands encountered by staff. Supervisors are seen to play a critical role in promoting the effectiveness of social work staff and ensuring quality service provision particularly when clients are involuntary (Bibus, 1993; Kadushin, 1976). Child welfare supervisors are urged to play a role in debriefing and supporting staff who perform emotionally taxing work (Anderson, 2000) and further assist staff who are experiencing personal losses which are exacerbated by traumatic stimuli on the job (DiGiulio, 1995). Child welfare supervisors and managers have a key role in developing effective change management practices in response to rapidly changing public policies (Shields & Milks, 1994). In the end, they are at higher risk of civil and criminal liability due to their responsibility for overseeing the cases of all members of their team (Zaphiris, 1984). If the omissions or commissions of their staff result in personal injury or death, supervisors and managers are at risk of action for criminal negligence (Zaphiris, 1984). In light of the high turnover of staff, these risks and responsibilities seem daunting due to the inexperience of many workers for whom the supervisor is responsible.

Supervisors carry the multiple functions as coordinators of service, quality control reviewers, and as buffers between administration, clients, the public and workers (Silver, Poulin & Manning, 1997). Yet, while we are becoming increasingly aware of the stressors encountered by child welfare workers, the experiences of managers and supervisors have received relatively little attention. In an important study in this area, Silver, Poulin & Manning (1997) surveyed 70 supervisors in child welfare agencies. They conclude that job satisfaction of child welfare supervisors is lower than that of front-line child welfare workers. Further, they report that length of time in current position was negatively associated with job satisfaction. In addition, the supervisors reported higher levels of stress (on a standardized scale) and lower levels of job satisfaction than front line workers. At first glance, this finding may seem contrary to the frequent observation that older workers are more satisfied than younger workers (Doering, Rhodes & Schuster, 1983). McNeely (1988) posited that this was due to the disproportionate representation of older workers in the upper echelon where they received higher income, prestige and greater autonomy. More recently however, McNeely (1989) suggested that middle-aged workers were less satis-

fied than older workers perhaps due to the limited opportunities for promotion now found in the human services. Similarly, Glisson and Durick (1988) found that worker age was not associated with job satisfaction but was associated with commitment to the organization. This may indicate that a linear relationship between age and satisfaction is too simplistic.

A second study of occupational stress in child welfare supervisors was more limited in its findings suggesting that supervisors who suppressed their anger experienced more stress (Norvell, Walden, Gettelman & Murrin, 1993). One final issue identified by researchers as creating additional stress for supervisors in child welfare is the dual functions that they have with regard to front-line workers, that of "empathic support person" and that of "inquisitor" (Rushton & Nathan, 1996). This dual role can create job conflict. While this issue has not been investigated with supervisors, role conflict has been found to reduce job satisfaction and increase burnout in front line child welfare workers (Um & Harrison, 1998).

Recent public and media attention to the issue of child deaths due to neglect or maltreatment have now been added to the list of stressors that have been associated with child welfare for many years. In both Europe and North America, much of this attention has been focussed on the perceived failure of child welfare services to protect vulnerable children (Hill, 1990; Hutchison, 1993; Munroe, 1996; Sanders, Colton & Roberts, 1999). In Ontario Canada, several coroner's inquests were conducted within a one year period in order to survey the deaths of children during 1994 and 1995, who were known to children's aid societies (Buck, 1998). These inquests, in addition to focussing considerable media and public attention on the issue of child maltreatment and murder placed a renewed and greater burden on child welfare staff and management. The more than 400 recommendations emanating from the inquests, a subsequent Child Mortality Task Force Review and finally an Accountability Review by the responsible Ministry, have resulted in an overhaul of the child welfare system in Ontario (OACAS, 1998). Changes implemented include the introduction of a Standardized Risk Assessment System, a new child welfare information system, a new funding formula, increased training, and accountability initiatives to increase standardization of services. These changes have had widespread implications for service delivery and the daily functioning of workers and for the responsibilities of supervisors and managers. Supervisors and managers in child welfare agencies have become caught in the crossfire of negative public perceptions and conflicting mandates as

they are charged with the task of being the safe keepers of our most vulnerable client group (Silver, Poulin & Manning, 1997).

