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Organizational climate and burnout among home visitors: Testing mediating effects of empowerment

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ABSTRACT

While a large body of literature exists regarding the negative effects of burnout among human service workers, less is known about the organizational strategies that may play a role in its reduction or prevention. Using data from a survey of 179 home visitors in a statewide voluntary child maltreatment prevention program, we use hierarchical regression and structural equation models (SEM) to examine the processes of burnout. We found significant direct effects of a positive organizational climate predicting lower levels of burnout as well as mediating effects of worker empowerment on burnout. Findings suggest that research and practice would benefit by focusing on improving the work environment and empowering workers.
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1. Introduction

Worker burnout is a serious concern in human service organizations. Emotionally burnt-out workers are unhappy with their jobs and are more prone to leave (Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Drake & Yadama, 1996) resulting in disruptions in services for clients. A large body of literature is available on the antecedents of burnout (see Boyas & Wind, 2010; DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) and significant advances have been made in understanding the pathways to burnout (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Leiter, Gascón, & Martínez-Jarreta, 2010; Lizano & Mor Barak, 2012). But mechanisms to reduce burnout remain elusive (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004).

Over the past two decades home visitation has emerged as a widely implemented service delivery model in prevention and intervention programs (Donelan-McCall, Eckenrode, & Olds, 2009). Specific goals and program content may vary, but home visiting programs tend to focus on optimizing child health and development by targeting services to expectant mothers or families with infants and young children. Community based organizations have been entrusted to operate most of the existing home visiting programs and are generally supported by public funding. As of 2010, home visiting programs using a variety of models have been implemented across 46 states and the District of Columbia (Pew Center on the States, 2011). As part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (2010), $1.5 billion of new federal funding has become available over 5 years to expand and improve state-administered home visitation.

Research on home visitation workforce issues is limited. There are only a handful of studies on home visitor burnout. These studies found that home visitor burnout affects the quality of relationships that are developed with clients and the amount of time spent on home visits (Burrell et al., 2009; Sharp, Ispa, Thornburg, & Lane, 2003). Beyond the negative impact of burnout on the home visitor and client relationship, little is known about how to reduce or ameliorate its effects (Hiatt, Sampson, & Baird, 1997; Jones Harden, Denmark, & Saul, 2010).

A growing interest in reducing or preventing burnout among various groups of human service workers has prompted researchers to examine a variety of organizational characteristics that might play a role in influencing this outcome (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). These include workload and work pressure (Leiter et al., 2010; Maslach et al., 2001; Um & Harrison, 1998; Yoo, 2002), task orientation (Kotzer & Arellana, 2008), and supervisory support (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Koeske & Koeske, 1993; Manlove, 1994; Swanson & Power, 2001; Yoo, 2002). Guterman and Jayaratne's (1994) early work on child welfare workers found that increasing a worker's sense of control at work positively affected worker effectiveness and reduced worker stress. Recent studies on health care workers found that empowered workers experienced less burnout (Gilbert, Laschinger, & Leiter, 2010; Leiter et al., 2010).

Building on recent advances in understanding the complex pathways to burnout (see Boyas & Wind, 2010; Leiter et al., 2010), this study examines the processes by which organizational climate influences worker burnout. We present a model testing the mediating roles

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of empowerment and supervisory support on the relationship between organizational climate and burnout for a sample of home visitors working in community-based organizations.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Defining burnout

Beginning with Freudenberger's (1974) introduction of the term "burnout" to describe emotional and physical exhaustion of staff members employed in the human services professions, there has been considerable research investigating burnout among human service workers. Maslach (1976) further developed the concept of studying emotions in the workplace by interviewing a wide range of human services workers about emotional stress generated by their jobs. More recently, burnout has been defined as a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is characterized by three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism (depersonalization), and inefficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). Emotional exhaustion has been studied the most and refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources. Over 25 years of research on this construct has established its complexity, and places the individual stress experience within the larger organizational context as well as individual workers' perceptions of their jobs.

While burnout can exist in many different types of work settings, researchers assert that burnout is a serious concern in the human services field, particularly in child welfare practice (Anderson, 2000; Bunston, 1997; Dane, 2000; Shim, 2010). Among human service workers, burnout has been implicated in decreased job satisfaction, a desire to leave the job, and somatic and psychological symptoms (Greenglass & Burke, 1991; Koeske & Koeske, 1993; Martin & Schinke, 1998; Whippen & Canellos, 1991). Similarly, turnover and intention to leave the field have been associated with high levels of burnout among child welfare workers (Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1994; Shim, 2010).

