

6-1-1998

# Burnout in School Social Workers

Carol L. F Davis  
*Augsburg College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://idun.augsburg.edu/etd>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

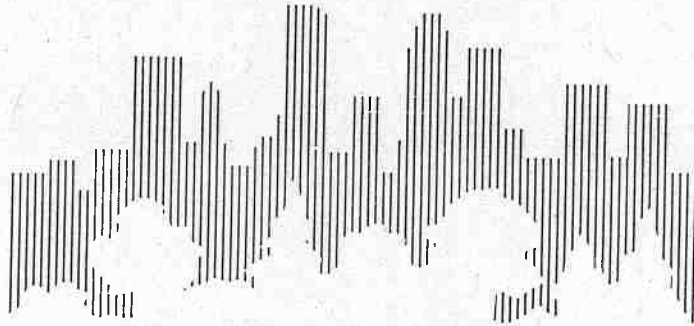
Davis, Carol L. F, "Burnout in School Social Workers" (1998). *Theses and Graduate Projects*. 214.  
<https://idun.augsburg.edu/etd/214>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Idun. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Graduate Projects by an authorized administrator of Idun. For more information, please contact [bloomber@aughsburg.edu](mailto:bloomber@aughsburg.edu).

---

**AUGSBURG**

---



---

**C • O • L • L • E • G • E**

**MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK  
THESIS**

Carol L. F. Davis

**Burnout in School Social Workers**

1998

**MSW  
Thesis**

Thesis  
Davis

**BURNOUT IN SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS**

**Carol L. F. Davis**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the degree of Master of  
Social Work**

**AUGSBURG COLLEGE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA**

**1998**

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK  
AUGSBURG COLLEGE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Master's Thesis of:

Carol L-F. Davis

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Master of Social Work Degree.

Date of Oral Presentation: June 1, 1998

Thesis Committee: Laura Boisen  
Thesis Advisor      Laura Boisen, Ph. D.

Maria Dinis  
Thesis Reader      Maria Dinis, Ph. D.

Shelly Theisen  
Thesis Reader      Shelly Theisen, M.S.W.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my daughter, Alexandra.

The completion of this thesis shows that whatever  
you put your mind to can be accomplished.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the people in my life who supported me through this process. My husband Tom, who without his support, I would not have completed this thesis. His computer intelligence also needs to be recognized for the many times it saved me. My daughter Alexandra, who tolerated and adjusted to mom's absences and stress level. My parents who watched Alex for me and provided emotional support. My father in-law and mother in-law who showed interest in my thesis and their many offers of help.

ABSTRACT  
BURNOUT IN SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

Study Focus: Research

Carol L. F. Davis

May 18, 1998

This quantitative study used survey research to explore the burnout level or degree of burnout experienced by school social workers and school social worker's relationship to burnout, caseload size, and multibuilding assignment. A survey of 95 school social workers in Ramsey County showed that most had a sense of personal accomplishment, felt connected to their clients and were not emotionally exhausted. The Maslach Burnout Inventory and demographic information were used to determine the burnout significance. The variables of caseload size and multibuilding assignment had no relationship with the burnout scores. In addition, no relationship was found between the three subscales of burnout, caseload size, and multibuilding assignment. These findings could be used to develop a further awareness of burnout in social workers.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
	ABSTRACT.....	i
	LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
<b>Chapter</b>		
1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
	Overview.....	1
	Purpose and Goal of Study.....	3
2	LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
	Overview.....	5
	The Theoretical/Conceptual Framework.....	5
	Burnout and Stress.....	7
	The Evolution of the Burnout Definition.....	8
	Predictive and Preventive Factors of Burnout.....	9
	Predictive Factors of Burnout.....	9
	Preventive Factors of Burnout.....	11
	Burnout in Social Work.....	12
	Burnout Variables in Social Work.....	12
	Environmental Variables in Social Work.....	13
	Burnout in School Social Workers.....	14
	Summary.....	14
3	METHODOLOGY.....	16
	Overview.....	16
	Research Design, Sample and Recruitment.....	16
	Population and Population Criteria.....	16
	Recruitment.....	17
	Data Collection.....	17
	Data Collection Instrument.....	18
	Validity and Reliability.....	20
	Data Analysis.....	20
	Protection of Human Subjects.....	21



4	FINDINGS.....	23
	Overview.....	23
	Characteristics of the Sample.....	23
	Burnout Findings for Research Question One...	26
	Emotional Exhaustion.....	26
	Depersonalization.....	29
	Personal Accomplishment.....	29
	Burnout Findings for Research Question Two..	30
	Depersonalization and Gender.....	31
	Emotional Exhaustion and Gender.....	31
	Personal Accomplishment and Gender..	32
	Education and Personal Accomplishment	34
	Education and Emotional Exhaustion.....	34
	Education and Depersonalization.....	35
	Multibuilding Assignment and Emotiona	36
	Multibuilding Assignment and Personal	38
	Multibuilding Assignment and Deper	40
	Caseload Size and Personal Accompl	42
	Caseload Size and Emotional Exhaustio	43
	Caseload Size and Depersonalization	44
5	DISCUSSION.....	45
	Overview.....	45
	Key Findings.....	45
	Findings Compared to Literature Review.....	47
	Limitations of the Study.....	49
	Implications for Social Work Policy and Practice....	50
	Recommendations for Future Research.....	50
	REFERENCES.....	51
	APPENDIX.....	55
A	I.R.B. Approval Letter.....	55
B.	Cover Letter.....	56
C.	Demographic Questionnaire.....	57

## List of Tables

Table	Page
1. Gender, Age and Ethnicity of School Social Workers.....	24
2. Education, Experience, and Caseload.....	25
3. Maslach Burnout Inventory Scores.....	27
4. Means and Standard Deviations vs. Normative Scores.....	28
5. Gender Compared to Depersonalization.....	31
6. Gender Compared to Emotional Exhaustion.....	32
7. Gender Compared to Personal Accomplishment.....	33
8. Education Level and Personal Accomplishment.....	34
9. Education Level and Emotional Exhaustion.....	35
10. Education Level and Depersonalization.....	36
11. Multibuilding Assignment and Emotional Exhaustion.....	37
12. Multibuilding Assignment and Personal Accomplishment.....	39
13. Multibuilding Assignment and Depersonalization.....	41
14. Caseload Size and Personal Accomplishment.....	42
15. Caseload Size and Emotional Exhaustion.....	43
16. Caseload Size and Depersonalization.....	44

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

This chapter consists of three parts: statement of the problem, purpose and goals of the study, and objectives of the study.

### Introduction

The concept of burnout was first discussed in 1974 by Herbert Freudenberger to describe the exhaustion he observed with volunteer workers in a free clinic. Freudenberger (1974) described burnout as a behavioral and somatic condition. Since Freudenberger's (1974) article, many other articles have followed addressing the concept of burnout in the human service field. These articles have defined and conceptualized burnout in many different ways.

The definitions of burnout have ranged from simplistic to complex descriptions of the concept. Freudenberger (1974) used a simplistic definition of burnout by taking the definition from the dictionary, "burn-out" as "to fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources" (Freudenberger, 1974, p. 159). Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996) define burnout as a "syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity" (Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter, 1996, p.4). The literature shows the evolution of the burnout definition which begins as a dictionary definition and develops into a syndrome with specific characterizations.

Along with the complexity of the burnout definition, burnout has also been examined in relationship to different variables. Age, time on the job, and autonomy are a few of the variables studied (Turnipseed, 1994). Variables have also been examined from an individual and environmental perspective. The organization or workplace may impose variables such as caseload size or expectations from the supervisor which causes the stress that can lead to burnout. In addition, lack of control over certain variables in the workplace is another factor that has been connected to stress and burnout from the organization (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Burnout has also been researched regarding the impact it can have on clients in the human service field. Researchers have examined the effects that burnout has on the client-professional relationship (Leiter & Harrie, 1996; Morch & Chestnut, 1984; Streepy, 1981; Stevens & O'Neill, 1983; Quattrochi-Tubin, Jones & Breedlove, 1983). Researchers found that clinical therapists who are experiencing burnout provided poor services to their client in comparison with non-burned out therapists (Quattrochi-Tubin et al., 1983). A professional who is experiencing burnout may exhibit a change in attitude toward their client or may generalize their clients. Therefore, burnout can ultimately affect the professional's ability to administer counseling and other services which will cause negative outcomes for the client (Koeske & Kelly, 1995).