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted at the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, which is one of the largest not-for-profit child welfare organizations in North America. It is operated by an independent Board of Directors. The broader goal of the research was to understand stress and trauma in child welfare workers, one component of which was exposure to post-mortem reviews in the form of internal reviews, coroner's inquests and civil litigation. This particular agency had been subject to two coroner's inquests into the deaths of children. Data collection involved both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative survey was distributed to all staff members following meetings describing the nature of the study. A total of 175 questionnaires were returned from front line, clerical and management staff. While actual numbers of staff employed by the agency over the three months of data collection vary, this number represents an approximate 33% response rate. Forty-seven of the participants were managers or supervisors from a total pool of 131 supervisors and managers employed in the agency, representing a 36% response rate.

The organizational chart for the Children's Aid Society of Toronto is relatively flat. A service supervisor would on average have responsibility for 7-8 front line workers each with caseloads of about 20-25. A service manager would have on average 8 supervisors reporting to them. Neither supervisors nor managers carry cases of their own. Both groups are responsible for overseeing cases however, managers would deal with only the most complex cases through consultation. Managers spend more time attending to agency administration and human resource issues than supervisors. Despite these differences however, small sample size required that the groups be combined in order to ensure confidentiality of participants.

Seventeen or 36.2% of the supervisors and managers in the sample were male. The mean age was 46.23 (SD 7.37) and the mean number of years in child welfare was 19.34 (SD 7.81). Twenty-four percent of the sample were single, 62% were married or living common-law, and the remainder identified themselves as widowed or divorced. In terms of education, 52% had MSW degrees, 20% had BSW's and 13% had other university degrees.

The quantitative component of the study included a variety of measures looking at exposure to traumatic events, levels of social support and levels of distress. Exposure to traumatic events and ongoing work stressors were assessed through the use of a questionnaire developed by the researchers. Items included such stressors as workload, threats of violence and death of a child (see Table 1). Levels of social support were measured in two ways, the use of Likert scales developed by the researchers and the use of the Social Provisions Scale (SPS) (Cutrona & Russell, 1987). The SPS is a brief (24 item) multidimensional self-report instrument that offers the possibility of discriminating between six distinct types of social support and assesses global support. The reported alpha level for the total scale is 0.91. Extensive validity testing is reported by the developers.

Level of distress was measured by two scales, the Beck Depression Inventory and the Impact of Events Scale. The Beck Depression Inventory is a self-report scale that assesses the presence and severity of affective, cognitive, motivational, vegetative and psychomotor components of depression (Beck & Beamesderfer, 1974). Initially standardized on 606 psychiatric in-patients and outpatients, the reported reliability coefficient is .86. Test-retest reliabilities are .48 for psychiatric patients after 3 weeks and .74 for undergraduate students after 3 months. The Impact of Events Scale (Zilberg, Weiss & Horowitz, 1982) assesses the experience of post-traumatic stress for any specific life event. Cluster analysis has shown the two subscales to have high internal consistency with Cronbach's alphas of .78 and .82. Test-retest reliability is .87.

Workers who participated in the quantitative component of the study were asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview in order to more fully explore their experiences. Forty participants indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed, twenty of whom were selected for interviews. Due to concerns regarding confidentiality of data, names were immediately removed from the quantitative research instruments and thus the subsample was randomly selected from those agreeing to participate. Eight of those interviewed were supervisors or managers. Of these, 3 were men and 5 were women. They represented the full range of managerial and supervisory positions from the perspective of level of responsibility and in terms of the types of client services that they oversaw.

The sample size of 8 individuals is consistent with recommendations for the long-interview method of data collection (McCracken, 1988). At that point it is suggested that theoretical saturation will have occurred (Cresswell, 1998). Interviews followed a semi-structured interview

guide which included questions about stressors encountered on the job, the effects of the stress on participants, organizational supports and strategies for dealing with stress. Interviews were conducted by one of the researchers at a location selected by the participants, generally their office and lasted one to three hours. The sessions were audio taped to ensure accuracy of data. Finally, consultation group meetings were held with members of three constituencies, management/supervisors, front line workers and union executive during which the initial data was presented and reactions were obtained.