2.2. Organizational Climate and burnout

In the human services field in general, and in the field of child welfare specifically, services are usually provided in an organizational setting (Arches, 1991). Thus, much research has focused on organizational characteristics such as workload and work pressure and the role they play in mitigating or intensifying burnout (Maslach et al., 2001; Um & Harrison, 1998; Yoo, 2002). Understanding the effects of organizational climate has advanced a great deal in recent years identifying an array of factors that contribute to burnout and turnover (Ellett, 2009; Strolin-Goltzman, 2010).

Among these factors, work pressure has been identified as being responsible for a significant amount of the job strain in human service professions (Manlove, 1994; O'Driscoll & Beehr, 1994, 2000). Workload and time pressure have also been found to be strongly and consistently related to burnout, particularly the exhaustion dimension (Maslach et al., 2001; Reid et al., 1999).

Conversely, task orientation, or an emphasis on good planning, efficiency and getting the job done, offsets some of the effects of work pressure. Kotzer and Arellana (2008) found that despite moderate work pressure perceived by nurses in a hospital setting, staff, overall, affirmed a highly positive work environment on their units. Of particular relevance was the influence of task orientation on concern about and commitment to the job. In another study among medical professionals (Chan & Huak, 2004), task orientation was the only significant predictor of emotional health, among a number of work environment factors.

2.3. Worker empowerment

The concept of empowerment has a long history, especially in social work. But worker empowerment is a relatively new concept to be tested out in organizational settings (Lee & Koh, 2001). The way that empowerment is conceptualized also varies from field to field. The fields of social work and psychology tend to equate empowerment with a worker's perception of self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) or control over the work (Ugboro & Obeng, 2000).

Control over work, in turn, has been identified as a protective factor in worker stress (Atkinson, 1999; Koeske & Kirk, 1993, 1995; Latack, 1986; Leiter, 2005). Workers' perceptions of control include their assessments of their ability to participate in and influence important decisions and their capacity to exercise professional autonomy in their work (Leiter, 2005). Within human service organizational settings, workers are more likely to exercise efficacious responses to their clients when they have the opportunity to manage and influence stressful situations (Guterman & Jayaratne, 1994). The perception of control is also associated with higher job and life satisfaction (Koeske & Kirk, 1995), as well as better performance and lower stress (Boyd & Schneider, 1997; McKnight & Glass, 1995; Schaubroeck & Merritt, 1997). In a large sample of health care workers, empowerment has shown to decrease burnout (Gilbert et al., 2010; Leiter et al., 2010).

There are other reasons to be attentive to whether, and to what extent, a work force is empowered (Wallach & Mueller, 2006). First, there is a parallel process whereby the supervisor–worker relationship mirrors the client–worker interaction (Ackerson & Harrison, 2000; Bartle, Couchonnal, Canda, & Staker, 2002). The organizational expectation that staff provide services in an empowering manner may be contingent on whether employees experience an empowering work site, especially when they are low status professionals (Fulton, 1997; Gutierrez, GlenMaye, & DeLois, 1995). Second, empowered workers are those who can demonstrate initiative and confidence in their abilities (Ripley & Ripley, 1992), assume responsibility (Thorlakson & Murray, 1996; Yoon, 2001), function as collaborative team members (Howard, 1998; Simon, 1994), better adapt to changes in the way services are implemented (Haugh & Laschinger, 1996; Howard, 1998), and feel satisfied (Fulford & Enz, 1995).

Few studies, however, have investigated the organizational characteristics of community-based organizations that may enhance or diminish worker empowerment (Peterson & Speer, 2000). A study examining the parallel process model suggests that the ability of workers to share their power with clients and to engage in a range of interventions requires an empowerment-based practice as its foundation (Gutierrez et al., 1995). The most effective workers drew on organizational supports and their own feelings of personal power in their work with clients. While research has advanced the conceptualization of worker empowerment in the organizational context (Gutierrez et al., 1995; Lee & Koh, 2001; Wallach & Mueller, 2006), the role of empowerment on the relationship between organizational factors and burnout in social service settings has yet to be empirically tested.

2.4. Supervisory support

Supervision is an integral part of many jobs in the human service field, particularly in child welfare. A group of individuals are often assigned to a supervisor who monitors their workload and performance. In return, a worker can rely on her/his supervisor for support and guidance. In the field of home visiting, a working alliance between a group of home visitors and a supervisor is essential in conducting home visits as scheduled. Increased hours of direct supervision have been associated with better program retention (McGuigan, Katzev, & Pratt, 2003) while reflective supervision has been associated with effective implementation (McAllister & Thomas, 2007).