Many factors in the human service field have been identified in relation to burnout with social workers. One contributing factor is that social workers have contact with client related stresses and co-worker stresses (Taylor-Brown, Johnson, Hunter, & Rockowitz, 1982). In addition to these stresses, the demands are high and feedback may be scarce (Stevens O'Neill, 1983). Due to human service work being

more difficult to quantify than other occupations, burnout may result from a lack of recognition. In addition, characteristics of human service professionals such as the desire to help people and make a difference may predispose individuals to burnout (Stevens & O'Neill, 1983).

Burnout has been studied in many areas of the human service field. Private practice, mental health therapists, child protection workers and family service workers are just a few of the areas studied. Although many areas of the human service field contain literature on burnout, no literature was found researching burnout in school social workers. Since school social workers face the same stresses as other human service workers, burnout may be an issue. In addition, the literature finds that uncontrollable variables in an individual's job may predispose them to burnout. According to Allen-Meares (1994), caseload size and multibuilding assignment are two uncontrollable variables for school social workers. Therefore, caseload size and multibuilding assignment may be variables which correlate with burnout for school social workers. Since burnout can have a serious impact on the client, research on burnout in school social workers would be needed information.

#### Purpose and Goal of Study

Due to the negative impact that burnout can have on clients, burnout continues to be an important concept to study in the social work field. Since the nature of social work consists of increased caseloads and limited resources, burnout will continue to be an issue. Learning more about burnout will provide insight into this concept for future education and training.

This study's goals are to determine the burnout significance for school social workers and identify the relationship between caseload size and multibuilding assignment. The goals will be accomplished by using the following research questions.

The research questions are:

- 1) What degree and what dimension of burnout were experienced by school social workers as measured on the subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory?
- 2) What is the school social workers relationship in regards to caseload size, multibuilding assignments, and burnout?

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

This chapter contains two sections. The first section is an explanation of the conceptual framework and the second section is the literature review. The literature review summarizes four themes of the literature: differences between burnout and stress, evolution of burnout, predictive and preventive factors of burnout, and burnout in the social work field.

### The Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

According to Cherniss (1980), work setting characteristics can have direct effects on burnout. The environmental variables of caseload size and multibuilding assignment are described as uncontrollable work setting characteristics which may have a connection with burnout (Allen-Meares, 1994). Therefore, the control-demand theory which focuses on the environment and how it relates to uncontrollable areas of work will be the framework used for this study.

The control-demand theory is described by Karasek & Theorell (1990). According to Karasek & Theorell (1990), a system as a whole can be in a stressful state even though a cause cannot be found. If this state continues for a long period of time, other parts of the system could become disrupted. Stress is defined as a "systematic concept referring to a desquilibrium of the system as a whole in particular of the system's control capabilities" (Karasek & Theorell, p. 87, 1990). When systems experience stress, it needs to reorganize which takes energy. The system needs to be able to return to a rest state so that more tasks can be performed. The need to return to a rest state defines the importance of being able to function without burning out. Rest is crucial to a system or person being productive.

The control-demand theory which was developed by Karasek(1990) contributes environment as a stress to the individual but goes further by examining the control aspect of work. Producing order on a chaotic environment takes energy. The control system must change from its' rest state to a work state. These actions or changes may go to an extreme and lead to fatigue or strain (Karask & Theorell, 1990). Control-demand theory is similar to the stress theory in that all living organisms are specified as needing rest and relaxation for work to be done. Some levels of demands are necessary but a level of demand that is too high can be destructive. Destructive demands can lead to fatigue, anxiety, and depression. The demand-control model states that when negative reactions to psychological demands of the job are high and the worker's decision or control of the task is low, strain or stress could occur (Karask & Theorell, 1990).

In the control-demand model, the environment or the amount of control that an employee has along with the significance of the demanding work, influences the stress. Psychological demands in conjunction with a lack of control is seen as not promoting learning or positive challenges.

This study will use the control-demand theory to focus on the relationship between the two uncontrollable variables of caseload size and multibuilding assignment in relationship to the school social worker's burnout scores. By using the control-demand model, the school social worker position will be viewed as a psychologically demanding job with a lack of control over the two variables of caseload size and multibuilding assignment.



## Literature Review

The literature review that follows specifies four major themes that were found in the burnout literature. The major themes are: burnout and stress, evolution of the burnout definition, predictive and preventive factors of burnout, and burnout in social work.

### Burnout and Stress

The literature contains many references to burnout and stress. A few of the authors discuss stress and burnout in the same article but only research one or the other (Meyerson, 1994; Ratliff, 1988; Shinn, Rosario, Morch & Chestnut, 1984). Shinn, Rosario, Morch and Chestnut (1984) also used the terms stress and burnout together in their study. Although the terms were conceptualized together, the study's purpose was to examine job stress. Other research articles examine either stress or burnout independently with no mention of the other concept. Although some articles examine either stress or burnout, other articles use the terms interchangeably without defining the differences. Due to the confusion with the usage of burnout and stress in the literature, the two terms will be defined in more depth.

The differences between burnout and stress are complicated. Some authors use the words burnout and stress as meaning the same concept (Brill, 1984). In one article the authors define burnout as "psychological strain resulting from the stress of human service work" (Shinn et al., 1984, p. 864). Stress is viewed as the initial phase while burnout is the end result (Brill, 1984, p. 864). Stress can lead to burnout but not all people who are stressed, burn-out (Brill, 1984). Stress leads to decreased performance or physical problems but it does not restrict the person's life (Brill, 1984). Job related stress is described as being needed in the beginning

stages of work (Daley, 1979). The challenge of job stress increases the employee's motivation (Daley, 1979).

Although stress can be beneficial, it can also turn into burnout if there is an increase of stress over a long period of time (Daley, 1979). Therefore, stress can be either positive or negative while burnout is primarily viewed as negative.

Cherniss (1980) describes stress as the first step to burnout but describes burnout as a developmental process. Burnout is seen as resulting from continuous job stress (Cherniss, 1980). This stress produces strain. The process of burnout ends when the employee copes by mentally detaching from their job and becoming pessimistic or rigid (Cherniss, 1980).

### The Evolution of the Burnout Definition

The definition of burnout has evolved over the years where the stress definition has remained more consistent. Maslach defined burnout for the first time in 1978 as what happens when an employee is unable to handle the emotional stress of their job which can present itself with low morale, performance problems, absenteeism, and high turnover (Maslach, 1978). In this definition, stress is viewed as a preliminary step to burnout with the employee being the cause of the burnout. Consequently, also in 1978, Maslach defines burnout as the practitioners inability to be concerned about their clients. In this definition, the client- practitioner relationship becomes the focus.

The definition of burnout which is most widely used is Maslach, Jackson and Leiter's (1996) definition of burnout. Maslach et al.(1996) definition is a "syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do people work of some kind" (Maslach et al., 1996, p.4 ). In this definition, burnout is seen as a concept which can

range from low to high in an individual. Stress is not included in this definition but the employee continues to be the focus or cause.

In 1997, Maslach and Leiter (1997) defined burnout in a different way from the past definitions. Burnout is described not as a problem of the individual but of the "social environment" in which people work (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 18). Maslach and Leiter's (1997) definition pinpoints the environment or workplace as being the cause of burnout versus the individual. The past definitions viewed burnout as an end product of stress which the employee caused. In Maslach and Leiter's (1997) current literature, the focus is taken away from the employee and placing it with the work environment.

#### Predictive and Preventive Factors of Burnout

The research on burnout identifies predictive and preventive factors of burnout. Predictive and preventive factors of burnout are factors that have been identified in the literature to cause burnout or prevent a person from experiencing burnout. The literature has researched many different factors which may be controllable or uncontrollable by the employee.

#### Predictive Factors of Burnout

Predictive factors can be examined from two perspectives. One is the environment and the other is the individual perspective. The environment is related to a systems perspective which examines conditions in the workplace (Cherniss, 1980).

Many factors of the work environment can contribute to burnout. Savicki and Cooley (1987) found that work environments which have high levels of burnout are those which have ambiguous job expectations, management forces rules on employees, and minimal support of new ideas. Peer support, pressure at work, boss support, job definition, and independence are also factors which are linked to burnout in the workplace (Turnipseed, 1994).