Interview data was transcribed and analyzed for themes with the aid of a computer program (Nvivo). In the initial stage, open coding allowed for the development of broad categories, after which selective coding allowed the researchers to attempt to develop a meaningful narrative of the experience of the workers. Other sources of data included the notes recording the interviewer's impressions and the notes from the consultation group meetings.

Erlandson and colleagues (1993) identify four primary criteria for judging the reliability of qualitative research, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In this study, credibility was established through triangulation of quantitative, interview and consultation group data. The consultation group process provided an opportunity to confirm and expand upon the trends developed in the analysis of the interview data, thereby enhancing transferability and confirmability (Cresswell, 1998; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Dependability or reliability was enhanced through the process of having one research team member conduct the interviews and record impressions, and then a second listen to the tapes for impressions prior to transcribing. Further the researchers worked collaboratively during the processes of open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Final results were then presented to large staff groups for discussion.

RESULTS

Stressors Encountered and Stress Reactions

Table 1 identifies both the ongoing stressors and the critical event stressors encountered by supervisors and managers. In terms of ongoing stressors, over 50% of participants identified organizational change (59.6%) and quantity of work (78.7%) as problematic in their jobs. Over 50% indicated that they had been exposed to threats of violence

TABLE 1. A Comparison of Stressors for Supervisors/Managers and Front Line Staff

| Stressors | Percentage Reporting | | Stressors | Percentage Reporting | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------|--------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| | M/S | Staff | | M/S | Staff |
| | Mandatory training | 27.7 | | 27.2 | Death of child (accident) |
| Organizational change | 59.6 | 47.6 | Assault against self | 19.1 | 26.0 |
| Conflict with community | 10.6 | 16.8 | Threats of violence to self | 55.3 | 52.0 |
| Public or media scrutiny | 40.4 | 29.6 | Death of child (abuse/neglect) | 51.1* | 15.7 |
| Travel | 10.6 | 21.4 | Death of adult client | 38.3* | 15.0 |
| Changing policies | 31.9 | 38.9 | Threats to staff | 57.4 | 43.3 |
| Conflicts with staff | 40.4 | 39.7 | Appeared in internal review | 36.2* | 16.5 |
| Difficult clients | 29.8 | 65.1* | Appeared in coroner's inquest | 10.6* | 3.1 |
| Court related activities | 19.1 | 38.9* | Had actions criticized | 17* | 5.5 |
| Documentation requirements | 44.7 | 65.9* | | | |
| Amount of work | 78.7 | 74.0 | | | |
| Lack of community resources | 29.8 | 32.8 | | | |
| Risk of liability | 23.4 | 31.8 | | | |

*Significant χ^2 , $p \leq 0.05$

(55.3%), the death of a child due to abuse or neglect for whom they had direct service responsibility (51.1%), and threats or injury to other staff (57.4%). The mean number of incidents encountered in the past year was 1.55 (Range 0-10). As a result of various critical events, 36.2% had been involved in an internal review of the incident, 10.6% had appeared in a coroner's inquest, and 2.1% (1 respondent) had been subject to civil litigation. In these reviews, 27.7% of the total sample had their actions questioned and 17.0% had their actions criticized. The Impact of Events Scale provides ratings of low, moderate, high and severe levels of traumatic stress symptoms. Among participating managers and supervisors, 12.8% scored in the high range and 35.9% scored in the severe range.

Comparing Supervisors and Managers with Front Line Staff

Supervisors and managers were significantly older than front line staff ($t = -4.452$, $p = .001$) and had worked for a significantly greater time in child welfare ($t = -6.273$, $p = .001$). The supervisors and managers involved in the study were significantly more likely to be male

($\chi^2 = 7.60$, $p = .005$) and were significantly more likely to have masters degrees ($\chi^2 = 12.46$, $p = .01$).

