

**Exploration into the work-life balance of professionals in the field
of child protection**

Glenn Dalton (1658942)

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Bachelor of Arts degree (Social Science Specialization) at DBS
School of Arts, Dublin**

Supervisor: Vanessa Long

Head of Department: Dr Bernadette Quinn

April 2014

Department of Social Science

DBS School of Arts

Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Method.....	14
Findings.....	19
Discussion.....	27
References	34
Appendix.....	36

Acknowledgements

I firstly like to thank the participants for taking part in my study. Without them this research project would not have been possible.

I would secondly like to thank my supervisor Vanessa Long for all her help and guidance. Vanessa made writing my dissertation an easy and very enjoyable experience.

I would finally like to my mam, my brother and my girlfriend for putting up with me and supporting me through this difficult final year.

Abstract

The aim of this research project was to gain an insight into the professionals in the field of child protection to ascertain if do not have an ideal work life balance, and if they do not what are the reasons why they do not have an ideal work-life balance. This research was completed by adapting a qualitative approach. The sample size consisted of ten participants. These participants consisted of three child welfare social workers, four family support workers and one coordinator of the family support team. The research used in depth semi-structured interviews to gather the necessary data. The data was recorded on a Dictaphone and then transcribed verbatim into N-vivo 10. The researcher used N-vivo 10 to assist the researcher to thematically analyze the data. From thematically analyzing the data it emerged that the participants did not have an ideal work-life balance. It emerged that there were a number of reasons why these participants felt they did not have an ideal work-life balance. It emerged that there were a number of stressors that had an effect on the work-life balance. these stressors included the heavy workload these participants have, that they were constantly being disturbed at work and this intern made them bring their work home which had an impact on their work-life balance.

Introduction

There has been a lot of research conducted globally on the issue of work-life balance throughout multiple disciplines. For the purpose of this research the topic of work life balance will be discussed with regard to professionals in the field of child protection. Although the research has been conducted extensively around the world there has been very little research conducted in Ireland with regards to the work-life balance and child protection professionals. The aim of this study is to add to the body of published literature that is currently available. When dealing with work-life balance the core elements found to be significant when studying this topic are stress, burnout and job satisfaction.

Child Protection history

Before discuss work life balance for child protection professionals is discussed it is imperative to discuss briefly the evolution of child care in Ireland. It is well known and documented that child protection has changed exponentially over the last decade in Ireland. Modern social care practice in Ireland was born out of serious deficiencies in the running of children's centers... and the recognition of the need for professionally trained staff. (Share & Lalor, 2009, p. 12). It is well known that social care in Ireland was predominantly run by the Catholic Church until very recently. The Catholic Church controlled the care for children which until recently was largely unregulated until the child care act of 1991 was put in place. The Child Care Act of 1991 was put in place along with the 1908 Children's Act. There was a big contrast between these two pieces of legislation. The 1908 Children's Act imposed negative duties to rescue children that have committed criminal offences against them or who had been cruelly treated. The child care act of 1991 was a stark contrast to the 1908 Children's Act legislation. The Children's Act of 1991 recognized and made the welfare of the child the primary objective. In this legislation the child's

wishes are also taken into consideration and also the rights and duties of the parents are important which is endorsed by the Irish Constitution (Share & Lalor, 2009, p. 13). There has been more legislations introduced around child protection since this, such as the Children's Act 2001 which is about the juvenile justice system (Share & Lalor, 2009, p. 13). It is unquestionable that the Child Care Act of 1991 was the main shift in shaping child protection in Ireland today.

There are vast numbers of professionals that are concerned about child protection. Some of these professions include Social Workers, Health Visitors, Guards, General Practitioners, Youth Justice Officers, Principals, Clinical Psychologist, Family Support Workers etc... (Kent). It is important to note that under 'children's first all Statutory, Voluntary and Community organizations involved with children have an obligation to provide them with the highest possible standard of care in order to promote their well-being and safe guard them from abuse'. (Hamilton, 2011, p. 98). It is clear from this that anyone who works directly with children are responsible for the child's well-being. In saying this, the Child Care Act 1991 states that the primary duty to act to protect children at risk of abuse falls specifically to the children and Family Service section of the Health Service Executive (HSE). Section 3 of the Child Care Act states that: it is the function of every Health Board to promote the welfare of children in this area who are not receiving adequate care and protection (Hamilton, 2011, p. 99). This puts a lot of responsibilities on the professionals that work in the Children and Family Service section of the HSE.

Work-life Balance

The idea of work-life balance is a relatively new term. Research into work-life balance only began roughly fifty years ago. The term work-life balance was coined in the 1970's in Seattle by individuals that who felt they were over worked and highly stressed at work. (Ashleigh & Mansi, 2012, p. 120). It is extremely difficult to put a definition on the term work-life balance. The reason being is that every individual is different. Each individual has their own ideology behind how they would like to balance

