

**CHILD WELFARE WORKER STRESS AS A
FUNCTION OF CROSS-LEVEL EFFECTS:
INFORMING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE
STRATEGIES**

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Background

◎ **Why focus on workers' stress level?**

- Changing demographics bringing more diversity, work-life concerns, and stress to workplaces (*Families & Work Institute, 2004*)
- Social workers in challenging jobs at higher risk for prolonged stress (*Lloyd, King & Chenoweth, 2002*)
- Stress linked to inconsistent services and impaired effectiveness (*Drake & Yadama, 1996; Mackay, et al., 2004*)
- Stress highly predictive of turnover (*Hopkins & Cohen-Callow, 2007; Cohen-Callow, Hopkins, & Kim, in press*)

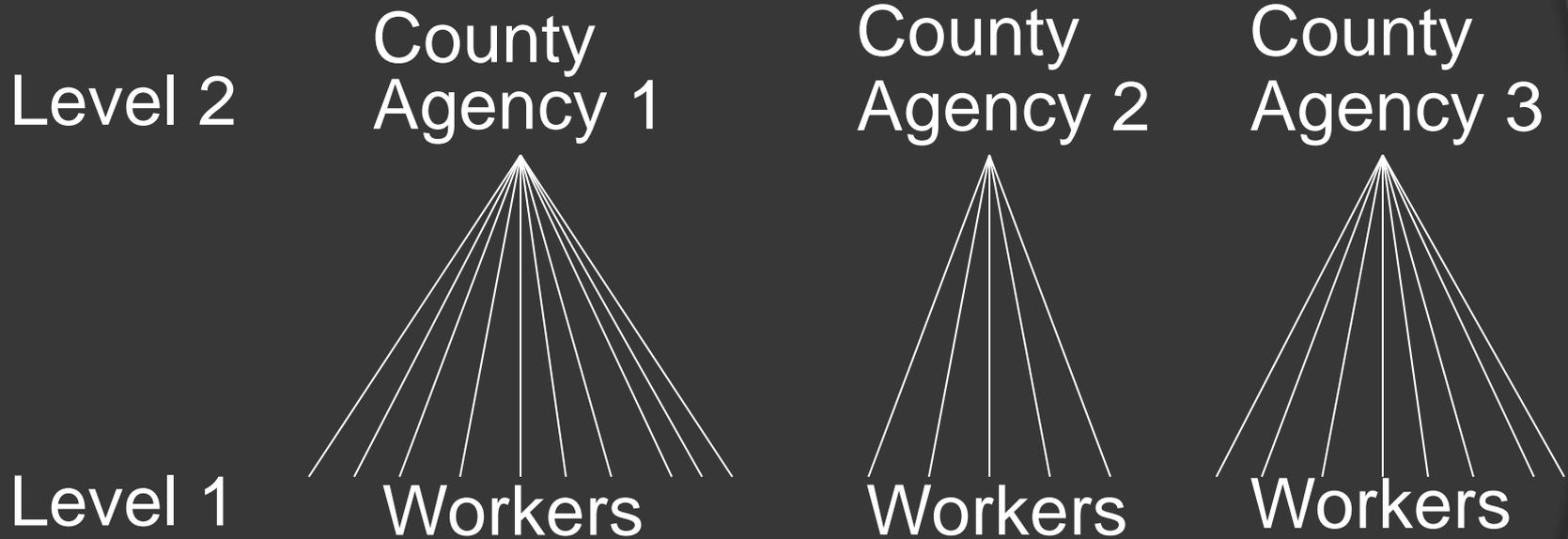
Background

- ⦿ Unclear how much organizations have control over the reduction of stress
- ⦿ Characteristics that predict stress
 - *Individual*
 - *Organizational*
- ⦿ Theoretically, individual behavior (*level 1*) is nested within organizations (*level 2*), as opposed to being viewed separately (*traditional focus*)
- ⦿ Limited by level 1 analysis as no accounting for between group differences; could result in fallacious conclusions in organizational research

Purpose

- To explore independent and organizational level effects on child welfare workers' stress through the use of multi-level modeling

Multi-level Structure Model



Method

◎ Sampling for online survey

- Random selection of child welfare workers (n = 992)
 - 56.5% response rate (n = 561; workers = 484)
- Total child welfare workers exiting (n = 186)
 - 31.2% response rate (n = 58)
 - Organizations (n = 24)