On questions asking participants to indicate which issues presented ongoing stressors in their jobs, supervisors were significantly less likely to identify documentation requirements ($\chi^2 = 6.41$, $p = .01$), difficult or disruptive clients ($\chi^2 = 17.26$, $p = .001$), and court appearances ($\chi^2 = 5.98$, $p = .01$) than were staff. There were no significant differences in identifying amount of work, risk of liability or changing policies.

On questions asking participants about exposure to critical events, supervisor/managers were significantly more likely to have experienced the death of a child ($\chi^2 = 22.64$, $p = .001$), and the death of an adult ($\chi^2 = 11.16$, $p = .001$) than staff. There were no significant differences regarding being assaulted or having experienced threats of violence against themselves. Further, supervisor/managers were significantly more likely to have been questioned in internal reviews on a case ($\chi^2 = 7.75$, $p = .005$), to have appeared in a coroner's inquest into the death of a child ($\chi^2 = 3.92$, $p = .05$) and to have had their actions criticized in these processes ($\chi^2 = 5.77$, $p = .01$).

There were no significant differences between front line workers and supervisor/managers on measures of support, traumatic stress or depression. All participants reported receiving high levels of support from family, friends and colleagues. Chi square analysis revealed that there were no significant differences in percentages of staff and supervisor/managers on levels of traumatic stress symptoms measured by the IES. Levels of depression in both groups were comparable to that of the general population. Ninety-four percent of respondents scored in the no to mild depression range on the Beck Depression Inventory according to guidelines set by the developers (Beck, Steer & Garbin, 1988).

QUALITATIVE THEMES

A Changing Environment

Child welfare reform has been a direct outcome of the public inquiries into child deaths in Ontario (OACAS, 1998). The changes accompanying reform have affected all aspects of work in child welfare agencies. Participants in this study indicated that they are now coping with new technology, new recording requirements, mandatory training and increased referrals due to mandatory reporting accompanied by

shorter timelines to complete complex, important tasks like investigations. An increased volume of new cases was identified by respondents to be 10-15% per year over the past 3-4 years. Respondents also identified that the number of children coming into care has increased dramatically as have the number of court applications. In the end respondents indicated that this has affected the ability to provide quality clinical services and has affected the willingness of people to remain in the job. The following quotes of participants exemplify this theme.

It all impacts on the front line. It means that people don't have as much time to have direct contact with people. We are finding we are getting less and less clinical time and more and more reporting time.

We're losing more and more bright, energetic people who wish to do child welfare as they understood it to be when they were being trained, or when they first thought child welfare would be a worthwhile pursuit.

Changes have also affected the physical working space of people. Departments have been moved from one part of the city to another and the physical plant altered. This was identified as an added disruption in an already disruptive atmosphere.

I've seen a lot of office space go up and come down. Offices being created and others literally torn down.

The rapid and dramatic changes have had direct impacts on the responsibilities of supervisors in many domains, including increased workload, increased responsibility for new staff and increased accountability.

Workload

Virtually all respondents described the increase in workload subsequent to child welfare reform as being a key stressor. "Well its just an amazing amount of work and because its crisis oriented, the pressure is huge." One participant indicated that his/her role had doubled in the past three years due to shorter timelines, increased recording, and increased need for supervision of new staff. As a result of this increased workload people reported working many extra hours. "The concept of a

7 or 8 hour day is not something that any of us have experienced for a number of years.” New technology aimed at reducing workloads has actually added work time. Participants identified getting the same information by fax, email and mail causing duplication of work as they sorted through priorities. As new cases are referred, supervisors are reluctant to pass them on to already overburdened workers, but see no option.

These professionals also experience the day-to-day stresses of all those who have families. One respondent identified the apparent contradiction between leaving one’s own sick children at home while attending to the needs of children who are clients of the agency. He/she indicated that in the end, no decision—staying home or going to work—was guilt free.