their work and their own personal individual needs. The concept of work-life balance does however imply that there is such a thing as an ideal work life balance but in actual fact the idea that a work life balance is ideal is more of a compromise than ideal (Ashleigh & Mansi, 2012, p. 121). Types of working patterns can have a direct impact on peoples work life balance. There are several different types of working patterns such as part-time and full-time. Full-time would be the most common type of working pattern but there are also more patterns such as flexible hours. This is where employees can choose to work longer hours on some days and in turn they would be able to take a half day on another day. There is also a pattern known as condensed working hours this is where an employee works longer days for fewer days, for example, an employee can work three twelve hour shifts and in turn take four days off (Ashleigh & Mansi, 2012, p. 122). There has been research carried out to prove that these types of working patterns give people more job satisfaction. HM Revenue and Customs introduced flexible working hours which resulted in higher satisfaction amongst workers (Ashleigh & Mansi, 2012, p. 123). If there is a lack of balance in people's lives between work and personal, and if there is a constant juggling between the two that it will undoubtedly have an impact on one's physical and mental well-being. It must be understood that there are people that will not be affected by this as some people thrive under pressure and have to juggle different roles in order to get things accomplished. Not all people are like this though. There are people that find juggling many different roles to be stressful and they in turn feel physical, emotional and mental strain (Ashleigh & Mansi, 2012, p. 129). It has been documented that if ones work life and family life conflict that it can have some potentially negative consequences for that individual. These consequences include increased psychological strain, reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment, increased absenteeism, and job turnover (Kalliath, 2012). It has been discovered that child welfare social workers often struggle with balancing work and personal life. There are a number of reasons for this and these reasons include, heavy workloads, high work expectations amidst scarce resources, and staff shortages (Kalliath, 2012). There are a number of ways in which child

welfare social workers' personal lives suffer as a result of their work. It has been found that child welfare social workers suffer with 'physical and emotional exhaustion, quality of relationship with a partner, quality of time spent with children, family, friends and time for self-care' (Kalliath, 2012). Imbalances between work-life and personal life can have a profound effect on the stress levels of child protection professionals.

Stress

The word stress comes from the Latin word *Stringere* which means to draw tight. (Furnham, 1997, p. 319). The term stress was initially used as a term in physics and engineering. The term stress has now developed into a term which is now the concept used to show how stress has an influence on individuals. The concept of stress on an individual can be described as 'forces or loads which are seen as exerting pressure upon an individual and forcing strain' (Arnold, 2005, p. 389). Hans Selye was one of the most important theorists in the field of stress. Selye came up with a physiological definition for stress. Selye defined stress as a nonspecific or generalized body response. This bodily response is made when, whether it is an environmental condition that we must survive or a demand that we make on ourselves in order to accomplish a personal goal (Berry, 1998, p. 417). Stress that occurs over long periods of time can have many very harmful results on one's physical and mental well-being. The results of prolonged stress on one's health include ulcers, psychotic behavior and burnout (Berry, 1998, p. 418). When talking about stress at work it must be understood that there is a wide variety of reasons that someone may suffer from stress at work. Over and under load of work is one reason for stress in the work place. Overload is where a person is given a task where the person has not enough time to complete the task or does not have the skills necessary to complete the task in hand, resulting in stress. Under load stress occurs when an employee has very little work to do or the job is very boring and very repetitive which in turn leads to boredom and in turn leads to stress (Furnham, 1997, p. 327). Another cause of stress at

work is poor appraisal. There can be two ways of poor appraisal; the first is receiving no appraisal at all for the work that is being done which can lead to stress, the second is receiving negative feedback and not being given any direction in how to improve can also lead to stress (Furnham, 1997, p. 328). It is clear that there are a lot of causes of stress in the workplace. It must be made clear though that there are jobs that stress is inevitable for reasons such as: unpleasant physical conditions, making decisions, repeated exchange of information. There is a long list of jobs that fall under this category. Some of these jobs include Air traffic controller, Journalist, Taxi driver and social workers (Furnham, 1997, p. 326). Stress can affect a vast variety of people. This can be seen by an online survey that was carried out in the United States of America. There was an online survey conducted by the American Psychological Association and it found from 1,848 participants that 74 per cent of the participants stated that they found their primary source of stress came from work (Arnold, 2005, p. 284). It can be clearly seen that stress at work has a huge impact on people. Stress can have very harmful results on one physical and mental well-being. There has been research carried out in Spain on child residential care workers on stress and their physical and mental well-being. It was found from the study that 37 per cent of the sample suffered from insomnia whereas the European average is estimated to be between 4 and 22 per cent. It was also found that 34.5 per cent of the sample said they suffer from severe headaches whereas the European average is to be estimated at 13 per cent. These results indicate that stress has a huge factor on these child residential care workers. It was also recorded that the main stressors for these child residential care workers were related to timetables, excessive paperwork, lack of knowledge about the criteria for assessing their work, exhaustion resulting from the job and lack of financial resources for fulfilling the care objectives (Jorge f, Monica, & Amaia, 2007). Social workers also suffer highly from stress. In Australia it was found that from the 5,842 claims for mental stress by female employees, over 18 different occupational fields, that 621 of these claims were in the occupational field of social work. This made social workers the fourth largest claimant group about stress in Australia after nurse

managers, police officers, and welfare professionals (Kalliath, 2012). It has been found that there are a vast number of stressors in the field of child welfare social work and these include;

'increased work accountability, high workloads, increasing complexity of cases, staff shortages, lack of managerial support, role ambiguity, lack of adequate and timely supervisor support, role conflict, and poor recognition and reward for services have all been linked to the experiences of stress among social workers. Client-associated factors such as increased complexity of cases, exposure to client hostility, ambiguous or unrealistic client expectations, and working with complex and emotionally sensitive cases are all recognized as significant contributors of stress for social workers' (Kalliath, 2012).

This indicates that child welfare social work is a highly stressful occupation because this highlights that there is a vast number of stressors involved with the profession. When dealing with work-life balance the topic of burnout must also be considered along with stress.