◎ Sampling for 21 focus groups

- 61% (n = 203)

Dependent Variable

- ◎ *Perception of stressful climate ($\alpha = .94$)
 - Emotional exhaustion: worker is emotionally exhausted
 - I feel like I am at the end of my rope.
 - Work overload: worker is overwhelmed with work
 - There are not enough people in my agency to get the work done.
 - Work conflict: worker can not get their work done in the way they want
 - How often do you do things that should be done differently?
- ◎ Scale 1 – 5, 1 = not at all; 5 = to a great extent

(*Second order variables, Glisson, 2008)

Independent Variables: Personal/Job Factors

- Tenure
- Gender
- Race
- MSW
- Caseload

Independent Variable: perceived organizational characteristics

- Quality supervision ($\alpha = .96$)
- Coworker support ($\alpha = .96$)
- Work life interference ($\alpha = .95$)
- Inclusion in decision making ($\alpha = .88$)
- Effort (demands of work) ($\alpha = .90$)
- Reward (feeling rewarded for the work done) ($\alpha = .77$)
- External stress (negative perception by community) ($\alpha = .73$)
- Respect (degree to which other professionals respect child welfare workers) ($\alpha = .78$)
- Safety ($\alpha = .79$)
- Rigidity ($\alpha = .79$) (inflexible work environment in which worker has limited control in a bureaucratic agency)

Independent Variables

- ⦿ Organizational (level 2)
 - Size (number of case workers)
- ⦿ Interactions
 - Supervisor x rigidity
 - Supervisor x effort
 - Supervisor x reward
 - Supervisor x work life
 - Supervisor x Inclusion in decision making

Analysis

- ⦿ Multi-level model analysis (MLM) predicting stress
 - Met assumptions
 - All variables grand mean centered
 - Ran 4 models
 - Random intercept only, ICC = 10%
 - Level 1 fixed individual and perceived variables
 - Added level 2 fixed organizational variable
 - Added interactions

Descriptive Data for Workers

	N	%	Mean	Range
Female	484	90.5	---	---
Race	444	54.5	---	---
Age (years)	418	---	40.20	23 - 66
Tenure (years)	476	---	8.22	0 - 29
MSW Degree	470	47.5	---	---
Case load	457	---	15.63	0 - 135
Agency Size Less than 100	484	51.0	---	---

Table 2: Final Model MLM Predictor of a Stressful Climate

	Model 3		
	Coefficient	SE	P value
Fixed Effects			
Intercept	2.7 0	.061	.000
Gender	.101	.112	.367
Race	.020	.071	.775
Tenure	-.012	.003	.001
MSW Degree	-.007	.065	.909
Cases	.004	.002	.087
Supervisor Support (SS)	-.084	.036	.022
Coworker Support (CS)	.071	.039	.067
Work life	.241	.031	.000
Effort	.351	.046	.000
Reward	-.129	.057	.025
Inclusion in Decision Making (ID)	-.081	.036	.025
Negative Comm. Relationship (NR)	.094	.032	.004
Respect from Community (RC)	-.093	.049	.056
Safety	.067	.076	.382
Rigidity	.126	.059	.034
Size of Agency	-.052	.082	.548
SS x Work life	.030	.031	.328
SS x Rigid	-.121	.059	.040
SS x Effort	.042	.049	.390
SS x Reward	-.072	.059	.220
SS x ID	.083	.043	.055
Random Effects	---	---	---
Residual	.235	.021	.000
Intercept	.004	.010	.694
Model Fit		479.047	
(-2 Restricted Log Likelihood)			

Conclusions/Recommendations

- ⦿ Higher levels of workers' stress were a function of factors mostly within the organization's control
 - Structural /environmental factors -- *i.e., level of bureaucracy inherent in perceptions of agency rigidity, decision making, work demands, and rewards processes*
 - Support -- *i.e., quality supervision, work-life initiatives*
- ⦿ *Focus groups also identified these factors as stressors*
- ⦿ **Supervisors** are likely conduits for reducing workplace stress

Conclusions/Recommendations

- ⦿ While 10% of the variation in worker stress was associated with differences across county agencies, size (as a proxy for structure/bureaucracy) did not explain the differences
- ⦿ Further research is needed to identify the appropriate underlying 2nd level organizational factors explaining variation in stress (*i.e., job design and culture?*)
- ⦿ Overall, the data is clear that managers must define desirable work standards, and effectively advocate and strategize to reduce stressful environments

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