Role ambiguity is another predictive factor for burnout in the research. In the research article by Meyerson (1994) ambiguity is defined as a "lack of clarity" (Meyerson, 1994, p. 632). Social workers are described as having ambiguity with their clients, employment boundaries, and standards of evaluation (Meyerson, 1994). Harrison's (1980) article also examines ambiguity. The child protection workers surveyed in Harrison's (1980) article exhibited high levels of role ambiguity which was related to low job satisfaction.

Freudenberger (1974) lists the predictive factors of burnout as behavioral and somatic complaints. Harris (1984) takes Freudenberger's predictive factors further by adding two additional categories. Harris (1984) lists predictive factors of burnout as being classified in three categories. The first category is feeling states which includes "helplessness, hopelessness, disenchantment, and emotional exhaustion" (Harris, 1984, p. 34). The second category is attitudes and behaviors which includes rigidity, helplessness, and cynicism (Harris, 1984, p. 34). The third category is somatic states with physical tiredness, clumsiness, and susceptibility to sickness (Harris, 1984).

One of the most recent books on burnout describes the predictive factors of burnout from an environmental context (Maslach & Leiter, 1996). Maslach and Leiter (1996) describe the causes of burnout as being: "work overload, lack of control, insufficient rewards, breakdown in community, absence of fairness and conflicting values" (Maslach & Leiter, 1996, p. 38). Burnout is described as resulting from the environment that people work. This perspective states that people are not the problem but that the work environment is the problem (Maslach & Leiter, 1996). This perspective sees the end result of burnout when the economic part of work is valued more than the human part. Burnout is also described as resulting from a mismatch between the expectations of the employee and the job (Maslach & Leiter, 1996).

In addition to the environmental factors that an individual or employee can possess, certain characteristics or traits may also predispose individuals to burnout (Cherniss, 1980). Daley (1979) states that burnout is an individual problem. Factors that cause one worker to burn-out, may be different for another worker (Daley, 1979). Cherniss (1980) states that people with neurotic anxiety are more vulnerable to burnout (Cherniss, 1980). People with anxiety are described as setting high expectations for themselves, emotionally unstable, impulsive, and insecure regarding what other people think about them. Flexibility is another individual personality trait which may cause more stress (Ratliff, 1988). Ratliff (1988) described individuals with rigid boundaries as having an easier time setting limits than a flexible personality individual. These people with flexible boundaries experienced stress resulting from setting boundaries.

#### Preventive Factors of Burnout

The literature on burnout has also described preventive factors from burnout. Preventive factors are coping methods which prevent people from burnout. Dorothy Beck (1987) lists coping methods as cognitive reframing, identifying origins of stress, establishing coping methods, diminishing demands, advocating a positive image, and changing the stress response (Beck, 1987). Freudenberger (1974) also suggests preventive measures which include avoiding the same job situation, limiting the number of hours a person works, and taking time off (Freudenberger, 1974).

From an individual perspective, attitudes have been seen as ways to prevent burnout. Streepy (1981) found that social workers' who had positive attitudes toward the social work field experienced less burnout. Expectations were also researched as an individual factor. Stevens and O'Neill (1983) found that burnout was low when individuals had high expectations for their clients. Burnout was prevented when staff changed their expectations from reliance on client progress to a sense of personal responsibility (Stevens & O'Neill, 1983).

In addition, work environments can also prevent burnout. Saviciki and Cooley (1987) found that work environments with workers who are committed to their work exhibit these factors: co-worker relationships are encouraged and supervisory relationships are supportive. Pines and Maslach (1978) researched staff in mental health settings and found preventive measures incorporated into the work environment. The preventive measures are reducing patient-staff ratios, shortening work hours, more opportunities for time outs, sharing patient loads, retreats for staff, and training students to deal with stress (Pines & Maslach, 1978).

Maslach and Leiter (1997) describe preventive measures as the first approach to the burnout problem, but the focus should be on assisting people to remain engaged in their work (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The approach that is recommended for preventing burnout is to take an organizational approach and look at the conditions in the workplace. The goal of this approach is to build management's policies that will prevent burnout and promote interest (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Management needs to then look at the six areas of the organizational environment which are; "workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values" (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 104).

### Burnout in Social Work

Burnout has been researched in many areas. Nurses, teachers, and other professionals have been studied for burnout. In social work, the burnout literature has concentrated in a few specific areas. Child protection, family service agencies, and hospital settings have been a few of the different areas with social work burnout research.

### Burnout Variables in Social Work

The research in the literature on burnout did not identify a high degree of burnout for social workers. Although there were no high burnout scores, certain variables were correlated with burnout. Powell (1994) researched hospital, nursing

home, and child welfare social workers. A correlation was found between feelings of alienation and high burnout scores. Coady, Kent and Davis (1990) surveyed social workers who work with Cystic Fibrosis patients and found a significant relationship between team support, supervision support, and low burnout scores. Social workers who spent 31-40 hours at work also had a higher potential for burnout than those who spent less hours at work.

The articles which researched child protection workers found that the variable of role ambiguity is related to job stress and job dissatisfaction (Daley, 1979; Harrison, 1980). Overall, stress and dissatisfaction may ultimately lead to burnout.

Additionally in the family service agency research, social workers had low burnout scores (Beck, 1987; Streepy, 1981). The correlation between burnout and demographic factors was found by Streepy (1981) in family service agencies. Streepy (1981) found that social workers with family incomes under \$20,000 or without advanced graduate degrees had the highest burnout. Social workers with graduate degrees and experienced workers had the lowest burnout scores.

In addition, research about burnout with hospital social workers concentrated on stress predictors in relation to burnout. Taylor-Brown et al., (1982) and Powell (1994) both examine powerlessness for hospital social workers. Taylor-Brown et al., (1982) found that the complexity of the hospital environment can leave the social worker feeling powerless due to the lower status that social workers have when compared to physicians. The powerless feeling may cause more stress for hospital social workers which could eventually lead to burnout

#### Environmental Variables in Social Work

Although many variables have been correlated with burnout, environment was consistently found to be a factor with the burnout literature on social workers. Beck (1987) who surveyed counselors in family service agencies found a correlation between burnout and the environmental factors of work pressure, lack of support and

authoritarian administration. LeCroy & Rank (1987) who also surveyed social workers from social service agencies found that burnout has a correlation with job structure and autonomy. Burnout was also found to be an environment versus an individual problem (LeCroy & Rank, 1987).

#### Burnout in School Social Workers

Although social workers in hospital, family service and child protection were studied, no research was found regarding burnout for school social workers. Allen-Meares (1994) discusses the tasks of school social workers and variables that school social workers have no control over. The school social worker has no control over "large caseloads and multibuilding assignments" (Allen-Meares, 1994, p. 566 ). These variables may be predictive factors of burnout for school social workers. As discussed previously, research shows that work environments may be a predictor of job stress which can lead to burnout (Savicki & Cooley, 1987). This predictor may be correlated with the uncontrollable variables of caseload size and multibuilding assignment which was identified by Allen-Mears (1994) for school social workers. Researching the significance of burnout in school social workers would provide insight into this area.

#### Summary

The research from this review of literature showed that burnout is a concern and issue in the social service field due to certain job factors. The negative implications that burnout has toward social worker's clients is also a concern. In addition, the differences between burnout and stress have been identified and discussed. Burnout will be studied instead of the stress factors which are also identified in some literature. The literature also defines certain factors contributing to burnout which were identified along with factors which prevent people from experiencing burnout.



By examining the burnout literature on social workers, a gap in research for school social workers was found. The literature on school social work discusses the tasks of their jobs and identifies factors which they have no control over but it does not discuss burnout due to these factors. This study will provide the opportunity to measure the significance of burnout in school social workers and determine if a relationship exists between caseload size, multibuilding assignment, and burnout.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### Overview

This chapter describes the research design, sample, data collection, data analysis and limitations of the study. This is an exploratory study used to determine the amount of burnout experienced by school social workers. In addition, the relationship between school social workers, caseload size, and multibuilding assignment will be explored.

### Research Design, Population, and Recruitment

This quantitative research project is a cross-sectional, exploratory study, using survey research design to answer the research questions. The cross-sectional design allowed a large population to be studied in a short period of time. Due to this large population, the survey research will be more generalizable.