Burnout

When dealing with work life balance it is also imperative that work burnout is also discussed. In saying this there is a very close link between stress and work burnout. This link can be clearly seen in the definition of work burnout. The definition of work burnout is that it is a debilitating psychological condition afflicting individuals who work in high stress jobs brought on, probably by the cumulative effects of prolonged stress (Shannon & Saleebey, 1980, p. 465). Burnout in the caring profession only began to attract the attention of researchers in the early 1980's (Hamama, 2012, p. 113). It has been a very topical area of research ever since. It has been topical for not only caring professions but a vast variety of professions such as the police force, army and prison wardens. Freudenberg was one of the first to come up with a definition of burnout. Freudenberger initially defined burnout as it was found among social worker's, paraprofessionals, and volunteers who were in intensive contact with their clients (Hamama, 2012, p. 114). The definition of burnout has come a long way since Freudenberger initial definition of it. Burnout is now typically described as the result of non-traumatic but stressful work conditions such as long hours overwhelming workload (Sprang, Craig, & Clark, 2011, p. 151).

There are a lot of symptoms which indicates that a professional is suffering from work burnout. The characteristics of burnout can be emotional fatigue, depersonalization, and a lack of personal fulfillment. These are the symptoms that indicate work burnout (Jorge f, Monica, & Amaia, 2007, p. 610). Burnout can have a massive effect in peoples work. Work burnout can be seen to effect professionals' work in that people who suffer from work burnout can be seen with negative attitudes towards the job, poor self-concept and loss of interest in clients (Jorge f, Monica, & Amaia, 2007, p. 610). Research shows that burnout has a massive impact on child protection workers such as social workers treating children. It was found in one study carried out in the United States of America that of a sample which consisted of 126 social workers, it was found that 43 per cent of these social workers suffered from work burnout. It is worth noting that it was also found in this research that people with higher seniority were found to suffer from work burnout less than people of lesser seniority. (Hamama, 2012, p. 120). Even though child welfare workers often suffer from burnout many social workers still indicate high levels of job satisfaction. It has been found in a Canadian study that was conducted on child welfare workers that they scored very highly on work burnout but at the same time also scored very highly with regards to job satisfaction (Stalker, Mandell, Frensch, Harvey, & Wrigth, 2007, p. 182).

Job Satisfaction

It is imperative that we discuss job satisfaction when we are studying job satisfaction. Job satisfaction refers to one's positive and negative attitudes that they have and hold about one's job or occupation (Schultz & Schultz, 2006, p. 232). There are a number of factors that have an impact on one's sense of job satisfaction. These factors can include age, health, length of experience and emotional stability etc... (Schultz & Schultz, 2006, p. 232). There can never be a definite list of factors that influence job satisfaction for the simple reason that one person might find one aspect of work satisfying and another person might find that aspect to be very unsatisfactory for them. There are a number of occupations in

society that show high levels of job satisfaction but there are also occupations that have very low levels of job satisfaction. An example of a profession that has low job satisfaction is assembly line workers. Assembly line workers tend to have low job satisfaction because their work tends to be very routine orientated and repetitive work offers little opportunity for personal growth and development (Schultz & Schultz, 2006, p. 232). Research shows that child welfare workers often display high levels of job satisfaction. This can be seen in the research that was carried out in Canada on child welfare workers. In this study it was shown that child welfare workers scored very highly on job satisfaction. The reason why these child welfare workers were satisfied with their work was because of individual characteristics. The child welfare workers felt a sense of personal reward for helping others and they also felt that their work was making a difference in people's lives. These child welfare workers showed a high level of satisfaction in spite of the workload and emotional exhaustion that they deal with in this occupation (Stalker, Mandell, Frensch, Harvey, & Wright, 2007, p. 232). Previous research also found that child welfare workers are not always satisfied with their work. It was found in a study carried out in Australia that child welfare workers are often dissatisfied with work. These researchers often found the main reason for dissatisfaction for work was organizational factors. These organizational factors were primarily the lack of resources. These workers found it to be highly dissatisfying and demoralizing that they were not able to provide a service to clients because they did not have the resources available. This in turn had a negative impact on the job satisfaction for these child welfare workers (Wagne, van Reyk, & Spence, 2001, p. 165).

Conclusion

Child protection professionals are a much needed and necessary profession within society. It is clear from the review of the literature that child protection professionals often find themselves, stressed and can experience burnt-out as a result of their work. The literature successfully highlights the reasons as

to why they often feel stress and burnout as a result of their work. The literature also successfully highlights that child protection and child welfare workers often do not have an ideal work-life balance. It has been highlighted that these stressors play a crucial role in the reasons as why these child protection workers do not have an ideal work-life balance.

Method

Apparatus

To carry out this research project the researcher used only two different devices to complete the research. The first device the researcher used was a Dictaphone. The Dictaphone was a Philips professional grade Dictaphone. It was used to record the interviews. The purpose of recording the interviews was so the researcher could transcribe the interviews verbatim. The second device the researcher used was computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). The software the researcher used was N-vivo 10.

Participants

To carry out this research project the researcher used a sample size that consisted of eight participants. The researcher used a method of purposive sampling to find the participants. The reason why the researcher chose to adapt a purposive sampling method is because purposive sampling allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested (Silverman, 2005, p. 129). The participants were purposively selected from the HSE (Health Service Executive). The criterion needed for the participants to take part in this study was that they had to work in the field of child protection for more than five years. It was felt that the research would benefit if the participants held different professions in the field of child protection so the participants consisted of two different professions. Four of the participants were family support workers, three of the participants were child protection and welfare social workers and one of the participants is the co-ordinator of the family support team. All of the participants were female ranging in age from 30 to 56. The researcher felt that the gender of the participants did not matter as gender was not the focus of the research.

