

The image of job burnout

- A qualitative study of how social caseworkers in Taiwan
perceive job burnout

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Abstract

Title: The image of job burnout – A qualitative study of how social caseworkers in Taiwan perceive job burnout

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The purpose of this study was to investigate how social caseworkers perceive job burnout (or work exhaustion). Three questions were addressed in this study:

- How do social caseworkers' perceptions of work exhaustion relate to all the efforts they invest in helping clients and the perceived response/lack of response these investments generate?
- How do social caseworkers perceive work exhaustion in relation to the organisational culture?
- How do social caseworkers construct “desirable” work situations contrasting work exhaustion?

Results indicated that due to differences of cultures and societies, social caseworkers in Taiwan may not have precisely the same interpretation of job burnout as Western countries. In Taiwan, job burnout is more commonly understood as *work exhaustion*. From the perspective of the modified social exchange model in this study, reciprocity/lack of reciprocity plays a primary role in social caseworkers' perception to work exhaustion. How social caseworkers perceive work exhaustion relates to the imbalance between their investment and the perceived rewards that their investment generate both on the interpersonal and organisational levels. Factors such as a lack of perceived control, value conflicts, and perceived work overload may hazard the reciprocity that social caseworkers strive for. This study also found that social caseworkers may construct their desirable work situations in two diverse approaches, as the results showed two categories of work satisfaction – a coping strategy to work exhaustion or the original work aspiration.

Key words: Job burnout, Work exhaustion, Social casework, Social exchange, Reciprocity

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It has been a long journey for me to write this thesis, despite the fact that I cannot define what a *long* journey represents. It takes about 24 hours to fly from Sweden to Taiwan, yet I feel that talking on Skype is literally a long journey, as my dog cannot recognize my voice without my smell.

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1. Introduction

Unsatisfied with the subsidy and housing arrangement from the social affairs bureau, a client ran to the governmental office, Home for the Disabled, and complained to the social worker, Ms. Zheng. An hour later, he came back to the office again with two knives and hurt the social worker. The social worker was wounded and sent to the hospital.

(Lin & Yang, 2013)

A father, who regretted to consent the placement of his own daughter, threatened the social worker with two petrol bombs at the office of social welfare centre.

(Su, 2014)

In light of how commonly these excerpted news have been reported in Taiwan in recent years, it is becoming extremely difficult to ignore the concern of social workers' safety and work conditions. In the first national survey of child and adolescent protection social workers at governmental centres in Taiwan, over 90% of the respondents reported being either assaulted, threatened, stalked or attacked by clients' families, and nearly 40% of the respondents felt that social workers have insufficient protection. The survey concluded that this safety concern was one of the primary sources of stress for child and adolescent protection social workers (Common health, 2013). Another survey on protection social workers at governmental centres in Taiwan shows that only 1.55% of the respondents reported that they had not suffered from any verbal or physical violence by the clients over the past year (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2015a:4).

In response to this safety concern, social workers and researchers advocated for better safety measures for social workers. As a result, the Ministry of Health and Welfare published the Social Worker Practice Safety Programme¹ (Executive Yuan, 2015). In fact, as early as 2009, the Social Worker Act was enacted to stipulate social workers' rights and obligations, and to promote social worker's

¹ The programme aims to enhance risk management of the work environment and social workers' safety at work. The programme is implemented from 2015 to 2017.

professional status in society. Nevertheless, the act applies exclusively to licensed social workers², which accounted for a quarter³ of all the social workers in the public sector in Taiwan in 2013 (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2015c). Although social workers' labour rights have long been an unresolved issue, there is still no act at the national level to protect the majority of social workers' rights and interests to date.

Besides this safety concern, social workers in Taiwan encounter problems of work overload and insufficient human resources. Social workers, together with staff in the insurance and financial industry as well as health care, were ranked the highest for work fatigue in Taiwan in 2008 (Ministry of Labour, 2008). The first national survey of social workers' general health in Taiwan suggests that social workers suffer from occupational health problems such as anxiety and insomnia (Hsu, Yu & Cheng, 2013). The report specifically highlights the excessive workload that imposing on the social workers in the field of domestic violence and child protection (Hsu, Yu & Cheng, 2013). For instance, it is reported that, in Yunlin Country, each child and adolescent protection social worker has 70-80 cases in hand, which results in work stress and generates a vicious cycle between work stress and high turnover (Zhan, 2015). Similarly, in Sweden, social caseworkers encounter problems of increasing workload and stress, and a high turnover of senior social caseworkers (Strandhäll & Tham, 2014).