New Staff

The added pressures in child welfare have resulted in higher staff turnover and large numbers of new employees (Howe & Milstein, 2001). One participant stated that 1/2 of the workers he/she supervised had less than one month experience. The relative inexperience of a large percentage of the front line workers means that supervisors must provide more and more in depth forms of assistance in cases. One participant identified the feeling of being forced to “micro manage” the work of staff. Others described the need to check records more thoroughly to assure that appropriate collateral contacts have been made and that every form had been properly completed. Participants resented the fact that they were required to know every detail about every case and that the constant flow of new staff undermined efforts to encourage collegial support and mentoring within the front line workers.

The concerns of these supervisors and managers goes beyond an increased focus on their staff’s ability to do the job effectively but also includes concern for staff’s safety and well-being.

One of the major stressors that we take for granted is that we send our people out alone, nobody else does. And when you look at the fact that we are tampering with the mother/child bond as being sacred to all societies, well I’m surprised we don’t have more violence than we do.

I worry more about other peoples workload than my own. I think the biggest concern is the workload of people on the front-line.

I come in on weekends, but when I hear that my staff has, I try to put a stop to it.

Respondents felt the support of management and supervisors was important to workers, but many described a sense of dissatisfaction with being able to provide for all the support needs of their staff.

It is my hypothesis that because of the work that we do, which is totally unpredictable on a regular basis, the place people get their security is in the office, back with their team, with their supervisors. That allows people to do their job. . . . On one hand it is exciting, on the other hand it can be very stressful [to hold this level of responsibility].

I can see the impact on staff but I feel powerless in terms of what I can do to make it less stressful, less onerous for them to have to keep up with these changes.

A final theme regarding new staff was the sense that no matter how hard the supervisors worked to support staff, many would leave shortly for better opportunities. One respondent indicated that young staff used child welfare work as a career starting block. This constant turnover has resulted in many job vacancies. "The biggest problem now is that we can't find people to do the work." Another concern expressed was that those who remained were not the strongest workers. "You don't necessarily have the best quality people. You've got people who are depressed, people who are tired and burned out."

Accountability

Additional accountability during the inquests and following child welfare reform has occurred at many levels. One level has been the scrutiny by the media and the subsequent public response to workers within the child welfare system. One theme raised by participants was that of community support and understanding of the complexity of child welfare work and the intricacies of decisions to be made by workers. Added to this was a sense that members of the community had sympathy for workers within the system. However, a more dominant theme was the critical nature of media attention and public opinion. This was fueled by the media's tendency to focus on negative news stories and investigate possible malpractice or negligence on the part of the child

welfare system and its workers. Supervisors and managers in their roles as representatives of the agency feel the added pressure of speaking to the press and presenting a fair and accurate account of the event without breaching confidentiality.

I guess one of the major stressors is the community response to the work and the fact that whenever there is a problem, the press are onto it. . . . People look very critically at the work we do in child welfare.

A second level of accountability is the perception of legal liability subsequent to criminal charges for negligence being laid against a worker in another child welfare agency. While these charges were later dropped, the perception of risk remains. Further, the Ministry responsible for child welfare has increased the frequency of audits and the range of items audited. As a result of fears regarding liability, supervisors are spending even more time ensuring that every necessary call is made and every form completed. These professionals worry whether they will be able to defend decisions that they or others have made. There was a strong theme that demands for accountability are being fueled by the misguided perception that through this revealing process only positive outcomes will be assured.

We've reached the point of trying to hold people so accountable that they can no longer get on with doing some of the things that they are quite capable of doing and have been trained to do. You reach a point where it backfires.

The Effects

One effect of the stressors reported by the supervisors and managers in this study is an undermining of their sense of control over the environment. Participants also lamented losing the sense of accomplishment that they previously experienced in their work. One participant indicated that he/she found it distressing that completing one job meant that another was left undone.

In the end, respondents reported feeling isolated in their jobs. While they may be able to obtain support from others in the organization, they felt that professionals in other organizations and in the community did not understand or value the work of child welfare. Further respondents

felt that despite attempts to advocate for needed resources, child welfare has been the victim of societal neglect.

Supervisors identified a variety of stress reactions including a variety of stress symptoms such as sleep disturbances, anxiety and other medical problems. "It all takes a lot of energy and physically takes it's toll sometimes."