Social support from supervisors has been shown to prevent burnout (Koeske & Koeske, 1993; Manlove, 1994; Swanson & Power, 2001; Yoo, 2002). Frequent and sensitive supervision is crucial in maintaining morale and professional competence and increases the self-efficacy of the worker (Ellett, 2009; Hardy-Brown, Miller, Dean, Carrasco, & Thompson, 1987). Research also indicates the significant bearing that supervisors

have on subordinate job satisfaction, reduced psychological strain and decreased intention to leave the organization (O'Driscoll & Beehr, 1994).

Lack of supervisory support is related to higher intention to leave (Curry, McCarragher, & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2005; Fakunmoju, Woodruff, Kim, Lefevre, & Hong, 2010) and higher stress (Boyas & Wind, 2010). Workers in both public and private child welfare organizations indicated higher levels of unmet expectations if they also rated supervisory support poorly (Kim, 2011). Support from supervisors was found to be more important than support from coworkers (Maslach et al., 2001). Supervisory support is particularly critical in reducing burnout for younger workers (Boyas, Wind, & Kang, 2012).

While there is much evidence on the positive effects of supervisory support on reducing burnout, the question remains as to what degree the supervisor–supervisee relationship is influenced by organizational factors. Studies have shown that both organizational climate and supervisory support are associated with burnout, but no direction has been established (Hamama, 2012). One recent study's findings on the mediating role of supervision on burnout further suggests the importance of understanding supervisory support in the organizational context (Leiter et al., 2010).

2.5. Effectiveness of home visitors

Early home visitation is one of the most widely disseminated prevention programs for improving parenting skills, improving child health and development, and decreasing child maltreatment (Stevens, Ammerman, Putnam, Gannon, & van Ginkel, 2005). Nurses, social workers, and paraprofessionals from publicly and privately funded social service agencies provide home visiting services to at risk families with measurable success in parenting, maternal life course outcomes, and child cognitive and health outcomes (see Donovan et al., 2007; DuMont et al., 2008; Eckenrode et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2009; Olds et al., 2007, 2010). Given that home visiting programs rely heavily on a service delivery model in which home visitors work closely and intensively with families, home visitors' competency and the quality of the services they provide are at the heart of successful implementation.

Duggan et al. (2000) emphasized the importance of understanding the strengths and challenges of home visitation as more communities adopt this strategy; yet, there is currently little research on the factors that impact the effectiveness of home visitors (Korfmacher et al., 2008). Those studies that do exist found that programs with lower caseloads per worker had a greater number of home visits, and that programs who matched participants and providers on parenting status and race or ethnicity were significantly more likely to retain families and deliver a greater number of home visits (Daro, McCurdy, Falconnier, & Stojanovic, 2003).

In an exploration of the correlates between home visitor personality and home visit length, Sharp et al. (2003) reported that home visitors with higher negative emotionality spent less time in home visits. While research on the effectiveness of home visitors is limited, burnt out home visitors were found to be less effective in both engaging clients and delivering services (Burrell et al., 2009; Gill, Greenberg, Moon, & Margraf, 2007).

A majority of home visitors work for community agencies that, while less bureaucratic than public agencies, offer limited opportunities for job mobility (Jones Harden et al., 2010). With expansion of home visiting models, home visitors are at the center of new and innovative approaches serving at risk families. Successful implementation depends on organizational capacity, and positive work climates is essential to the successful implementation of prevention programs (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). Understanding the effects on organizational climate on home visitors' burnout is timely and much needed.

2.6. Study aims and hypotheses

The specific aims of the present study are to: 1) examine the effects of organizational climate on burnout among home visitors; and 2) investigate how supervisory support and empowerment mediate the relationship between organizational climate and burnout.