Design

A Qualitative design was adopted out the research. It was deemed that the research would benefit greatly by adopting a qualitative approach. The reason why the researcher deemed a qualitative design to be the best method to adopt is because qualitative research is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). The researcher felt that this approach was the best method to adopt as one of the central purposes behind the study was to explore people's experiences of work life balance and this method allowed the participants to express their own personal experiences about work life balance. It was felt that this was the best way to gather rich in-depth data. The researcher decided that the best way to get these personal experiences of work life balance was to carry out in depth semi-structured interviews.

In depth semi-structured interviews generally have a series of questions that are in a general form of an interview schedule (See appendix 1) but it is able to vary the sequence of questioning (Bryman, 2008, p. 196). This allowed the researcher change the order of the questioning when it was necessary. The reason for this is that if the interviewee brought up a topic that was going to be asked and discussed later in the interview it allowed the interviewer to skip to that question in the interview schedule and this enabled the interview to flow much smoother than sticking strictly to the interview schedule. By adopting semi-structured interviews it allowed the interviewer to steer the interview so that the research question was fully discussed during each interview. This enabled the researcher to gather rich in-depth qualitative data.

Procedure

The method to which the researcher gathered the necessary data to complete this research was through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The researcher made contact with the participants through an informal acquaintance. To conduct the research the researcher travelled to each participant's place of residents this information was gathered through a brief phone call to each participant. This phone call was also used by the researcher to briefly explain the topic of research and also to explain what participation would entail. Each interview was conducted in the kitchen of the participant's place of residents. Before each interview begun the researcher explained in detail the topic of research and it was also explained to each participant that they could stop the interview at any time if they wished to no longer continue in the research. They were also informed that they could withdraw their interview from the study up until the point of completion of the research. The participants were also asked to sign a consent form (See appendix 2) before the interview was conducted. Each participant also received an information sheet (See appendix 3) which also explained the topic of research. The information sheet also contained the researcher's contact details and the number of two organisations. This information was given to each participant just in case they needed to get help or they had any queries after completing the interview. The kitchen was used as this is where each participant felt most comfortable and relaxed while carrying out the interview. The kitchen was also used to conduct each interview because in each case it was the least likely place to be disturbed and therefore the best place to gather rich in-depth data.

Data Analysis

After each interview was completed the researcher transcribed each interview verbatim into a word document. The word document was then copy and pasted into the data analysis program N-vivo 10. N-vivo 10 was used to assist the researcher to thematically analyse the data. Thematic analysis is described as a 'method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data' (Braun & Clarke,

2006, p. 79). For the researcher to thematically analyze the data correctly it was vital that the researcher was fully immersed in the data by reading the transcription several times. The researcher then created codes in N-vivo. By creating these codes on N-vivo the researcher was able to identify reoccurring themes and subthemes that emerged from the interviews. These reoccurring themes and subthemes that were generated are the primary findings for this research project.

Ethics

There were a number of ethical issues to consider while carrying out this research. There were minimal ethical issues to consider when carrying out this research because each participant was sound of mind and did not belong to any vulnerable group as each participant is over the age of 18 and are still active professionals in the field of child protection. The main ethical issue that had to be taken into consideration when carrying out the research was Stress related issues. The stress related issues were dealt with by giving each participant an information sheet before the interviews were conducted. The information sheet contained the researchers contact information and also the contact information for other relevant service providers within the community so they could contact them if they felt it necessary. Another ethical issue to consider while carrying out this research was confidentiality. As each participant are active professionals in the field of child protection anonymity was essential when carrying out this research. There were numerous steps taken throughout this research project to protect the participant's right to confidentiality. These steps are as follows, pseudonyms were given to each participant when transcribing the interviews, no identifying information was transcribed and each recording of the interview was destroyed after transcription was complete. Another ethical issue that had to be taken into consideration was informed consent. To protect the participant's right for conformed consent the research took several steps to ensure their rights were protected. The researcher fully briefed each participant about the study both verbally and formally in the form of an information sheet. Each

participant was fully aware that they could withdraw from the research at any point if they wished to do so.

Findings

The main focus of this research was to explore, child welfare professionals and their personal experiences with regard to work-life balance. The researcher achieved this by conducting eight semi-structured interviews. The researcher then thematically analyzed the interviews. When the thematic analysis was complete three themes emerged with three subthemes for each theme. The first theme is Work-life balance and the sub themes were personal life, working at home and burnout. The second theme was stress and the subthemes under stress are workload, contact, and lack of resources. The third and final theme that emerged from thematically analyzing the data was Job Satisfaction and the sub themes that emerged were unpredictability, personal achievement and peer support.

Work-life Balance:

Personal life

Under the theme work-life balance the sub theme of Personal life emerged. It was evident from the interviews that each participant's personal life was affected due to their work. It was evident that the participants found it difficult to create an ideal work life-balance. The participant's personal lives were affected in many different ways throughout the study.

'Yes my work does infringe with my personal life in a couple of ways, I don't get to meet my friends and family too often' (Joan)

'My personal life would take second place especially Monday to Friday. This could also impact on my weekends depending on what had occurred during the week' (Lucy)

'I can't always do the things I want to do. I love going for a swim in the evenings to relax and I don't get to go as nearly as much as I would like to' (Liz)

It is not just the things the participants wanted and liked to do that were affected by their work there was also things that they didn't particularly like doing in their personal life that they couldn't complete because of their work. This was highlighted by Trish;

'I hate doing the house work but it has to be done there is something to be done every night around the house whether it be washing, cleaning and I often find I just can't do it when I get home and my weekends are often then spent catching up on the housework' (Trish)

There was one participant that did feel that they had a successful balance between their career and their ability to satisfy their personal life and their personal roles. This participant was the coordinator of the family support team and had a higher seniority to the other participants.