The number of reported cases of child and youth protection has increased from 21,449 cases in 2009 to 49,881 cases in 2014 (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2015b), which the number of social caseworkers could not keep pace with. Furthermore, the amendment of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act published recently in January 2015 extends the target group to include children and juveniles who have witnessed domestic violence and partners who have intimate relationships without cohabitation (Department of Protective Services, 2015). The amendment may lead to a heavier workload for protection social workers, which

² According to article 4 in the Social Worker Act, licensed social workers refer to those social workers who have passed the examination of social worker and obtained the certificate of social worker. The examination of social worker is optional, which means that social workers are not required to obtain the certificate of social worker to work as a social worker.

³ According to the statistic resource from the Ministry of Health and Welfare, there were 645 licensed social workers and 2,462 social workers working in the public sector in Taiwan in 2013.

accentuates the significance to examine social workers' emotional, psychological and physical conditions when the social workers undertake heavy workloads in insecure work conditions. Previous research shows that child protection social workers suffer from psychological pressure when working with involuntary clients, and emotional frustration when the expected improvement does not occur with clients, as well, physical and psychological stress caused by case overload (Bai, 2013).

This study suggests that poor work conditions and lack of human resources may partly attribute to the high degree of work stress and turnover in the social work sector in Taiwan. Nevertheless, an equally interesting question is if and how the interpersonal nature of social work impacts social workers' experiences of work stress or fatigue. How do social workers perceive the emotional investments they make when working with clients? How do they handle the possible lack of response? The situation that social workers may suffer from work related stress or fatigue seems to be a global trend, as it occurs and has been studied by researchers in different countries, for instance, Sweden (Söderfeldt, Söderfeldt & Warg, 1995), Israel (Hamama, 2011), and USA (Kim, Ji & Kao, 2011; Poulin & Walter, 1993).

In other societies, the phenomenon of severe work exhaustion is often interpreted as “job burnout”. Unlike in many Western countries, burnout is seldom discussed in Taiwan in common discourse or in academic research. In fact, there is no direct translation for the English word burnout in Mandarin, the official language of Taiwan. On the website of the National Academy for Educational Research, burnout is translated into *juàn dài* or *kū jié* in psychology studies, *gōng zuò juàn dài* in management studies, and *guò lǎo* or *hào jìn* in journalism and communication studies. Yet, none of the aforementioned Chinese terms are commonly used in daily life or at work, which is different from how “burnout” is used in English speaking countries. The commonly used terms are *lèi* and *yā lì*, which have precisely same meanings respectively as “tired” and “stressful” in English. When a Taiwanese hear the term, *yā lì*, the picture emerges naturally that a heavy stone is put on a person, which describes well how people feel stressed or are stressed by something.

From the cultural and societal perspective, burnout phenomenon is not a formal medical diagnosis in Taiwan. Consequently, Taiwanese employees cannot be diagnosed with burnout nor eligible for compensation or treatment, unlike, for instance, in Sweden and the Netherlands (Schaufeli, Leiter & Maslach, 2009). Despite high economic growth in Taiwan, the global trend of research on burnout has not occurred in Taiwan. To date, there is a lack of research on burnout, and burnout is not a subject commonly discussed in society. A potential reason is that the traditional agricultural society in Taiwan values the virtue of perseverance and diligence at work without complaint (Shi, 1997). Additionally, the historical background of being either occupied or colonized by various countries (the Netherlands, Spain, Qing dynasty, and Japan) for a long time has made people in Taiwan learned to be obedient, grateful for what they possess, and to adapt quickly to the shifting society in order to live a peaceful life. Under this cultural and historical background, most people in Taiwan, particularly the older generations, promote these deeply-rooted ideology of perseverance, obedience and diligence. On the contrary, the young generations born after 1971 were labelled as the “strawberry generation” by the persevering older generations who have gone through a period of turmoil in society (Weng, 1993). The “strawberry generation” originates from the fact that strawberries would be rotten after being pressed despite the initial perfect appearance, and is a metaphor for how the younger generation, who grew up in a relatively prosperous and stable society, has supposedly low stress resistance, low setback resistance, low obedience, and low stability at work.