Guided by prior research on burnout, this study aims to test five hypotheses. The first three hypotheses focus on the direct effects of burnout: 1) positive supervisory support would be associated with lower burnout; 2) higher worker empowerment would be associated with lower burnout; and 3) positive organizational climate would be associated with lower burnout. The next two hypotheses examine the indirect effects: 4) supervisory support would mediate the relationship between organizational climate and burnout; and 5) empowerment would mediate the relationship between organizational climate and worker burnout.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample

The sample for the current study was drawn from a population of paraprofessional home visitors serving families enrolled in a statewide prevention program. As part of an on-going evaluation of the program, home visitors were asked to fill out a survey in 2002, 2004 and 2006. Different programs were surveyed in each wave. Three program sites were surveyed in 2002, seven in 2004, and ten in 2006. Survey sites were chosen primarily to reflect diversity — urban and rural, small and large, old and new, and varying levels of resources. We visited each of the sites to present the study details and distribute the survey materials, which included a prepaid return envelope. Each home visitor who mailed in a survey was provided modest compensation for her time. The response rates for the surveys were 88% in 2002, 94% in 2004, and 89% in 2006, resulting in 182 respondents in all. After checking for missing data and outliers, one case was dropped from each of the three rounds, resulting in 49 respondents from 2002, 62 from 2004, and 68 from 2006 for a final sample of 179 respondents. All 179 respondents were women.

3.2. Measures

Home visitors were asked to provide basic demographic information such as age, marital status, ethnicity, educational level, number of dependents, and salary level. In addition, standardized instruments were included to measure home visitors' degree of burnout, perceived level of empowerment, and organizational climate. Given the importance of supervisory relationships as a predictor for burnout in the literature, the study also included a measure of satisfaction with supervision to test its effects on burnout in the model.

3.2.1. Burnout

The study used the Emotional Exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) to measure the frequency and intensity of job-related burnout. This subscale is considered the most reliable of the Inventory's subscales for assessing burnout (Drake & Yadama, 1996; Oh & Lee, 2009). The subscale, based on Koeske and Koeske's (1993) construct of burnout, utilizes nine items that tap into feelings such as being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work. Responses range from 0 = never to 6 = every day on a seven point scale, with higher scores representing stronger feelings of emotional exhaustion or burnout. In the current study, the emotional exhaustion scale had a high internal consistency ($\alpha = .90$).

3.2.2. Supervisory support

For supervisory support, we used two questions from the seven-item Supervisory Support Questionnaire developed by Shulman (1982). The first item assessed overall satisfaction with the working relationship

(1 to 3 rating scale), while the second asked participants to rate how helpful their supervisors were (1 to 4 rating scale). Because the responses to the question about overall satisfaction were heavily skewed towards the higher end, the variable was collapsed into two categories (very satisfied = 1, otherwise = 0) for inclusion in the regression analyses. The full range of responses for the satisfaction with and helpfulness of supervision items were used in the structural equation model (SEM) analyses.

3.2.3. Worker empowerment

The study used a 5 item scale to assess worker's perceptions of control over the work as a proxy for empowerment (Ugboro & Obeng, 2000). The scale was first adapted by Guterman and Jayarante's (1994) from Pearlin and Schooler's Mastery scale (1978). The original Mastery scale consists of 7 items measured by a 4-point Likert scale. Guterman and Jayarante added the words "in/on my job" in each item. In the current study, confirmatory factor analysis revealed that factor loadings for items 6 and 7 were less than .20, so these items were excluded. All other factor loadings were between .46 and .86. The 5 items included for this study measured a worker's perception of control over work such as having power to change or feeling helpless. The scale showed a good internal consistency ($\alpha = .84$). A higher composite score indicated a greater level of control over work.

3.2.4. Organizational climate

The concept of organizational climate is generally defined as the way people perceive their work environment (Glisson, 2009; Glisson & Green, 2011), although it has been operationalized in a variety of ways. Organizational climate was conceptualized and measured using 2 subscales from the Work Environment Scale (WES) by Moos (1981), which has been validated in studies measuring the work climate of an organization (Brookings, Chacos, Hightower, Howard, & Weiss, 1985; Chan & Huak, 2004). It contains 10 distinct subscales that can be used independently. These 10 subscales tap into different aspects of the work environment, ranging from peer cohesion at work to physical comfort of the workplace. Each subscale consists of nine True/False items that are summed to calculate an average score for that subscale. For the purposes of this study, two subscales of the WES were used as proxies for organizational climate: task orientation and work pressure. The task orientation subscale ($\alpha = .66$) was used to gauge whether the organization put an emphasis on planning, efficiency and getting the job done. A higher score on this scale corresponded to a worker perceiving the organization as having a strong task orientation. The work pressure scale ($\alpha = .73$) was used to detect the extent to which high work demands and time pressure dominated the organizational culture. A higher score indicated a higher level of work pressure.