### Population and Population Criteria

The units of analysis for this cross-sectional, exploratory study were licensed school social workers in Ramsey county. A nonprobability, universal population with male or female attributes was used. The population consisted of all licensed school social workers who work in urban and suburban areas.

A criteria used for sampling was that the school social workers needed to be licensed through the state of Minnesota as a school social worker. The social workers whom are licensed through Minnesota and practice as a school social worker in Ramsey County were selected. Ninety-five school social workers practice in Ramsey County which was a workable population due to time constraints.

### Recruitment

To obtain this population, the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning licensing team was contacted regarding a list of licensed school social workers in Ramsey county. This department licenses all school social workers in the state of Minnesota. For a \$25.00 fee, a mailing label list of school social workers who practice in Ramsey County was sent to the researcher.

### Data Collection

After receiving the mailing labels, the researcher prepared the survey packets for mailing. The individuals that were on the list of licensed school social workers were sent a cover letter, explaining the purpose of the study and how they should proceed with completing the questionnaire. The Maslach Burnout Inventory and demographic sheet was enclosed with the cover letter. The Maslach Burnout Inventory was presented as a survey of job-related attitudes due to the need for minimizing response bias. According to the Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual (Maslach et al., 1996), the respondents' awareness of the burnout measure could sensitize the respondents to not completing the survey accurately.

The respondents were given two weeks to complete the survey. A self-addressed stamped envelope was enclosed for return to the Augsburg mail room. Thirty-seven surveys were returned after the initial mailing. Within ten days after the initial mailing had been sent, a reminder postcard was sent to all of the individuals. The individuals were asked to ignore the second mailing if they had already responded to the initial mailing. The individuals were given two weeks from the second mailing for inclusion in the study. Twelve surveys were returned after the second mailing, for a total of 49 surveys. This was a return rate of 51%. According to Rubin & Babbie (1997) a return rate of 50% is an acceptable rate for analysis. The return of the measure indicated the participants consent and ended their role in the research.

### Data Collection Instrument

The instrument that was used for this survey research is the Maslach Burnout Inventory which was purchased through Consulting Psychologists Press (Maslach et al., 1996). The answer key and manual were also purchased through Consulting Psychologists Press. The Burnout Inventory was developed for human service personnel. The tool was standardized by testing mental health workers, police and their spouses, physicians, and social service workers. These occupations were used due to their common factor of working with people who could have strong issues or problems.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory is a twenty-two item survey with close-ended statements. For example, two of the statements are: "I feel emotionally drained from my work" and "I feel frustrated by my job." The respondent is given six answers to choose from for these questions. The answers are "0" (never), "1"(a few times a year or less), "2"(once a month or less), "3"(a few times a month), "4"(once a week), "5" (a few times a week),and "6"(every day). The participants were asked to provide a number score for the question which correlates with how they feel about their job. Numbers 1-6 describe how frequently the participant feels this way.

In addition, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) assesses three aspects of the burnout syndrome; emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Each aspect of burnout is measured by a separate scale. The Emotional Exhaustion subscale examines feelings of being exhausted by one's work and being emotionally overextended. The depersonalization subscale measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's service care, treatment, or instruction (Maslach et al., 1996). The personal

accomplishment subscale assesses feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work with people (Maslach et al., 1996).

According to the Maslach et al., (1996) manual, burnout is seen as a continuous variable which can range from low to average to high degrees of feeling. A high degree of burnout will be exhibited on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) with a high score on the Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization subscales and low scores on the Personal Accomplishment subscale. An average amount of burnout will be exhibited with a average score on the three subscales. Last of all, a low degree of burnout will be exhibited with low scores on the Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization subscale and in high scores on the Personal Accomplishment subscale. Consequently, burnout scores that are considered high will be in the upper third of the normative distribution , average scores will be in the middle third, and low scores will be in the lower third. The Maslach Burnout Inventory(1996) tool takes less than ten minutes to complete.

A demographic questionnaire (appendix A) was also used to collect data. The demographic questionnaire is a seven question form which uses close ended questions. Two of the questions asks for information regarding the participant's job characteristics. These two questions look specifically at the caseload size and multibuilding assignment. Caseload size is the average number of cases the social worker is actively working with at this time. Multibuilding assignment is how many schools the social worker is assigned. The other five questions concentrate on demographic information such as gender, race, birthdate, degree, and years as a school social worker. The demographic questionnaire will take participants less than five minutes to complete.

### Validity and Reliability

In addition, the Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual (1996) describes the validity and reliability of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) as being reliable and valid. Each subscale of the MBI exhibited consistency and reliability. The reliability was established through test-retest procedures. Five samples were used of graduate students in social welfare and administrators in a health agency. The two test sessions were separated by two to four weeks. All of the test-retest reliability coefficients for the subscales on the Maslach Burnout Inventory were significant. The reliability coefficients for the subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory were .90 for Emotional Exhaustion, .79 for Depersonalization, and .71 for Personal Accomplishment. Therefore, according to the Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual (1996), the MBI is a reliable measure.

The validity was established through three different correlations. The MBI scores were related with behavioral ratings made by a person who knew the individual who took the test. Secondly, MBI scores were related with job characteristics that were suppose to cause burnout. Thirdly, the MBI scores were connected with results that had been predicted to be connected with burnout. All three testings were shown to be evidence for validity of the MBI (Maslach et al., 1996).

### Data Analysis

The Maslach Burnout Inventory data was used to address the first research question. The demographic questionnaire was used to compile descriptive statistics regarding the sample and correlation with the Maslach Burnout Inventory scores. Both the demographic questionnaire and Burnout Inventory were used to address the second question. Upon return, each Maslach Burnout Inventory and demographic questionnaire was coded with a number. The first was case #1, the second case #2

and so on. The demographic information and variable information was entered using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) data file on the computer. The Maslach Burnout Inventory's subscales were tabulated by using the purchased answer key. The data from the Maslach Burnout Inventory was entered into the SPSS data file. The original number scores for each subscale of burnout was entered into the SPSS data file under the subscale's name. The descriptive statistics from the demographic questionnaire were also entered into the SPSS data file. The SPSS was used to formulate descriptive statistics of the sample using the demographic data. The chi square test was used to analyze the relationship between the caseload size, multibuilding assignment, and burnout scores. Crosstabulation was also used to analyze the data further. The variables were crosstabbed with the Burnout Inventory's three subscales (depersonalization, personal accomplishment, emotional exhaustion). The variables were crosstabbed on the SPSS. In addition, the SPSS was used to compute the mean and standard deviation of the burnout subscales. The scores were compared with the social service norms listed in the Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual (Maslach et al., 1996).

#### Protection of Human Subjects

Confidentiality of the participants was established during this study by not including their names on the measure. There was no identifying information on the questionnaires or envelopes and participants were informed not to place identifying information on the questionnaires. Included in each survey packet was a cover letter (Appendix B), which explained the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of the study. Participants were informed that there was no direct benefit for participating in the study. The names and numbers of the researcher and thesis advisor were included for further questions regarding the project. All individual's names and addresses were kept separate from their returned measures and were secured in a locked file. This locked file was only accessible to the researcher. The

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

### Overview

This chapter presents the study's findings as they relate to the research questions: 1) what degree and what dimension of burnout were experienced by school social workers as measured on the subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory and, 2) what is the school social worker's relationship with caseload size, multibuilding assignments, and burnout? Findings will be presented by discussing characteristics of the population followed by the research question findings.

### Characteristics of the Population

The population consisted of 49 school social workers. The response rate of respondents in the study was 51% (49 out of 95). The school social workers were mostly females. Almost three out of four (73.5%) were female while the remaining (26.5%) were male (see Table 1).

The school social workers ranged in age from 25 to 63 years with a mean age of 45 years. More than half the sample (63.2%) was older than age 40. Approximately one-third (36.6%) of the population was between the ages of 40-49 (36.6%) while approximately one-quarter (26.6%) was between the ages 50-59. The age group of 30-39 (20.4%) had the smallest group of respondents (see Table 1).

One ethnic group dominated the population. The largest ethnicity for the population was Caucasian (89.8%). African American was the next largest ethnicity (6.1%). The population also had a small proportion of school social workers who have Native American (2%) and Hispanic ethnicity (2%) (see Table 1).



## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

### Overview

This chapter presents the study's findings as they relate to the research questions: 1) what degree and what dimension of burnout were experienced by school social workers as measured on the subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory and, 2) what is the school social worker's relationship with caseload size, multibuilding assignments, and burnout? Findings will be presented by discussing characteristics of the population followed by the research question findings.

### Characteristics of the Population

The population consisted of 49 school social workers. The response rate of respondents in the study was 51% (49 out of 95). The school social workers were mostly females. Almost three out of four (73.5%) were female while the remaining (26.5%) were male (see Table 1).

The school social workers ranged in age from 25 to 63 years with a mean age of 45 years. More than half the sample (63.2%) was older than age 40. Approximately one-third (36.6%) of the population was between the ages of 40-49 (36.6%) while approximately one-quarter (26.6%) was between the ages 50-59. The age group of 30-39 (20.4%) had the smallest group of respondents (see Table 1).

One ethnic group dominated the population. The largest ethnicity for the population was Caucasian (89.8%). African American was the next largest ethnicity (6.1%). The population also had a small proportion of school social workers who have Native American (2%) and Hispanic ethnicity (2%) (see Table 1).

<b>Table 1 - Gender, Age, and Ethnicity of the School Social Workers</b>		
<b>Population</b>		
<b>Gender</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Male	13	26.5%
Female	36	73.5%
<b>Age</b>		
20-29	4	8%
30-39	10	20.4%
40-49	18	36.6%
50-59	13	26.6%
60+	2	4.0%
No answer	2	4.1%
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Caucasian	44	89.8%
African American	3	6.1%
Native American	1	2%
Hispanic	1	2%

The sample was highly educated and experienced. The majority (87.8%) of the population had Masters degrees. A small portion (10.2%) of the sample had Bachelor degrees (see Table 2).

Almost half (42.8%) of the respondents were social workers with 0-10 years of experience. The largest portion (57.2%) of the population had over 10 years experience as a school social worker. The second largest part (32.7%) of the population had spent 10-20 years in the job. The smallest proportion (24.5%) was respondents who had spent over 21 years as a school social worker (see Table 2).

Most of the respondents reported large caseload sizes. A caseload size greater than 20 (98.0%) was reported by the majority. A caseload of 15-20 was reported by one (2.0%) school social worker (see Table 2).

<b>Table 2 - Education, Experience, and Caseload for the Population</b>		
<b>Education</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>
B.A./B.S.W.	5	10.2%
M.A./M.S.W.	43	87.8%
No Answer	1	2.0%
<b>Years as School Social Worker</b>		
0-10 years	21	42.8%
11-20 years	16	32.7%
Over 21 years	12	24.5%
<b>Caseload Size</b>		
15-20	1	2.0%
20+	48	98.0%

## Burnout Findings for Research Question One

Research question number one investigated to what degree and what dimension burnout was experienced by school social workers. The burnout scores were reported by the participants on the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The Maslach Burnout Inventory measured three subscales of burnout. The three subscales are: 1) emotional exhaustion, 2) depersonalization, and 3) personal accomplishment. Each subscale is scored and then categorized low, average, or high.

### Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion was described as feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work (Maslach et al., 1996). For example, respondents were asked on a 0-6 score how often they felt this way. A few statements used were: "I feel emotionally drained from my work" and "I feel burned out from my work".

Most of the respondents reported not feeling exhausted by their work (see Table 3). Eighty-one percent of the respondents reported feeling a low to average level of emotional exhaustion from their work while 18.1% reported feeling a high degree of emotional exhaustion.

When the population's emotional exhaustion scores were compared to the norms of the Maslach Burnout Manual (1996), their average scores were lower than the normative scores (see Table 4). Thus, these school social workers reported feeling less exhaustion from their work than the social service group in the Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual (1996).

<b>Table 3- Maslach Burnout Inventory Scores for the Subscales</b>		
<b>MBI subscale</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b>	19	38.7% low
	21	42.9% average
	9	18.1% high
<b>Depersonalization</b>	30	61.2% low
	16	32.5% average
	3	6% high
<b>Personal Accomplishment*</b>	31	63.5% low
	11	22.3% average
	7	14.1% high

**\*Note: Low indicates high level of personal accomplishment.**

**Table 4- Comparing Means and Standard Deviations for the School Social Workers in Ramsey County with the Maslach (1996) Normative Scores for Social Service Personnel**

Maslach Burnout subscale	n	Normative scores vs. survey scores	
		Normative	Survey
<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b>			
M	47	21.35	20.10
SD	47	10.51	9.52
<b>Depersonalization</b>			
M	47	7.46	5.55
SD	47	5.11	4.25
<b>Personal Accomplishment</b>			
M	47	32.75	39.46
SD	47	7.71	6.34

### Depersonalization

Depersonalization is the second component of burnout. The depersonalization component measures an unfeeling and distanced feeling toward one's clients (Maslach et al., 1996). For example, a few statements which are used on the Maslach Burnout Inventory are: "I feel I treat some recipients as if they were impersonal objects" and "I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally."

The majority of the respondents reported feeling a connection with their clients (see Table 3). The percentage of respondents who reported feeling a connection with their clients was 93.7%. A small portion (6%) of the respondents reported feeling distanced from their clients.

The respondents in this population averaged lower scores on depersonalization than the normative scores (see Table 4). Thus, the respondents from this population felt more of a connection with their clients than most social service personnel.

### Personal Accomplishment

The third component of burnout which was measured is personal accomplishment. According to Maslach et al., (1996) personal accomplishment refers to feelings of success in one's work with clients/people. For example, some statements from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (1986) are: "I feel very energetic" and "In my work, I deal with emotional problems very calmly".

The majority of the respondents reported high feelings of success in their work (see Table 3). The school social workers who feel that they are successful in their work is 85.8% while a small proportion (14.1%) reported a lack of feelings of success in their work.

The respondents in the personal accomplishment sample averaged higher scores than the normative scores. Therefore, these respondents feel a higher sense of personal accomplishment than most social service personnel (see Table 4).

### Burnout Findings for Research Question Two

Research question number two examined the relationship between the school social worker's burnout scores, caseload size, and multibuilding assignments. The Chi square test was used to determine if a relationship exists between burnout, caseload size, and multibuilding assignments. No relationship was found between multibuilding assignment and the three components of burnout. Caseload size and the three components of burnout also showed no relationship. Therefore, a relationship was not found between caseload size, multibuilding assignment, and the three components of burnout (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment) which signifies that these factors are not associated with burnout in this population.

### Depersonalization and Gender

Gender was crosstabbed to see if a relationship exists between gender and depersonalization or the feeling of distance from clients. The males and females of this population had similar scores for feelings of depersonalization(see Table 5). The majority of females (94.5%) reported feeling a connection with their clients compared to 100% of the men who reported feeling a connection with their clients. These scores suggest that most of the school social workers are feeling a connection with their clients whether they are male or female.



<b>Table 5-Gender Compared to Depersonalization</b>			
<b>Gender</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Degree</b>
<b>Female</b>	20	55.6%	low
	14	38.9%	average
	2	5.6%	high
<b>Male</b>	9	69.2%	low
	4	30.8%	average
	-	-	high

#### Emotional Exhaustion and Gender

Emotional Exhaustion was crosstabbed with gender to determine if a relationship exists between these variables. The findings show that more females reported feelings of being overextended or exhausted by their jobs than males (see Table 6). Twenty-two percent of the females in the sample reported feeling overextended by their work while 7 % of the males reported feelings of being overextended. The majority of the males (92.3%) reported feelings of not being overextended by their work while the majority of females (77.8%) also reported feelings of not being overextended by their work.

<b>Table 6-Gender Compared to Emotional Exhuation</b>			
<b>Gender</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Degree</b>
<b>Female</b>	8	22.2%	low
	20	55.6%	average
	8	22.2%	high
<b>Male</b>	11	84.6%	low
	1	7.7%	average
	1	7.7%	high

#### Personal Accomplishment and Gender

Most of the males and females in the population felt successful with their work (see Table 7). Over half of the females ( 61.15%) and the males ( 69.2%) reported feeling successful in their work. The females and males who reported not feeling successful in their work was a small percentage of the population. Sixteen percent of the females reported feeling unsuccessful while 7.7% of the male population reported feeling unsuccessful.