'As I only work a three day week it does afford me a little luxury to carry out my personal rolls' (Tina)

Burnout

There were a small number of participants that indicated strong signs of Burnout. It was made evident that the burnout that the participants were displaying had a factor on their ability to create an ideal work-life balance.

'When I get home in the evening I just am totally drained and shattered' (Tina)

'When I go home in the evening more often than not I come home wrecked' (Joan)

The symptoms of burnout were further highlighted. This was further highlighted through Kelly who had a negative perception about child protection;

'I think a lot of people want to get out of child protection, I think people are stuck in child protection because there are no jobs but I think if you asked the majority of people in child protection including myself they would leave' (Kelly)

Working at home

Another aspect that emerged from the data that made it difficult to have an ideal work-life balance was working at home. It was found throughout the study that every participant brought work home. This made their working day longer and also had an effect on their work-life balance.

I find I always bring work home; I nearly always have to bring my court reports home just in order to keep up with the deadlines' (Liz)

'By the very nature of the time taken to achieve these I would often have to take the work home with me and finish it off their' (Lucy)

Bringing your work home can have an impact on your work-life balance is highlighted further by Kelly

'Depending on what happened during the day I could be working at home to all hours of the night to catch up and it gives me no time to do anything else for the evening' (Kelly)

Stress

From analyzing the data stress was found to be an inevitable part of child welfare. Every participant indicated that they suffer with stress in work. One of the main stressors that emerged while conducting this research was the workload that participants have at work. This is a main reason why the participants have to bring their work home and in turn this has an effect on their work-life balance.

The workload I have is absolutely the biggest stressor for me without doubt' (Joan)

The workload I have is very overwhelming and sometimes it drives me mad because I just feel will I ever be done' (Sarah)

'I can work 24/7 365 days a year and I will never get to the end of my to-do list' (Kelly)

The workload that these participants carry was made very evident when they were discussing their working pattern and the hours they actually work.

The job is supposed to be 9-5. But by the very nature of the job it does not correlate to that at all. I usually start at 8 because I have to bring children to school and I can often work well into the evening and I've been in court as late as seven which was a disaster because I got no other work done that day which made me fall behind then' (Joan)

Contact

Another major stress that emerged when analyzing the data was that the participants could be contacted all the time whether it is through a phone call, text message or e-mail. This ability to be contacted all the

time was found to be a major stressor for these child protection workers and this can be seen through some of their personal experiences;

I have a landline and people calling to the office while I'm in the office so I can't get much of my work done there because of it (Kelly)

I lock myself into a back room where there is privacy where nobody will see what I am doing, turn off my phone and nobody can get at me there (Liz)

It emerged that it is not just the fact that they can be contacted at any time is the main stressor it was the knock on effect this ability to be constantly contacted had on their lives is what emerged as a very big stressor to them.

I have to work late in the evening because after five I can turn off my phone and nobody can contact me then so I can tackle my work load in peace (Rose)

When I'm in the office I can't get my paper work done at all really because ill have txt messages, e-mails, phone calls and emergencies flying in the door at me all the time so I have to turn my phone off in the evening to get my stuff done and this eats into the time I have at home to get that stuff done too. (Sarah)

I often work late work late to complete reports where there is no phones ringing to get my reports up to date (Lucy)

These finding highlight the idea that child welfare workers work-life balance is not ideal. It indicates that the stressors they find in the work place have a knock on effect into their personal lives at home.

Resources

Another theme that emerged that adds to the stress of these particular child protection workers was the lack of resources. It emerged when analyzing the data that each participant felt that there was not enough resources available to them and this in turn added to the participants stress levels.

The department I'm in is definitely understaffed and it's very frustrating at times (Joan)

I feel the department lacks allot of resources that would definitely improve the level of care we could offer but there just isn't enough money there for them (Sarah)

The experience that the participants have about not have having enough resources in their field is even further highlighted by Kelly

For me it is not the people you're working with mostly it's the environment your working it in so if it's a child that needs to come into care it's the fact that there is a lack of placement which causes the people the most stress or it's a child displaying concerning behaviour play therapy should be organised but there's no money to provide one so the resources aren't there so that's what I found to be most stressful (Kelly)

Job Satisfaction

Unpredictability

The findings were not all negative it emerged from analyzing the data that every participant felt a high sense of job satisfaction. There were a number of reason emerged when analyzing the data that indicates that the participants felt a strong sense of job satisfaction. The first reason that emerged when analysing the data was unpredictability. The unpredictability of the participants work could be seen right throughout the data;

The reality of it is that there is no typical day at work because even when you plan for something and you have your stuff in your diary an emergency can crop up any day of the week and you have to reprioritise your day to suit the emergency (Kelly)

There is no typical day at work for me I could plan to go see a family and on my way to that family I could get a phone call and I might have to travel 50 miles in the other direction at the drop of a hat (Rose)

It can be seen by a large number of the participants that this unpredictability gives them a strong feeling of job satisfaction. This is highlighted below by two of the participants;

I wouldn't change that at all I enjoy the idea that I can be doing anything on any particular day I'd hate to be going to work every day doing the same thing every day just the thought of doing the same thing over and over would make me miserable (Trish)

The fact that the job is unpredictable suits my personality. I don't like to be in the same space to long and the fact I could be doing anything or anything could happen at work I really do enjoy that aspect of my job (Liz)

Personal achievement

It emerged right throughout the data that personal achievement is a major factor behind why these participants have a strong sense of job satisfaction. There were a number of different reasons why these participants felt a sense of satisfaction but they were all based around the sense of achievement. These reasons are highlighted below;