3.3. Analysis plan

We first conducted descriptive statistics to check means and to detect any outliers given that the data were collected at three different time points. Hierarchical regression analyses in SPSS 17.0 were used to assess the relationship between organizational characteristics and worker burnout. Socio-demographic covariates and dummy variables to control for the different rounds of surveys were entered in the first step. Then in the second step, we entered satisfaction with supervisor. In the third step, we added empowerment. For the last step, two indicators of organizational climate are entered.

To test the mediation model, we use SEM which allows us to obtain true estimates of total, indirect, and direct effects of variables in complex relationships (Fairchild & McQuillin, 2010). SEM allows the relationships among latent variables (i.e., empowerment and satisfaction with supervision) to be tested and confirmed using cross-sectional data (Bollen, 1989). It generates unbiased estimates by explicitly modeling measurement error. The path model includes worker's age as the only significant demographic predictor of burnout.

Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) with Mplus 6 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1983) were used to assess the adequacy of measurement of latent factors (unmeasured, estimated variables). A priori specified hypotheses about the underlying structure of the measurement model and the structural model, controlling for measurement error (Bollen, 1989), were tested.

The intent was to estimate a parsimonious, theoretically based model. The measurement model consisted of the latent constructs of empowerment, supervisory support and burnout. The structural model was constructed according to theory, with a non-recursive relationship specified as a correlated error coefficient between the two mediating constructs, empowerment and supervisory support. The relationship between the two mediating variables and one dependent variable was also specified as non-recursive. The structural model consisted of three exogenous (not determined by the model) observed variables and two endogenous (determined by the model) mediating latent variables (empowerment and supervisory support), and one latent dependent variable (burnout). All estimated parameters were hypothesized a priori.

4. Results

4.1. Sample description

The average age of the respondents was 38 years and more than half had completed at least two years of college (see Table 1). They were diverse in race and ethnicity, reflecting the communities they serve; 44% were Non-Hispanic Whites, 32% were Hispanic and 24% were Black. The scores for the task orientation scale ranged from 0 to 9 ($M = 6.90$, $SD = 1.89$), the work pressure scale from 0 to 9 ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 2.27$) and from 5 to 20 for empowerment ($M = 14.05$, $SD = 3.15$). A majority (87%) of the home visitors were satisfied with their supervisors. As the sample was drawn from three different years we conducted tests to see patterns by the survey year. There was only one significant difference by survey year. Results from the second round of surveys showed a higher percentage of Non-Hispanic Whites (53%), and a smaller percentage of Blacks (10% vs. 35% in 2002, and 30% in 2006).

4.2. Direct effects on burnout

As presented in Table 2, the first step of the hierarchical multiple regression model indicates that home visitor's age ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .05$) was the only significant demographic characteristic of burnout; the younger the home visitor, the higher the level of burnout. In the second step, satisfaction with supervision displayed an inverse relationship to worker burnout ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .01$). Thus, the first hypothesis, that positive

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of variables (N = 179).

Variable	M (SD)	% of the sample
Outcome		
Burnout	18.47(11.86)	
Predictors		
Task orientation	6.90 (1.89)	
Work pressure	5.46 (2.27)	
Empowerment	14.05 (3.15)	
Satisfied with supervisor		86.6%
Control variables		
Age	38.18 (10.10)	
Survey year 2002		27.4%
Survey year 2004		34.6%
Survey year 2006		37.9%
Two or more years of college education		53.1%
Black		24.2%
Hispanic		31.6%
White		44.3%

Table 2
A hierarchical multiple regression model predicting burnout among home visitors (N = 179).

Variables	Step 1 I		Step 2		Step 3		Step 4	
	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	B
Age	−.19 (.088)	−.16*	−.15 (.087)	−.13	−.10 (.080)	−.081	−.17 (.07)	−.14*
Survey year 2004	−.51 (2.33)	−.02	−.81 (2.28)	−.03	−.78 (2.09)	−.031	−1.10 (1.89)	−.04
Survey year 2006	2.23 (2.21)	.09	1.37 (2.18)	.06	2.18 (2.00)	.089	1.52 (1.81)	.06
Two or more years of college	1.38 (1.77)	.06	1.42 (1.74)	.06	.82 (1.59)	.035	1.18 (1.44)	.05
Hispanic	−.82 (2.40)	−.03	−.41 (2.36)	−.02	−.56 (2.16)	−.022	−2.66 (1.98)	−.10
White	−2.35 (2.26)	−.10	− 2.78 (2.22)	−.12	−2.34 (2.03)	−.098	−.61 (1.85)	−.03
Satisfied with supervisor			−7.68 (2.61)	−.22**	−1.08 (2.64)	−.031	.05 (2.47)	.00
Empowerment					−1.66 (.28)	−.44***	−.87 (.28)	−.23**
Task orientation							−1.46 (.42)	−.23**
Work pressure							2.29 (.38)	.44***
Constant	25.69 (4.05)***		31.18 (4.38)***		46.42 (4.77) ***		34.92 (5.32)***	
R^2	.051		.097		.249		.394	
F for change in R^2			.046**		.172***		.145***	