<b>Table 7- Gender Compared to Personal Accomplishment</b>			
<b>Gender</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Degree</b>
<b>Female</b>	22	61.1%	low
	8	22.2%	average
	6	16.7%	high
<b>Male</b>	9	69.2%	low
	3	23.1%	average
	1	7.7%	high

**\*Note:Low indicates high level of personal accomplishment.**

#### Education and Personal Accomplishment

The majority of Bachelor level and Master level respondents indicated feelings of success in their job(see Table 8). Fewer Master- prepared social workers (83.8%) reported feelings of success in their jobs than Bachelor level (100%) respondents. A small proportion of Master level (16.3%) respondents reported a lack of successful feelings toward their work while 0% of the Bachelor level respondents reported feeling unsuccessful in their work.

<b>Table-8 Education Level and Personal Accomplishment</b>			
<b>Education level</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Degree</b>
<b>Bachelor Level</b>	4	80.0%	low
	1	20.0%	average
	-	-	high
<b>Master Level</b>	26	60.5%	low
	10	23.3%	average
	7	16.3%	high

**\*Note: Low indicates high level of personal accomplishment.**

#### Education and Emotional Exhaustion

The majority of the bachelor level and Master level school social workers reported feelings of not being emotionally overextended by their job (see Table 9). The Master level school social workers (79%) reported not feeling emotionally overextended on their job while 100% of the Bachelor level reported not feeling emotionally overextended. A small portion of the Master level social workers (20.9%) reported feeling emotionally exhausted by their work while 0% of the Bachelor level respondents felt emotionally exhausted.

<b>Table 9-Education Level and Emotional Exhaustion</b>			
<b>Education</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Degree</b>
<b>Bachelor</b>	1	20.0%	low
	4	80.0%	average
	-	-	high
<b>Master</b>	17	39.5%	low
	17	39.5%	average
	9	20.9%	high

#### Education and Depersonalization

Both the Bachelor level respondents and the Master level respondents indicated feeling a connection with their clients (see Table 10 ). Only a small percentage (4.7%) of the Master level school social workers reported a high level of depersonalization which signifies feeling distanced from their clients. All of the bachelor level school social workers(100%) reported feeling a connection with their clients compared to 95% of the Master level social workers who felt a connection with their clients.

<b>Table 10-Education Level and Depersonalization</b>			
<b>Education</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Degree</b>
<b>Bachelor</b>	3	60.0%	low
	2	40.0%	average
	-	-	high
<b>Master</b>	25	58.1%	low
	16	37.2%	average
	2	4.7%	high

#### Multibuilding Assignment and Emotional Exhaustion

The number of schools assigned to the respondents were compared to the subscale of emotional exhaustion (see Table 11). The majority of the respondents for each school classification reported not feeling tired or overwhelmed by their job. This comparison showed that no relationship exists between the number of schools assigned to the respondents and feelings of being tired or overwhelmed. The social workers assigned to one school (87.9%) reported not feeling emotionally exhausted while 42.9% of social workers who have two schools reported not feeling emotionally exhausted. One-hundred percent of the respondents who have three schools are not emotionally exhausted, and 83.4% of social workers with four schools are not exhausted.

<b>Table 11- Multibuilding Assignment and Emotional Exhaustion</b>			
<b>Schools Assigned</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>One School</b>	15	45.5%	low
	14	42.4%	average
	4	12.1%	high
<b>Two schools</b>	-	-	low
	3	42.9%	average
	4	57.1%	high
<b>Three schools</b>	-	-	low
	3	100%	average
	-	-	high
<b>Four schools</b>	4	66.7%	low
	1	16.7%	average
	1	16.7%	high

### Multibuilding Assignment and Personal Accomplishment

The number of schools assigned to the school social worker displayed no relationship with feelings of personal accomplishment (see Table 13). The majority of school social workers (72.7%) who work at one and four schools (83.3%) reported a strong feeling of accomplishment in their job. The majority of the respondents who work at two (71.4%) or three schools (66.6%) also reported positive feelings toward their accomplishments at work.

The respondents did report a slight increase in not feeling personal accomplishment toward their work as the number of schools increased. The school social workers with one school (12.1%) reported poor feelings of personal accomplishment while 28.6% of the social workers with two schools reported poor feelings of personal accomplishment, three schools or 33.3% of the respondents reported poor feelings of personal accomplishment in their work.



<b>Table 12- Multibuilding Assignment and Personal Accomplishment</b>			
<b>Schools Assigned</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Degree</b>
<b>One School</b>	24	72.7%	low
	5	15.2%	average
	4	12.1%	high
<b>Two Schools</b>	1	14.3%	low
	4	57.1%	average
	2	28.6%	high
<b>Three Schools</b>	1	33.3%	low
	1	33.3%	average
	1	33.3%	high
<b>Four Schools</b>	5	83.3%	low
	1	16.7%	average
	-	-	high

**\*Note: Low indicates high level of personal accomplishment.**

### Multibuilding Assignment and Depersonalization

The number of schools assigned to the school social worker and the burnout levels for Depersonalization showed no relationship (see Table 13). The respondents with one school reported that 94% felt a connection with their clients. The respondents with two, three, and four schools reported that 100% felt a connection with their clients. The only category of school assignment with a percentage of respondents who reported feelings of detachment from their clients was the respondents with one school. The respondents with one school reported that 6.1% felt a detachment from their clients.

<b>Table 13-Multibuilding Assignment and Depersonalization</b>			
<b>Schools Assigned</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Degree</b>
<b>One School</b>	22	66.7%	low
	9	27.3%	average
	2	6.1%	high
<b>Two Schools</b>	1	14.3%	low
	6	85.7%	average
	-	-	high
<b>Three Schools</b>	2	66.7%	low
	1	33.3%	average
	-	-	high
<b>Four Schools</b>	4	66.7%	low
	2	33.3%	average
	-	-	high

Caseload Size and Personal Accomplishment

Caseload size compared to personal accomplishment showed that most of the school social workers reported feelings of personal accomplishment toward their job. All of the respondents (100%) with a caseload of 15-20 clients and the respondents with 20 or more clients (85.4%) reported positive feelings of personal accomplishment in their jobs. A small portion of the sample (14.6%) reported not feeling a sense of accomplishment in their job.

<b>Table 14- Caseload Size and Personal Accomplishment</b>			
<b>Caseload Size</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>15-20</b>	1	100%	low
	-	-	average
	-	-	high
<b>20 or more</b>	30	62.5%	low
	11	22.9%	average
	7	14.6%	high

**\*Note: Low indicates high level of personal accomplishment.**

### Caseload Size and Emotional Exhaustion

The majority of the school social workers did not report feeling emotionally overextended or exhausted in their job when compared to caseload size (see Table 15). The majority of the social workers (81.3%) with 20 or more cases reported not feeling emotionally overextended or exhausted by their work while a small portion of the sample (18.8%) reported strong feelings of being emotionally exhausted by their work.

<b>Table 15- Caseload Size and Emotional Exhaustion</b>			
<b>Caseload Size</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Degree</b>
<b>15-20</b>	-	-	low
	1	100%	average
	-	-	high
<b>20 or more</b>	19	39.6%	low
	20	41.7%	average
	9	18.8%	high

### Caseload Size and Depersonalization

The majority of the sample reported feeling a connection toward their clients (see Table 16). The respondents (95.8%) who reported a caseload size of 20 or more reported feeling a connection with their clients while the other 4.2% of the sample reported feeling a distanced or uncaring attitude toward their clients.

<b>Table 16- Caseload Size and Depersonalization</b>			
<b>Caseload Size</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Degree</b>
<b>15-20</b>	1	100%	low
	-	-	average
	-	-	high
<b>20 or more</b>	28	58.3%	low
	18	37.5%	average
	2	4.2%	high

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

### Overview

The previous chapter examined the findings of this study. This chapter will present the key findings and how these findings relate to the literature review. Implications for social work practice and recommendations for future research will also be discussed.