I do have a very good sense of satisfaction from it and I suppose for me the most important thing is when you can see children returning home to the birth families with all the needs addressed obviously that gives me great satisfaction (Liz)

We do get to see families change their lives around for the better and it feels great that I can be a part of that (Lucy)

It emerged from analyzing the data that some of the participants felt that this sense of achievement outweighs the negative's that comes with the job. This was especially highlighted by Lucy;

It's great when all foster families birth families and social workers are all singing off the one hymn sheet and that is for the good of all children when that happens and that makes for very happy children when they go home and it makes it feel all worthwhile for me (Lucy)

Peer support

Another aspect that emerged when analyzing the data was peer support. It was revealed that peer support played a fundamental role on the participant's strong sense of job satisfaction. The link between peer support and job satisfaction was seen right throughout the data;

We get over a cup of coffee with our peers that is very beneficial to me, I find it great that peer support is available whenever we really need it within our group (Lucy)

Everyone acknowledges and understands the pressure we are under and they are very happen to listen and support as it could be themselves on any given day (Joan)

The perception that peer support has an impact on these participants strong feeling towards job satisfaction is even further highlighted by Rose

I find peer support to be great, it's a great time to have a rant and get stuff of my chest and I would feel a little satisfied after I meet with the girls because I feel I have solved a problem or I got something off my chest or I helped the girls around a situation or I was an agony aunt for her (Rose)

Summary

Each participant gave their personal experiences about their work and their work-life balance. It emerged from analyzing the data that the participants felt they did not have an ideal work-life balance. It also demonstrated that the participants had a number of stressors at work. These stressors played a significant role in their work life balance. They also affected their personal lives. It emerged from analyzing the data, that these stressors were the main factor as to why these participants did not have an ideal work life balance.

It also emerged from the data that even though the participants did not have an ideal work life-life balance, they indicated very strong signs of job satisfaction. The data also revealed that these participants felt a strong sense of job satisfaction. The reason for this being they felt like they were

helping people. The information gathered identified this to be the main reason as to why they felt a strong sense of job satisfaction.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to explore the personal experiences of professionals in child protection and their personal experiences with regard to their work life balance. The researcher was specifically interested in what the participants felt about their work life balance and what were the factors that played a role in their work life balance. The research successfully gathered the necessary data to analyze how the participants felt about it and what factors contributed to their work life balance. It emerged from analysing the data that participants felt they did not have a very good balance between their professional and personal lives.

Summary of the results

This section of the research report will critically analyze the data that emerged from this research project. This will be completed by comparing and contrasting the findings to some of the main literature regarding this topic as highlighted earlier in the introduction. The first finding that will be critiqued is the effect working patterns have on professionals and their work life balance. Ashleigh and Mansi argued that the working pattern of an individual can have a direct impact on peoples work life balance (Ashleigh & Mansi, 2012, p. 122). This research found this argument to be true as Tina highlighted in the findings. Tina explained that she only works a three day week and this affords her time to accomplish her personal roles and duties where as the rest of the participants worked what is considered and known to be full time work. All of the other participants expressed that they did not have enough time to accomplish their personal life roles and duties. The research can deduce from these findings that Ashleigh and Mansi argument that the working pattern of an individual can have a direct impact on peoples work life balance weighs merit to the findings of this research.

Previous research by Kalliath suggested that child welfare workers in Australia displayed physical and emotional exhaustion quality of relationship with partner, quality of time spent with children, friends and family and time for personal care all suffered as a result of have a poor work-life balance (Kalliath, 2012). This research suggests that some of these findings that were found by Kalliath to be true, but not all of these result of poor work-life balance were displayed in this study. There were a number of participants that highlighted that they did not spend enough quality time with friends and family. This was specifically highlighted by Joan when she said '*Yes my work does infringe with my personal life in a couple of ways, I don't get to meet my friends and family too often*'. It was also highlighted by a number of participants that they felt physical and emotional exhaustion. This was highlighted by a number of participants but undoubtedly highlighted by Tina and Joan. Both of these participants highlighted how they were emotionally and physically exhausted when they got home from work. Tina highlighted this by saying *when I get home in the evening I just am totally drained and shattered*, Joan reinforced this idea by saying *when I come home in the evening more often than not I come home wrecked*. No participant in this study highlighted that they did not spend enough quality time with their children so not all of the findings that Kalliath found are identical but there were some very strong similarities between the two.

Previous research that was carried out by Jorge F, Monica and Amaia found there to be a number of stressors for child residential care workers in Spain. They found that the main stressors of these children residential care workers to be in relation with timetables, excessive paperwork, lack of knowledge about the criteria for assessing their work, exhaustion resulting from the job and the lack of financial resources (Jorge f, Monica, & Amaia, 2007). Kalliath also found there to be a number of main stressors for child welfare social workers in Australia. Kalliath found there to be a vast number of stressors for child welfare social workers and some of these stressors include high workloads, staff shortages, exposure to client hostility and working with complex and emotionally sensitive cases are just a number of stressors

Kalliath found to be the main stressors for child welfare social workers in Australia (Kalliath, 2012). It can be seen from these two findings that even though the two findings are from two different disciplines in child protection there are still a large number of reoccurring stressors between the two occupations. This research also found there to be some similar stressors to those found by these two previous studies. The main stressor that was found by this study was the workload. This was highlighted by a number of participants. This can be seen by looking at what Joan said about the work load. Joan stated that *the workload I have is absolutely the biggest stressor for me without doubt*. The workload that these participants have to deal with is once again highlighted by Kelly when she stated that *I can work 24/7 365 days a year and I will never get to the end of my to-do list*. The workload was described to be the main stressor of this study but there was a number of other stressors that were identified when analyzing the data which also coincides with the previous literature. These stressors include a lack of resources which was highlighted by Sarah when she stated that *I feel the department lacks a lot of resources that would definitely improve the level of care we could offer but there just isn't enough money there for them*. There was one stressor that emerged from analyzing the data that has not been recognized or mentioned in any previous study and this was the fact that while working they could be contacted by others which does not enable them to get their own work done at times and this in turn means these participants often have to bring their work home which has an impact on their work life balance. It is evident that there are many similar stressors through many different disciplines of child protection but there are also some stressors that are specific to individual disciplines.