β is the standardized regression coefficient.
* $p<.05$.
** $p<.01$.
*** $p<.001$.

supervisory support would be associated with lower burnout, is supported. In the third step, empowerment was also inversely related to worker burnout (β = −.44, $p<.001$). Thus, we found support for the second hypothesis: that higher worker empowerment would be associated with lower burnout. In the final step of the model, the organizational climate variables of task orientation and work pressure both demonstrated substantial effects on worker burnout (β = −.23, $p<.01$ and β = .44, $p<.001$) respectively. Thus the third hypothesis that positive organizational climate would be associated with lower burnout is also supported.

With the inclusion of empowerment in the third step, supervisory support was no longer significant implying shared covariance between two key concepts. It appears that empowerment is a better predictor than supervisor support for burnout in the model. In the final full regression model, age, task orientation, work pressure, and empowerment were significant predictors of burnout. Together, they explained 39% of the variance in worker burnout.

4.3. Empowerment as mediator

Results from the SEM are shown in Fig. 1 with unstandardized and standardized structural coefficients. Circles represent latent variables and squares indicate observed exogenous variables. The absence of a line connecting variables indicates no direct effect. Weighted least squares means and variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimators were used since latent supervisory support was measured by two categorical variables and empowerment was measured by a 4-point ordinal scale. For the model evaluation, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI) and Turker Lewis Index (TLI) were used as the primary fit indices. Following Hu and Bentler (1999), an RMSEA ≤ .06 represents a good fit. As for CFI and TLI, a value of .95 or above is acceptable model fit.

The overall fit was acceptable according to guidelines offered by Hu and Bentler (1999) as indicated by various fit indices (RMSEA = .04, CFI = .97 and TLI = .97). Based on a Chi-square difference test, we reject the null hypothesis that a correlated error coefficient between supervisory support and empowerment does not significantly improve model fit. These fit indices indicate that the hypothesized model fits the data reasonably well.

The results indicate that empowerment was directly predictive of burnout (β = −.28, $p<.01$), while supervisory support was not (β = −.08, $p = .464$). Similarly, both indicators of organizational climate were predictive of burnout. Work pressure (β = .38, $p<.001$) had a stronger direct effect on burnout compared to either empowerment (β = −.28, $p<.01$) or to task orientation (β = −.18, $p<.05$).

Work pressure also had a significant negative effect on empowerment (β = −.46, $p<.001$) and similarly on supervisory support (β = −.26, $p<.001$). Task orientation, though having a weaker direct effect on worker burnout (β = −.18, $p<.05$), had a stronger direct effect on supervisory support (β = .45, $p<.001$) than did work pressure (β = −.26, $p<.001$).

When total effects were decomposed into direct effects and indirect effects (See Table 3), both work pressure (β = .15, $p<.001$) and task orientation (β = −.12, $p<.01$) had indirect effects on worker's burnout.

The SEM results indicate that supervisory support did not have a mediating role on worker's burnout although it is strongly related with empowerment. Thus the fourth hypothesis, that supervisory support would mediate the relationship between organizational climate and burnout, was not supported. The results, however, support the fifth hypothesis that empowerment would mediate the effect of organizational climate on burnout.

5. Discussion

5.1. Organizational climate, burnout, and empowerment

The study results indicate that home visitor's age was a significant demographic factor in understanding burnout. The younger the worker was, the greater the level of burnout. This finding is in line with previous studies which have suggested that older workers may be better at coping with stressful circumstances associated with direct care work with clients (Maslach et al., 2001).

As predicted, greater supervisory support was related to decreased worker burnout. Similarly, greater empowerment perceived by workers corresponded to less burnout. Most home visitors are frontline workers and are the least likely to have authority and power in the organizational hierarchy. Thus, having supportive supervisors and increased sense of power over the work are inversely related to burnout.