Coping

Self-care is one aspect of coping described by participants. They talked of ensuring that they took time to eat lunch, of engaging in physical exercise and relaxation programs such as Yoga. A second approach for reducing stress levels was trying to ensure that one had all the information available and was well prepared for any questions that might follow an event.

Another aspect of coping is the positive reframing of stress. It was identified however, that if this was taken to the extreme, even those most adept at coping can begin to feel the impact of the stress. "The stressors are also stimulants, so it is a matter of keeping these various elements in balance."

Some participants identified the ways in which crisis oriented work fits with their personalities—and didn't fit with the personalities of all social workers.

Child welfare work is not for the faint of heart. It is an environment that attracts a certain type of person. I can predict with some assuredness those who will thrive on that kind of environment, and those who will perhaps crumble.

A further coping mechanism identified is acquiring the ability to turn it off and find ways to extricate oneself from the stressors.

There are elaborate defense mechanisms that you develop over the years so that you can cope. If you don't you wouldn't be able to stay in the field.

Supports

Supervisors indicated that despite the changes and pressures they have been able to count on the support of other managers especially in times of acute incidents.

I guess there's always second guessing that you go through, rumors and all the other stuff, but I have always felt fortunate that whenever I have had a critical incident at the agency the Executive Director and other people were extremely supportive of me.

I have to say that I have a lot of confidence in the management group of this agency. If we had a different management group, running things differently, there would have been more stress. We have a lot of confidence in them.

Despite the best intentions of everyone however, the participants identified that all members of the agency's management team are experiencing high levels of stress, at times there is limited energy left to support one another. Further, it was identified that during times of stress supervisors in various divisions of the organization will suggest that the blame lies within the other divisions, creating tension and conflict.

Giving Up

Perhaps one of the most disturbing findings of this study is the fact that these supervisors and managers with many years of experience and tremendous wisdom in the field are giving up. In part this was due to their belief that others did not understand the magnitude of the problem and the changes required and therefore, it was unlikely that things would improve in the near future.

I guess [recent experiences] have let me know that now is the time to start looking at doing something else and get out of child welfare in the next year or so.

I don't believe the work is doable any longer I have concluded that I've done what I could and it's time to move on. I know that it is possible to do excellent work and to be appreciated and to go home feeling good at the end of the day, I don't have those feelings anymore, so it is time to go.

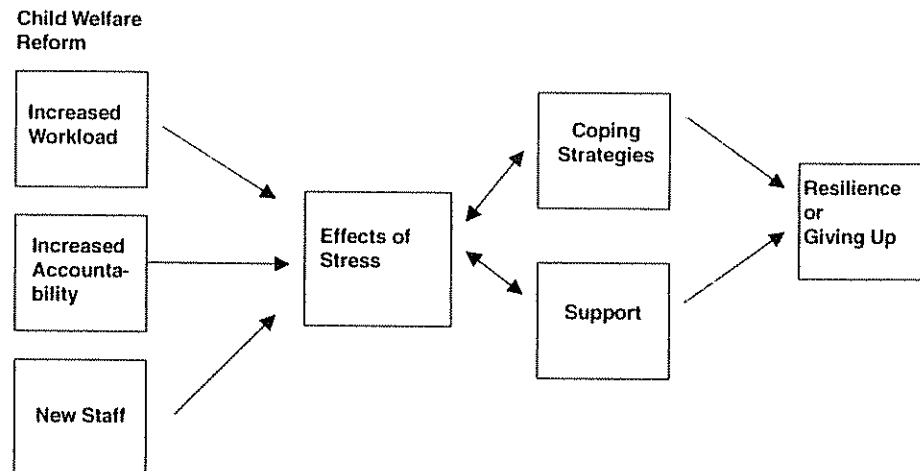
What do I have to do first? Break down or find another job.

DISCUSSION

This study and others have revealed that high levels of stress are prevalent within the child welfare field (Bradley & Sutherland, 1990; Collings & Murray, 1996; Guterman & Jayaratne, 1994; Vinokur-Kaplan, 1991). Despite the fact that supervisors and managers have years of experience surviving various levels of front-line child welfare work and mastering the ever-changing demands of the field, the strain that they experienced was evident. The quantitative component of this study revealed that while post-traumatic stress symptoms for managers and supervisors were lower than that of front-line staff (though not statistically significantly), nevertheless, 48.7% fell in the high or severe range of symptoms.