Despite the lack of acknowledgment and research on job burnout in Taiwan, the above outline indicates that many social workers do suffer from work stress or exhaustion. Unlike medical and psychological research on job burnout, this study is based on a constructionist assumption that job burnout also needs to be understood in relation the particular linguistic, cultural and societal context. No previous research has investigated job burnout or work exhaustion in Taiwan from a qualitative perspective that how the notion of job burnout is perceived by social workers, and thus, this study aspires to fill the relative lack of qualitative knowledge.

1.1 Research aim and questions

The aim of this study is to explore how social caseworkers perceive job burnout (or work exhaustion).

The following research questions are proposed to fulfil the research purpose.

1. How do social caseworkers' perceptions of work exhaustion relate to all the efforts they invest in helping clients and the perceived response/lack of response these investments generate?
2. How do social caseworkers perceive work exhaustion in relation to the organisational culture?
3. How do social caseworkers construct "desirable" work situations contrasting work exhaustion?

Defining and clarifying terms:

Social caseworker: Social workers who do direct service with casework. In this study, the term social caseworker refers to social caseworkers in the field of child and adolescent protection in both public and private sectors in Taiwan.

Job burnout: In this study, the term "job burnout" is substituted by the term "work exhaustion" occasionally, as there is no precise word in Mandarin that is equivalent to the English word "burnout".

1.2 Disposition

The subsequent chapters in this study begin with Chapter Two, in which presents a brief overview of the purpose, system, and features of child and adolescent protection work in Taiwan. This chapter is meant to equip those who are not familiar with social casework the fundamental knowledge in order to gain a thorough picture of the study. Chapter Three reviews previous research on burnout from various disciplines as well as the development of research on job burnout in Taiwan. The majority of previous research on burnout set off from the (social) psychology perspective in finding the causality between the three

dimensions of burnout. Likewise, research on job burnout in Taiwan focuses on quantitative studies despite the fact that “burnout” is seldom discussed in both daily conversation and academic research in Taiwanese society.

Chapter Four lays out the theoretical dimensions of the research. The study adapts concepts such as job control, work overload and value conflicts into the established social exchange model, which functions as the primary foundation of the theoretical framework. The study goes on to Chapter Five, which discusses the methodological consequences in using participatory photo interview and illustrates the data analysis and sampling process. Chapter Six presents the results and analysis, which indicates that, albeit various interpretations the respondents have, the perceived work exhaustion relates to perceived lack of reciprocity both on the interpersonal and organisational levels. Additionally, the respondents’ strategies to restore energy and their aspirations to the job associate with how they perceive work exhaustion. Finally, Chapter Seven concludes with discussions on the findings and suggestions for further research.

2. Background

The complexity of job burnout phenomenon lies in that it involves not only individuals at work but also the organisation. Thus, to acquire a comprehensive background of the issue, it is essential to recognize the original objectives of the programmes that social caseworks undertake, and the cooperation between the public and private sectors. This serves as the basis to understand present difficulties in the child and adolescent protection work.

The first section of this chapter highlights that social casework has a pivotal role in the child and adolescent protection work. As the front line of child and adolescent protection work, social casework requires accuracy to maintain service quality as well as efficiency to undertake the increasing caseloads. Furthermore, the cooperation between the public and private sectors relates to how social caseworkers do social casework. The second section presents the predominant features of child and adolescent protection work – high caseloads, high pressure and high risk. Examining the challenging work conditions provides important insights into how social caseworkers perceive job burnout.

2.1 Child and adolescent protection work in Taiwan

The child and adolescent protection work is based on the Protection of Children and Youths Welfare and Rights Act (the PCY Act), which applies to both the municipalities and county (city) governments, and organisations in the private sector. Article two in the PCY Act regulates that the target group in the child and adolescent protection work are children aged under 12 and youths aged between 12 and 18. On this basis, article six and eight regulate that the Ministry of the Interior in the central government is responsible for the planning, recommending, and distribution of the national welfare policy for children and youth, as well as the allocation and subsidization of the central welfare budget for children and youth. The municipalities and county (city) governments are responsible for the implementation of central welfare, acts, and programs for children and youth, according to article nine. Furthermore, article 23 states:

Municipalities and county (city) governments will establish integrated service mechanisms, and encourage, guide and entrust the private sector to self-manage related welfare measures for children and youth.