The findings add more support to studies that place a greater emphasis on organizational climate than individual or supervisory factors alone (Gill et al., 2007; Sauter & Murphy, 1995). The two organizational climate variables were the strongest predictors of burnout in the full regression model. The more a worker perceived her/his agency as ineffective and inefficient, the greater the level of burnout experienced by the worker. Similarly, the agency's emphasis on the amount of work led to elevated burnout. Each of the two measures of organizational climate had a larger effect on reducing burnout relative to supervisory support.

The study's findings regarding the mediating effect of worker empowerment is important to note. Our results indicate that empowerment

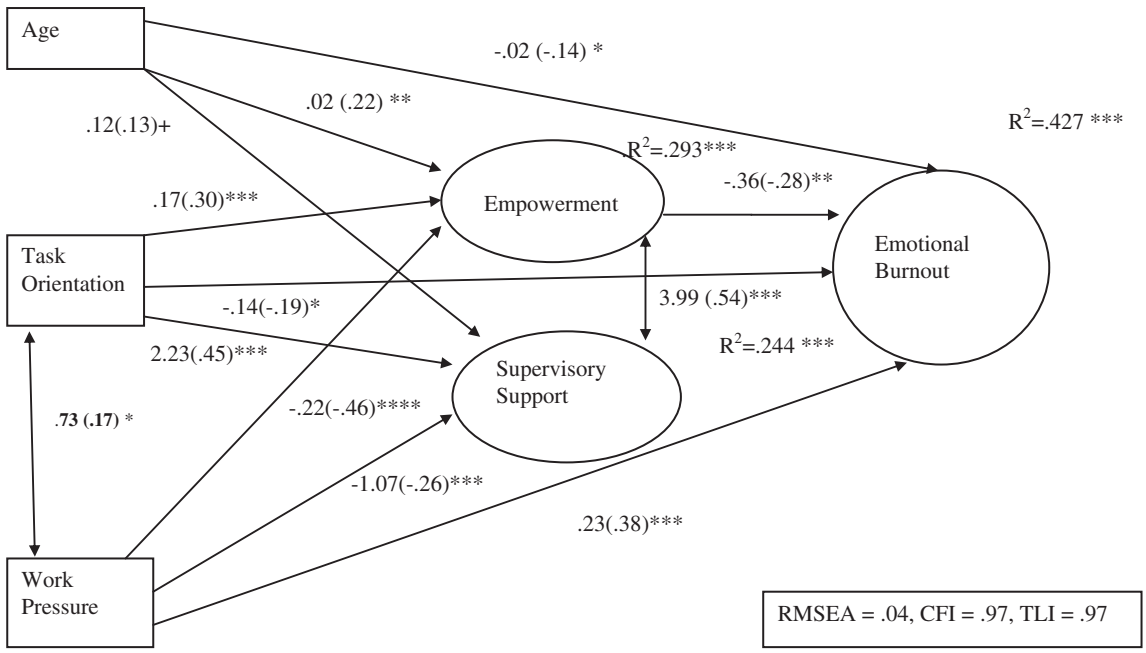

Fig. 1. Path model of burnout among home visitors. Note: Unstandardized coefficients are shown first and standard coefficients are in parentheses. * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$. Path coefficients for non-significant relationships were not presented.

is inversely associated with burnout. And both burnout and empowerment are influenced by organizational climate. In other words, empowerment is tied to both organizational climate and burnout. Preventing worker burnout could be facilitated through improving organizational climate at the agency level. At the same time, empowering individual workers to control over their work would lead to better results. Identifying mechanisms that mediate the effects of organizational climate has been difficult (Glisson & Green, 2011; Hemmelgarn, Glisson, & James, 2006). This study presents one such mechanism.

The study's results add more evidence to the current view that organizational climate is critical to service delivery and effectiveness. The findings on empowerment, organizational climate, and burnout are relevant and timely given that the field has renewed interest in designing interventions that can improve organizational climate and service effectiveness (Glisson, Dukes, & Green, 2006; Strolin-Goltzman, 2010). Additionally, the study's findings based on a sample of home visitors suggest that the field would benefit from looking beyond public child welfare workers to study worker burnout. As the results indicate that, home visitors, who make up a significant workforce in the child abuse prevention field, also suffer from organizational inefficiency and structures that are known for limited promotional opportunities and low pay.