### Key Findings

This study was an exploration of the burnout significance in school social workers and the relationship with caseload size and multibuilding assignment. The first research question examined the degree and dimension of burnout which was experienced by school social workers. This question was answered by the Maslach Burnout Inventory data which the respondents reported low to average levels of burnout on feelings of being emotionally overextended by their work and feelings of distance from their clients. Two out of the three subscales on the Maslach Burnout Inventory had low to average scores while one subscale had a high burnout score. The two subscales of burnout which consist of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization had no high scores. The findings show that feeling emotionally overextended by their work and feeling distanced from their clients was not a problem for the majority of the sample. Personal accomplishment also had a positive score for the majority of the sample. The respondents felt personal accomplishment or competence toward their work.

Another interesting finding is that although the majority of school social workers exhibited a low score on depersonalization, emotional exhaustion had an average score for the majority of the sample. Emotional exhaustion is described as being overextended by one's work which scored higher than depersonalization. Depersonalization measures an unfeeling attitude toward clients or recipients of care. These findings show that the majority of the sample felt that being overextended by one's work was more of a problem than feeling positive toward their relationship with their clients. On the basis of these findings, although the school social workers appear to have feelings of being overextended by their work, they reported positive feelings about relationships with their clients and positive feelings of competence toward their job.

The second research question addressed the relationship between school social workers, caseload size, multibuilding assignment and burnout. According to the findings, no relationship was found. The lack of a relationship could be due to the large majority of school social workers who had a similar characteristics in their job. The majority of the school social workers reported a caseload of twenty or more (n=48). The large majority of the sample (n=33) also worked with more than one school which could have limited the ability to have any specific correlations. In summary, the majority of the school social workers data shows that the respondents had a caseload of more than twenty and more than one building with low to average levels of burnout and a high sense of personal accomplishment.

Crosstab were also used to find relationships between the variables. The subscale of emotional exhaustion was compared to gender which showed that the majority of males felt that they were not emotionally overextended by their jobs while the majority of the females felt an increase in being emotionally overextended by their



jobs. It needs to be recognized that the gender population was larger for females (n=36) than the males (n=13). This discrepancy in the number of males and females respondents would limit the generalizability of the findings.

Another similar variable for the sample was that education level was mostly represented by Master level (n=43) school social workers versus (n=6) Bachelor level. Findings would be difficult to generalize due to the minimal representation of one sample over another.

For school assignment, the majority of the population had one school (n=33). According to these findings no relationship was found between school assignment and burnout scores. Caseload size was also represented mostly by 20 or more cases (n=48). Due to the representation of the sample, generalizing would be difficult since only one respondent had a caseload less than 20.

Overall, this burnout tool may have helped some school social workers examine their feelings regarding their job but no strong significant relationships were found related to the variables and burnout scores. A small minority of the school social workers reported high scores on the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Although there were high scores, according to the majority scores on the Maslach Burnout Inventory, school social workers in Ramsey County experience a connection with their clients, strong feelings of personal accomplishment, and feelings of not being exhausted by their work.

#### Findings Compared to Literature Review

The personal accomplishment subscale is viewed in the literature as being related to peer support. According to the findings, the school social workers exhibited positive feelings of personal accomplishment at their job which may be related to the supportive peer relationships experienced. LeCroy and Rank (1987) specify personal accomplishment as being correlated with burnout. The subscale of personal accomplishment is also described as an environmental factor related to peer

support(Savicki & Cooley,1987). Wade, Cooley and Savicki (1986) view personal accomplishment as a powerful tool to change burnout levels.

The literature supports that workers with supportive relationships report lower levels of burnout. In addition, Pines and Maslach (1978) list improving work relationships as a preventive measure toward staff burnout. The literature supports the importance of personal accomplishment with one of the most current definitions of burnout which views burnout as a problem of the "social environment" and not the person (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). This current definition is also viewing burnout as a problem resulting from the environment. Therefore the literature supports this finding that social support from peers is an important factor related to burnout.

According to the findings, caseload did not show a relationship with the burnout scores. The literature also found in other studies that caseload size had no significant impact on burnout (Beck, 1987; Gomez & Michaelis, 1995).

The findings do not support the literature with caseload size and multibuilding assignment being viewed as uncontrollable variables for the school social worker (Allen-Meares, 1994). Although, the literature shows that a lack of control over variables in the workplace may cause burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997), caseload size and multibuilding assignment showed no relationship with high burnout levels.

According to the findings, school social workers with advanced degrees and more than ten years of experience exhibited low to average burnout scores. Streepy (1981) found that social workers with graduate degrees and experienced workers had the lowest burnout scores. This literature supports the findings since the majority of social workers in the sample were experienced with advanced degrees and exhibited low to average levels of burnout.

### Limitations of the Study

This study has a few limitations. One limitation is the quantitative design. Incorporating qualitative data with the quantitative data would have provided more insight into the study. The subscales would have provided more significant results with qualitative data. Qualitative data from the burnout subscales would have also provided more in-depth data.

Responder bias or social desirability is another limitation. The questionnaire was self-reported according to the respondents perceptions of themselves. The respondents may not want to look bad on the questionnaire, so they respond in what they consider to be socially appropriate ways on the inventory. The respondents' answers may have also been influenced by talking to other people which could cause bias.

The sample also has the limitation of limited generalizability due to its suburban and urban characteristics. A rural community would not be able to be generalized. Along with the generalizability, the response rate of 51% could be seen as a limitation, since almost half of the sample did not respond. Sending the survey out to the population a third time may have increased the response rate. Therefore, sending two mailings is seen as a limitation. The survey method has external validity due to its size but limited internal validity due to its cross sectional design.

Another limitation is that the normative scores for the Maslach Burnout Inventory may be low since the workers who are experiencing burnout leave the organization and the healthy workers tend to remain in the organization. This is called the "healthy worker effect"(Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

### Implications for Social Work Policy and Practice

This study provides important implications for social work practice. Social workers need to be aware that anyone is susceptible to burnout at any time. Due to the vulnerability of the social worker's clients, burnout is even more important. The literature found that a professional who is experiencing burnout may cause negative outcomes for the client (Koeske & Kelly, 1995). This has serious implications for the clients of high burnout social workers. This study will provide awareness that levels of burnout exist in various fields of social work. The awareness of burnout needs to be there in the social work profession before action will be taken. Hopefully, the result will be education, prevention and intervention programs for social work students and employees.

Social work policy would also benefit from this study. Awareness of the burnout phenomena and its occurrence will help regarding prevention programs (e.g. EAP). Social work policy would also be effective in work policies regarding the Family Leave Policy, personal days and other policies which affect an employees ability to manage stress on the job.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The gaps in the literature appear to be any quantitative studies with a qualitative component examining burnout in school social workers. The majority of the studies use a quantitative approach with studying social workers. There appears to be further research needed into specific social work fields which would examine the causes and prevention of burnout. Exploring the individual subscales such as personal accomplishment and how peer support is related to burnout would be another important area for qualitative study.

One longitudinal study was found on burnout but more would be helpful since burnout is conceptualized as a continuous variable. A continuous variable has

different degrees of burnout at different times which can best be measured in a longitudinal study. The cross-sectional study limits the research since questions are asked at one time period in the respondent's life. A longitudinal study would provide insight regarding the changes in burnout feelings and how it correlates with other factors in that individual's life. A few research questions which could be examined in the future would be: What is the relationship between gender and burnout; what is the relationship between age and burnout? Hopefully, these suggestions and other ideas will be used to continue the research on the concept of burnout.

## REFERENCES

- Allen-Meares, P. (1994). Social work services in schools: A national study of entry-level tasks. Social work, 39, 560-566.
- Arches, J. (1991). Social structure, burnout, and job satisfaction. Social Work 36,202-206.
- Arthur, N. (1990). The assessment of burnout: A review of three inventories useful for research and counseling. Journal of Counseling & Development, 69, 186-189.
- Barber, C., & Iwai, M. (1996). Role conflict and role ambiguity as predictors of burnout among staff caring for elderly dementia patients. Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 26, 101-116.
- Beck, D. F. (1987). Counselor burnout in family service agencies. Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work, 34, 3-15.
- Bhana, A., & Haffejee, N. (1996). Relation among measures of burnout, job satisfaction, and role dynamics for a sample of South African child-care social workers. Psychological Reports, 79, 431-434.
- Brill, P.L.(1984). The need for an operational definition of burnout. Family and Community Health, 6, 12-24.
- Cherniss, C. (1980). Professional Burnout in Human Service Organizations. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Coady, C., Kent, V., & Davis, P. (1990). Burnout among social workers working with patients with cystic fibrosis. Health and Social Work, 24, 116-124.
- Daley, M.R. (1979). Burnout: smoldering problem in protective services. Social Work, 24, 375-379.
- Freudenberger, H. J. (1974). Staff burn-out. Journal of Social Issues, 30, 159-165.
- Gant, L., M. (1996). Are culturally sophisticated agencies better workplaces for social work staff and administrators? Social Work, 41, 163-172.