On this basis, the Ministry of the Interior advocates the child and adolescent protection work on three levels to establish a sound social security network (Huang & Ye, 2012). The primary prevention involves promotion of community care service for children and youths in disadvantaged families and propaganda of child and adolescent protection. The secondary and third preventions centre primarily on social casework, which will be elaborated in the subsequent section. Yet, only the third prevention work of child and adolescent protection work is entitled with legal measures, for example, child/youth placement.

2.1.1 The secondary prevention – social casework in the high-risk family programme

The secondary prevention work focuses on the intervention system to implement the programme of children and youths in families at high risk (high-risk family)⁴. Considering the increasing cases of child abuse, sexual assault and domestic violence, the government embarked on the programme aiming to extend the filtering system and to identify high-risk families at the early stage (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2014). According to article two in the Regulations for Reporting and Assisting Children and Youths in Families at High Risk, social casework is addressed to the children and youths found in the families suspected of not appropriately taking care of them due to economic, nurturing, marriage and medical care problems. Thus, the purpose of social casework in high-risk family programme is to enhance high-risk families' capabilities by offering the families preventative and supportive services, which the children and youths' interest is in the centre; for example: home visits, casework, assessment of the family's need, resource connection, referral to other authorities, follow-up evaluation, complement services (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2014). Nevertheless, in the high-risk family programme, it is not mandatory for the families to cooperate with social caseworkers to do the investigation and to accept these services. If a family

⁴ The programme started in 2005. In this study, the abbreviation "high-risk family programme" will be used to refer to the programme of child and youths in families at high risk.

refuses to cooperate, social caseworkers can only wait until the family changes their mind, and meanwhile, try to collect information about the child/youth and family via other authorities (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2014). For example, social caseworkers have the right to visit child/youth at schools according to the PCY Act.

2.1.2 The third prevention – social casework in the child and adolescent protection work

Different from the high-risk family programme, which works with families suspected of improper child care, child neglect or child abuse, social caseworkers in the third prevention work with reported cases of child and adolescent protection from various authorities such as schools, police, hospital, referral from the high-risk family programme, etc. (Ministry of the Interior, 2006). The aim of social casework in the third prevention is to reduce the psychological and physical damages on the children and youths to a minimum. Cases in child and adolescent protection work are characterized as severe and urgent, which require work efficiency; for instance, article 53 in the PCY Act regulates that social caseworkers must see the child/youth in person within 24 hours after the report is taken to ensure the child/youth's safety, and submit an assessment report within four working days. In some circumstances, social caseworkers are entitled to legal rights such as civil protection order. §2 of article 70 in the PCY Act regulates:

When authorized municipal agencies and county (city) governments, entrusted institutes, groups or professional personnel interview, investigate and perform the tasks, parents, guardians or other people looking after children and youth, teachers, employers, medical personnel and other relevant personnel will meet the requirements and provide the relevant information. If necessary, they can apply to police, household and registration, finance, education or other relevant agencies or institutes for assistance, all of whom will meet the requirements.

The parents, guardians or other people looking after children and youth, teachers, employers, medical personnel or other relevant people who violate the regulations described in §2 in article 70 without reasonable grounds will be fined a sum of

NT\$ 6,000 to NT\$ 30,000⁵ (approximately 1,554 to 7,776 SEK), according to article 104. In a similar vein, §2 & 3 of article 64 states:

The treatment program will include an assessment of family functionality, children and youth's safety and placement, parental education⁶, psychological guidance, mental health, drug addiction treatment or assistance and welfare services relating to the protection of children and youth.

Children and youth, parents, guardians or other people looking after children and youth shall cooperate to implement the treatment program.

Besides the above mentioned services, social caseworkers in child and adolescent protection work should provide the following services according to the PCY Act: supportive services (e.g. consultation, parental education), complementary services (e.g. children living allowance, single parent support, childcare resource), alternative services (e.g. foster family placement, adoption), protective service (e.g. enhance child and adolescent protection system).

2.1.3 Cooperation between the public and private sectors in this study

In this study, based on article 23 in the PCY Act, the city government entrusts the private sector (NGO A and NGO B in this study and other NGO) high-risk family programme, which is on the second level of prevention work. Thus, NGO A and NGO B do the practical work of high-risk family programme, and report back to the city government regularly. Appendix 1 shows the work procedures of high-risk family programme. Firstly, the city government receives reports from other authorities or self-reports via the protection hotline 113⁷, and then registers the reports in the high-risk family programme online system, where NGO A and NGO B receive those reports. Social caseworkers in NGO A and NGO B are

⁵ The fine will be charged per violation until there are no more violations or the requested information has been provided.