5.2. Strengths and limitations

There are a number of limitations that suggest some caution in interpreting these findings. The study relied on cross-sectional data, thus presenting a significant challenge in establishing causal relationships. Even with path modeling, the causal relationships between the various constructs cannot be confirmed. In addition, the sample was purposively drawn from a statewide program. Home visitors in other programs may not share the characteristics of the sample, and results may vary according to the staffing and organizational structure of individual programs.

Another limitation is that the measure used to assess supervisory support was not ideal. The sample had very little variation in satisfaction with supervisor or helpfulness of supervisor. Most of the home visitors were either very satisfied or satisfied with supervision and found their supervisor to be very helpful. The home visitation model used by the programs relies on close relationships between supervisors and the home visitors they supervise. Supervisors often serve as mentors to staff and are generally experienced case managers. Unlike workers in public child welfare agencies however, home visitors work in small agencies with limited hierarchy. This lack of variation in supervisory

Table 3
Decomposition of effects.

Predictors	Dependent variable	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
Age	Burnout	−.02 (−.14)*	−.01 (−.07)*	−.03 (−.21)**
	Empowerment	.02 (.22)**	–	
	Supervisory support	.12 (.13)+	–	
Task orientation	Burnout	−.14 (−.18)*	−.09 (−.12)**	−.22 (−.30)***
	Empowerment	.17 (.30)***	–	
	Supervisory support	2.23 (.45)***	–	
Work pressure	Burnout	.23 (.38)***	.09 (.15)***	.32 (.53)***
	Empowerment	−.22 (−.46)***	–	
	Supervisory support	−1.07 (−.26)***	–	
Empowerment	Burnout	−.36 (−.28)**	–	
Supervisory support	Burnout	−.01 (−.08)	–	

Unstandardized coefficients are shown first and standard coefficients are in parentheses.
* $p<.05$.
** $p<.01$.
*** $p<.001$.
\+ $p<.10$.

support is therefore understandable, but leads to limited power in the analysis.

This study also has a number of strengths. It is one of a few empirical studies that specifically examines home visitors (Jones Harden et al., 2010). Child welfare workers in the non-public sector, such as paraprofessional home visitors, have become an integral part of the workforce serving vulnerable families in prevention and intervention programs. Despite their presence, limited attention has been paid to these workers as evidenced by the large body of literature on child welfare workers in the public sector. The current study, with its focus on home visitors, makes an important contribution to this emerging field.

Testing the role of worker empowerment is another strength given the limited empirical research on this concept. The finding is important especially given the program's own emphasis on client empowerment to achieve better outcomes. Finally, the study's use of advanced statistical methods permitted a complex model to be tested. This allowed us to examine the processes of burnout as well as identify a protective mechanism against burnout. The inclusion of both additive (hierarchical regression) models and structural models render results that are more complete and interpretable.

5.3. Implications for practice and future research

This study provides additional evidence regarding aspects of organizational climate that directly influence worker burnout. The results are not surprising given the body of research that has pointed out the importance of looking at organizational climate in predicting worker turnover, stress, job satisfaction, and even client outcomes (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Drake & Yadama, 1996; Glisson & Green, 2011; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Mor Barak, Levin, Nissly, & Lane, 2006). The study adds to this emerging trend of emphasizing macro level issues rather than the individual characteristics of workers (Strolin-Goltzman, 2010). Our findings also highlight one lesser known aspect of organizational climate: how workers perceive their organization's efficiency. It appears that when workers view their organization as inefficient with poor planning they experience more burnout, regardless of how much work pressure they feel. This suggests that outcome-based practice would not only benefit clients, but workers as well.

The protective mechanism of worker empowerment on burnout raises an interesting question about the concept of parallel process. In social services, empowering clients has been of paramount importance. However, empowering workers has not received the same urgency. On the contrary, frontline workers have limited power in the decision-making process in many public and private agencies with a mission of empowering clients. The study's findings suggest that empowered workers are more adept at dealing with psychological stress, which is often inherent in providing direct services, compared to less empowered workers. The field needs to reflect that the parallel process is not just interpersonal, but needs to be extended to organizational practice.

Future research would benefit from the use of hierarchical models that can generate better estimates of organizational level effects (Glisson & Green, 2011; Smith & Mogro-Wilson, 2008). Analyses using data with organizational-level variables rather than worker perceptions would also advance our understanding. Additional research focusing on supervisory support and organizational culture would also generate a better understanding of the ways in which worker–supervisor relationships are influenced by organizational policy and practice. Finally, it would be a great benefit to the field if more research is focused on worker empowerment, especially delineating its contexts and identifying ways in which to empower workers.

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