Gibson, F., Mcgrath, A., & Reid, N. (1989). Occupational stress in social work. British Journal of Social Work, 19, 1-16.

Gomez, J., & Michaelis, R. (1995). An assessment of burnout in human service providers. Journal of Rehabilitation, 61, 23-26.

Harris, P. L. (1984). Assessing burnout: The organizational and individual perspective. Family and Community Health, 6, 32-42.

Harrison, W. D. (1980). Role strain and burnout in child-protective service workers. Social Service Review, 54, 31-44.

Himle, D. P., Jayaratne, S., & Thyness, P. (1986). Predictors of job satisfaction, burnout, and turnover among social workers in Norway and the USA: A cross-cultural study. International Social Work, 29, 323-334.

Jayaratne, S., & Chess, W. (1984). Job satisfaction, burnout, and turnover: a national study. Social Work, 61, 448-453.

Jayaratne, S., Davis-Sacks, M., L., & Chess, W. (1991). Private practice may be good for your health and well-being. Social Work, 36, 224-229.

Karasek, R. & Theorell, T. (1990). Healthy work stress, productivity, and the reconstruction of working life. New York: Basic Books.

Koeske, G., F., & Kelly, T. (1995). The impact of overinvolvement on burnout and job satisfaction. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 65, 282-292.

Kruger, L., J., Bernstein, G., & Botman, H. (1995). The relationship between team friendships and burnout among residential counselors. The Journal of Social Psychology, 135, 191-202.

LeCroy, C. W., & Rank, M. R. (1987). Factors associated with burnout in the social services: an exploratory study. Journal of Social Service Research, 10, 23-39.

Leiter, M. P., & Harvie, P. L. (1996). Burnout among mental health workers: a review and a research agenda. International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 42, 90-101.

Maslach, C. (1978). The client role in staff burn-out. Journal of Social Issues, 34 (4), 111-123.

Maslach, C., Jackson, S., & Leiter, M. P. (1996). Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual, Palo Alto, California: Consulting Psychologists Press.

- Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (1997). The Truth about Burnout. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Meyerson, D., E. (1994). Interpretations of stress in institutions: The cultural production of ambiguity and burnout. Administrative Science Quarterly, *39*, 628-653.
- Miller, K., Stiff, J., & Ellis, B. (1988). Communication and empathy as precursors to burnout among human service workers. Communication Monographs, *55*, 250-265.
- Pines, A., & Kafry, D. (1978). Occupational tedium in the social services. Social Work, *23*, 499-507.
- Pines, A. & Maslach, C. (1978). Characteristics of staff burnout in mental health settings. Hospital and Community Psychiatry, *29* (4), 233-237.
- Powell, W., E. (1994). The relationship between feelings of alienation and burnout in social work. The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, *75*, 229-235.
- Quattrochi-Tubin, S., Jones, J., & Breedlove, V. (1982). The burnout syndrome in geriatric counselors and service workers. Activities, Adaptation and Aging, *3*, 65-76.
- Ratliff, N. (1988). Stress and burnout in the helping professions. Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work, *29*, 147-154.
- Savicki, V., & Cooley, E. (1987). The relationship of work environment and client contact to burnout in mental health professionals. Journal of Counseling and Development, *65*, 249-252.
- Schaufeli, W., B., & Dierendonck, D., V. (1995). A cautionary note about the cross-national and clinical validity of cut-off points for the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Psychological Reports, *76*, 1083-1090.
- Schulz, R., Greenley, J., & Brown, R. (1995). Organization, management, and client effects on staff burnout. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, *36*, 333-345.
- Shinn, M., Rosario, M., Morch, H., & Chestnut, D. (1984). Coping with job stress and burnout in the human services. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *46* (4), 864-876.
- Soderfeldt, M., Soderfeldt, B., & Warg, L., E. (1995). Burnout in social work. Social Work, *40*, 638-647.



Sowers-Hoag, K., M. (1987). Burnout among social work professionals: a behavioral approach to casual and interventive knowledge. Journal of Social Welfare, 14, 105-118.

Stav, A., Florian, V., & Shurka, E., Z. (1987). Burnout among social workers working with physically disabled persons and bereaved families. Journal of Social Service Research, 14, 105-118.

Stevens, G., & O'Neill, P. (1983). Expectation and burnout in the developmental disabilities field. American Journal of Community Psychology, 11, 615-627.

Streepy, J. (1981). Direct-service providers and burnout. Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work, 62, 352-361.

Taylor-Brown, S., Johnson, K., Hunter, K., & Rockowitz, R. (1982). Stress identification for social workers in health care: a preventitive approach to burn-out. Social Work in Health Care, 7(2), 91-100.

Turnipseed, D. (1994). An analysis of the influence of work environment variables and moderators on the burnout syndrome. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 24, 782-800.

Ursprung, A. (1986). Burnout in the human services: a review of the literature. Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, 190-199.

Wade, D., Cooley, E., & Savicki, V. (1986). A longitudinal study of burnout. Children and Youth Services Review, 8, 161-173.

AUGSBURG



C•O•L•L•E•G•E

To: Carol Faschingbauer Davis  
16321 Heath Court  
Lakeville, MN 55044

From Professor Michael Schock  
Institutional Review Board  
Augsburg College  
Minneapolis

December 2, 1997

Dear Carol Faschingbauer Davis,

Augsburg College Institutional Review Board (IRB), has considered your proposal for research, "Burnout in school social workers". You have fully complied with the requirements of Augsburg's IRB. Therefore, you have full clearance from Augsburg College to proceed with your research. Your IRB number is 97-19-02. Please use this number when referring to Augsburg's approval of your research.

Good luck on your research project.

Sincerely,

Michael Schock

cc. Vicki Olson  
Robert Clyde

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

Campus Box #51 • 2211 Riverside Avenue • Minneapolis MN 55454 • Tel. (612)330-1189 • Fax (612)330-1493

## APPENDIX B

January 12, 1998

Dear School Social Worker:

I am working on my Masters degree in social work at Augsburg College. As part of the program, I am completing a thesis on job-related attitudes in school social work. You are invited to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study is to identify job-related attitudes and examine variables such as caseload size and multibuilding assignments which may influence these attitudes. The school social workers in Ramsey county will be surveyed for this study.

This survey will take approximately fifteen minutes to complete. Your participation will supply the data necessary to complete this study. This study should be able to identify some factors which may be related to certain job attitudes.

Please do not place your name or any other identifying information on this survey. The returned surveys will be kept in a locked box at my home. The completed survey will be anonymous, and I will be unable to identify who you are. No risks are identified for your participation in this research study. Rewards will not be offered. Your decision to participate is voluntary and will not affect your relationship with Augsburg College.

If you choose to participate, please complete the enclosed survey within two weeks. There are two parts to the survey. The first part is a one page survey on job attitudes. The second part is questions regarding demographic information. Return of the survey indicates consent to participate in the study.

I appreciate your time and consideration with completion of this survey. If you are interested in the findings of this study, the results will be available by July 1, 1998. Please feel free to contact me regarding questions about this study, or you may call my thesis advisor, Laura Boisen, Ph.D. at 612-330-1439.

Thank-you for your time and consideration,  
Sincerely,

Carol L. F. Davis  
MSW Student at Augsburg College  
612-891-5223 (home)

APPENDIX C

Part II  
Questionnaire

Please complete all the questions.

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Gender reassignment

2. What is your race?

- Caucasian
- African American or Black
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian American
- Hispanic
- Other, explain \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your date of birth?

\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

4. What is your highest degree?

- B.A./B.S.W.
- M.A./M.S.W.
- Ph.D
- other

5. How many years have you been working as a school social worker?

- 0-2 years       10-20 years
- 3-5 years       over 20 years
- 5-10 years      other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**School Social Worker's job characteristics**

1. What is your average caseload?

- 5-10       15-20
- 10-15       20 or more, explain \_\_\_\_\_

2. How many schools are you assigned to as their school social worker?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