Supervisor/managers were significantly more likely to have experienced the death of a child for whom they had service responsibility and to have experienced the death of an adult client. This is undoubtedly associated with their tenure within child welfare and not simply their level of responsibility. They were significantly more likely to have been questioned in internal reviews of child mortality, to have appeared in coroner's inquests and to have their actions questioned than were front-line staff. The qualitative interviews and consultation group sessions have served to clarify and highlight some of the factors that contribute to the quantitative findings. A thematic summary of these interviews can be found in Figure 1. Increased workload resulting from

FIGURE 1. Stress and Coping in Supervisors and Managers Facing Child Welfare Reform—A Preliminary Model



higher caseloads and significant staff turnover was identified as an important factor. The added accountability as a result of inexperienced staff and increased scrutiny by the media, the public and government funders, was another theme identified. Supervisors and managers were concerned about the safety of clients and the health and well-being of their staff as a result of these pressures and consequently placed an increased onus on themselves. While supervisor/managers described a strong structure of support within the management team, the evident overload of others prevented them from seeking assistance. Supervisor/managers described good coping strategies they had developed over the years. Nevertheless, the overwhelming pressures had led to a sense of desperation in some and consequently a feeling of giving up.

In considering these findings, it is important to underscore that this is not intended to be reflective of all managers and supervisors in all child welfare organizations. This particular child welfare agency is a large organization in a major city that has been subject to two high profile coroner's inquests. The quantitative findings represent a 36% rate of response for managers and supervisors within this organization. The eight interviews were based on a random sample of those managers and supervisors agreeing to be interviewed. Thus, there is a risk of self-selection bias. Further, the results of this study may in part reflect the fact that this was one of the first times that managers and supervisors were asked about the impact of the work on them, in the midst of public outcry over child welfare. Thus, the comments may reflect a waterfall of emotion that may not be indicative of everyday experience.

The findings of this study do however highlight many areas of concern and suggest areas for further inquiry. Such inquiries could include investigation the relationship between stress and turnover in supervisors and managers in child welfare and factors which predict these variables. In addition, the personality characteristics and leadership styles of supervisors and managers may have a significant influence on their individual experiences of stress and subsequently on the types of support they are able to offer their staff. This would be an important area for investigation in order that attempts can be made to increase the both the individual resilience and organizational supports of all workers in child welfare.

While change has been a consistent element of child welfare practice, the rapid rate of change in recent years has been unprecedented (Alwon & Reitz, 2000; Shields & Milks, 1994). The present mediums of change which include coroner's inquests, public inquiries and system overhaul

have had far-reaching impacts on child welfare service and the environment in which it operates (Davies, McKinnon, Rains, & Mastronardi, 1999; OACAS, 1998). In addition, the current focus on accountability and protection, rather than prevention and enhancing family functioning (Brunet, 1998; Davies et al., 1999) has further demoralized staff within child welfare. As suggested by Glisson & Durick (1988), job satisfaction and organizational commitment play key roles in both burnout and staff turnover and subsequently in the quality of services provided to clients. It is imperative that we better understand the pressures encountered by supervisors and managers in child welfare and the factors which enhance their commitment and satisfaction. To date, managers and supervisors in child welfare have been largely ignored in the professional literature except from the standpoint of what they can do better to support workers. Ensuring the commitment of quality management staff is the key to revitalizing child welfare services.

Child welfare organizations such as this are fortunate to have managers and supervisors with long-standing careers in child welfare. Their excitement with the challenge of the work and their dedication to children and families is truly exemplary. Every public service organization must be accountable to clients and the public for the work that it performs and must be transparent in its operations. However, we must ensure that our quest for accountability does not alienate and drive out our most experienced practitioners. We must not only look to supervisors and managers to help others manage the change within child welfare, but we must also ensure that the supports and rewards are in place to retain these valued employees.

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