Previous research contrasted in the idea of job satisfaction and child welfare workers. Stalker, Mandell, Frensch, Harvey and Wright found in their study that child welfare workers were satisfied with their work because of individual characteristics. They found that child welfare workers felt sense of personal reward for helping others and they also felt that they are making a difference in people's lives (Stalker, Mandell, Frensch, Harvey, & Wright, 2007, p. 232). In contrast to this Wagne, van Reyk and Spence

found in their study that child welfare workers did not feel a sense of satisfaction with work because of the lack of resources. These workers found it to be highly dissatisfying and demoralizing that they were not able to provide an appropriate level of service to clients because they did not have the necessary resources available (Wagne, van Reyk, & Spence, 2001, p. 165). The participant in this research did highlight that there was a lack of resources in their department and that this is very frustrating to them but this did not have an effect on their job satisfaction. The participants in this study highlighted that they did feel a strong sense of job satisfaction. The reasons why the participants felt a strong sense of job satisfaction coincides with the reasons Stalker, Mandell, Frensch, Harvey and Wright found. The reasons why these participants felt a strong sense of job satisfaction is because of individual characteristics. These individual characteristics were highlighted by Liz when she stated *I do have a very good sense of satisfaction from it and I suppose for me the most important thing is when you can see children returning home to the birth families with all the needs addressed obviously that gives me great satisfaction.* This is even further highlighted by Lucy when she stated *It's great when all foster families birth families and social workers are all singing off the one hymn sheet and that is for the good of all children when that happens, and that makes for very happy children when they go home and it makes it feel all worthwhile for me.* This strongly indicates that even though these participants display a poor work-life balance they still feel a strong sense of job satisfaction.

Limitations

Whilst carrying out this research, the researcher encountered a number of limitations which did not necessarily affect any data generated but may have had an impact on the strength of the data generated. The researcher deemed there was a number of limitations that may have played a role in the strength of

the data. The first of these limitations was the time restrictions the researcher had to complete this research project. The time restrictions that were in place restricted the length of each semi structured interview. Each interview lasted approximately 35-40 minutes. The research gathered very rich in depth qualitative data from these interviews but because they had to be transcribed verbatim there was a knock on affect to how long the interviews could be as transcribing the interview was a very long and time consuming process. If the interviews conducted could have been longer a lot more information could have been gathered around the topic and in turn strengthen the data gathered.

The researcher found it very difficult to meet the participants as a study shows that the participant had a very hectic work schedule to work around. This also had an impact on the time restrictions in place to carry out each individual interview. The researcher found in to be very problematic to arrange an appropriate time to meet each participant due to the extremely hectic work schedule and personal commitments each of them had. It was not at all practical to meet any of the participants during their work hours. Respect for the participants personnel lives also had to be taken into account as to not inter fear with any of their personnel obligations. Throughout the course of the interview process a number of the participants had to reschedule their interviews. The longer it took for the researcher to conduct the interviews the less time was made available to complete the research project, which could possibly have had an impact on the strength of the data generated.

Recommendations

This research has a very good starting point to highlight that child protection professionals do not have an ideal work life balance in Ireland. This research report will not have any ground breaking results for professionals in the field of child protection and will not change any legislation around this field. There are a number of recommendations that can be put forward so that in the future if the research in this

project was to be duplicated or reproduce the integrity of the data could be significantly increased. The first recommendation that can be put forward is a larger participant population. The reason why this research would benefit from a larger sample population is that it would give a greater understanding of what factors influence the work life balance of child care professionals in Ireland.

The second recommendation that could be put forward that could greatly increase the integrity of the data would be to use participants from multiple departments relevant to child protection around Ireland. This research only gathered the data within a single department in Ireland. This minimised the data that was gathered as each department in child protection around Ireland could have different personal experiences with regard to their work life balance. By gathering the personal experiences of professionals in child protection around Ireland it could give a greater insight into what affects the professionals work life balance and in term gives the data found a greater integrity.

The third and final recommendation that could be put forward would be to incorporate males into the study. All the data gathered throughout the course of this research project was based specifically on the personal experiences of female participants. Even though child protection is dominated by females there are a large number of males within the multiple disciplines of child protection. This research could benefit greatly with the addition of male participants. With the addition of males to the study it could give a variety of different personal experiences with regard to work life balance. With the addition of these recommendations, this research model could have an integral part in restructuring policies around child protection professionals and their work life balance.

Conclusion

This research project attempted to add to the body of literature that is currently available around the issue of work life balance and child protection professionals. This study set out to complete this by exploring the personal experiences of child protection professionals and their thought on their work-life

balance. This was completed by conducting semi-structured interviews. This allowed the researcher gather these personal experiences of the participants and this in turn allowed the research question to be answered. The data generated suggested that these participants felt they did not have an ideal work life balance for a number of reasons. These reasons were that they had to work at home quite often because they could not get there work done in the department because they were constantly being interrupted. They also felt that there work life balance was affected due to long hours they work and also the workload each participant had indicated that this was another factor that played a role in their work-life balance. This research project has successfully completed to what it set out to do by adding to the body of literature that is currently available around the issue of work-life balance for child protection professionals. This research report added to the body of literature by highlighting what factors influence these participant's perceptions why they do not have an ideal work-life balance.

References

- Arnold, J. (2005). *Work Psychology Understanding Human Behaviour in the Workplace*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Ashleigh, M., & Mansi, A. (2012). *The Psychology of people in Organisations*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. California: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Berry, L. M. (1998). *Psychology at work*. San Francisco: Jane E Vaicunus.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. Auckland: Edward Arnold.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University press.
- Furnham, A. (1997). *The psychology behaviour at work*. Hove East Sussex: Psychology press, publishers.
- Hamama, L. (2012). Burnout in social workers treating children as related to demographic characteristics, work environment, and social support. *national association of social work*, 113-125.
- Hamilton, C. (2011). *Irish Social work Social Care Law*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.
- HSE. (2011). *Child Protection and welfare practice handbook*. Dublin: Health Service Executive.
- Jorge f, d. v., Monica, L., & Amaia, B. (2007). Job stress and burnout in residential child care workers in Spain. *psicothema*, 610-615.
- Kalliath, P. H. (2012). When Work and Family are in Conflict: Impact on Psychological Strain Experienced by Social Workers in Australia. *Australian Social Work*, 355-371.
- Kent, U. o. (n.d.). *The Centre For child Protection*. Retrieved February 5, 2014, from University of Kent : <http://www.kent.ac.uk/sspsr/ccp/CentreForChildProtection2013.pdf>
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research a guide to design and implementation*. San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schultz, D., & Schultz, S. E. (2006). *Psychology and work today*. New Jersey: Pearson education.
- Shannon, C., & Saleebey, D. (1980). Training Child Welfare Workers to cope with burnout. *Child welfare league of America*, 463-468.

Share, P., & Lalor, K. (2009). *applied social care An introduction for students in Ireland*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.

Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing Qualitative Research*. London: sage Publications.

Sprang, G., Craig, C., & Clark, J. (2011). Secondary traumatic stress and burnout in child welfare workers: a comparative analysis of Occupational distress across professionals groups. *Child welfare* , 149-168.

Stalker, C. A., Mandell, D., Frensch, K., Harvey, C., & Wrioth, M. (2007). Child welfare workers who are exhausted yet satisfied with their jobs: how do they do it? *Child & Family Social Work* , 182-191.

Wagne, R., van Reyk, P., & Spence, N. (2001). Improving the working environment for workers in. *Child and Family social work* , 161-178.

Appendix

Appendix 1

Research Question

Explore the work life balance of professionals in the field of child protection

Intro

1. Could you tell me a little bit about your job in child
2. Do you enjoy the work?
 - a. If any 'attitudes arise, you can ask them to explain a little bit more (if appropriate)
3. Could you talk me through a typical work day?

JOB SATISFACTION

1. How long have you been involved in child protection
2. Do you feel a sense of satisfaction from your position?
 - a. and why
3. Why did you choose the field of child protection
4. When you go home an average what would you feel more a sense of stress or a sense of satisfaction

Work life balance

1. What would best describe your work pattern?
2. Does your work pattern allow you to carry out your personal life roles
3. How do/would you react when you are put under pressure
4. Do you ever work from home in order to prepare or catch up on work?
5. Do you think the area of child protection can be overwhelming as an occupation?
6. Do people in this area have any supports in work when dealing with situations?

Would you find it easy to switch off after work?

Stress

1. Do you consider child protection a difficult area to work in?

2. What difficulties?
3. Could you describe the sort person it takes to work in child protection?

Appendix 2



Work life balance of professionals in the field of child protection

My name is Glenn Dalton and I am conducting research that explores the work life balance of professionals in the field of child protection.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves an interview that will take roughly 40 minutes.

Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part. If you do take part and any of the questions do raise difficult feelings, you do not have to answer that question, and/or continue with the interview.

Participation is confidential. If, after the interview has been completed, you wish to have your interview removed from the study this can be accommodated up until the research study is published.

The interview, and all associated documentation, will be securely stored and stored on a password protected computer.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the interview that you are consenting to participate in the study.

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact

Glenn Dalton (glennaldton60@yahoo.ie) or LECTURER NAME (vanessa.long@dbs.ie)

Thank you for participating in this study.

Appendix 3

Info sheet

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Glenn Dalton and I am conducting my interviews about the work life balance of professionals in the field of child protection. I am currently a final year student in Dublin business school. I would like to invite you to take part in my final year project. I would appreciate if you would be an interviewee for the project.

The aim of the interview is to gather information on how professionals in the field of child protection manage their work life balance. The goal of the interviews is to see how child protection professional's manage and deal with their work life balance. Some of the topics that will be covered in the interviews are:

- Work Schedule
- Your position in the HSE
- Your typical day

The interviews will consist of 15 questions. The interviews will take approximately 40 minutes to conduct. There will be no identifying information gathered and all information gathered will remain anonymous. The interviewee will be given a pseudonym just for the interviewer to keep an account of each individual interview. The information gathered may be used in the dissertation and may be published.

Bellow there is a list of organizations and there contact details and also my own contact details just in case you feel the need to contact them or me if u feel like you need their services or you would like more information.

Samaritans Cork

National telephone: 021 4271323

Email Samaritans: jo@samaritans.org

Visit our branch: Samaritans Cork Coach Street Cork Republic of Ireland

Aware

National helpline: 1890 303 302

E-mail: info@aware.ie

Glenn Dalton

Telephone: 087 9535204

E-Mail: glennDalton60@yahoo.ie