⁶ Article 102 in the PCY Act regulates that anyone who refuses to accept guidance, parental education or the required hours of completion will be fined a sum of NT\$ 3,000 to NT\$ 15,000 (approximately 1,554 to 3,890 SEK); the fine will be charged per violation against refusal after re-informing until it has been accepted.

⁷ Protection hotline 113 is answered by social workers 24 hours all year around, and provides three counselling services: domestic violence, child protection, and sexual abuse and harassment (World Vision Organisation, 2015). Protection hotline 113 is operated by the municipalities and county (city) government and also entrusted to the private sector.

responsible to do home visits within 10 working days and submit an assessment report and an intervention plan to the city government within a month (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2014). Based on the case intake and termination criteria, social caseworkers in NGO A and NGO B have the discretion to decide to intake and to terminate a case in the high-risk family programme, yet the intake and termination reports have to be submitted to the city government. The city government pays NGOs in the private sector fees for every social caseworker who has to undertake 30 cases. For instance, if an NGO undertakes 120 cases, the city government pays totally four social caseworkers' fee. Different from high-risk family programme, the city government undertakes the social casework of child and adolescent protection work, which is on the third level of prevention work, by itself, and the work procedures of child and adolescent protection work is presented in Appendix 2.

2.2 Features of social casework in child and adolescent protection work

2.2.1 High caseloads

The first national survey of work conditions among social workers in the field of child and adolescent protection revealed that the primary source of stress for social workers is high caseloads (Common Heath, 2013), which could be attributed to the combination of increasing cases of child and adolescent protection and insufficient human resources of social workers.

As mentioned previously, the number of reported cases of child and youth protection has been increasing steadily every year, from 21,449 cases in 2009 to 49,881 cases in 2014 (see table 1) (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2015b). It is anticipated that the sum of reported case of child and youth protection, which is one type of domestic violence case, will continue to rise as the recently amended Domestic Violence Prevention Act has expanded the protection that children and youths who have witnessed violence are qualified to petition for protective order (Department of Protective Services, 2015).

Table 1. Reported cases of child and youth protection

Year	Total report (cases)
2009	21 449
2010	30 791
2011	28 955
2012	35 823
2013	34 545
2014	49 881

Source: The Ministry of Health and Welfare (2015b), updated 2015-03-06

As such, more human resources are required to undertake the increasing caseload. Nevertheless, Huang and Ye (2012:134) indicated that insufficient human resources has long been an issue in protection social work, and the situation is worse in child and adolescent protection than adult protection. In fact, the Ministry of the Interior implemented a project to recruit child and adolescent protection social workers in 2007. The idea was that the central government afforded 40% of the fee to aid city governments to employ 320 child and adolescent protection social workers, which would lower the caseload to 30-40 per social caseworker (Ceng et al., 2010; Guo & Ye, 2010). Nonetheless, every city government still has to afford 60% of the fee and expenses on trainings. Consequently, the structure of protection social work varies in cities depending on resource every city government has (Yan, 2010).

The major problem with high caseloads is that the supplement of human resources cannot keep up with the rising number of child and adolescent protection case. An incident that a social caseworker died at work revealed that protection social workers working under some city governments undertook much higher caseloads than the standard number of 25 cases per social worker⁸ (Control Yuan, 2011:12). According to an investigation of caseload in 2011 in Taiwan⁹, the average number of cases (including new and old cases in hand)¹⁰ that each child and adolescent

⁸ The Ministry of the Interior regulates that 25 cases per social caseworker is the standard caseload in child and adolescent protection work.

⁹ The investigation was conducted by the Ministry of the Interior after the incident.

¹⁰ From January to the end of June in 2011.

social caseworker in the public sector undertook was 117 (Control Yuan, 2011:12-15). The highest caseload among the 22 cities and counties was 358 cases per social caseworkers in the Yunlin Country. As many as 12 cities/counties, the caseload is higher than 100 cases per social caseworker. A primary concern of such a high caseload is whether social caseworkers can maintain the service quality under the circumstance of increasing caseloads and insufficient work force (Ceng et al., 2010).

2.2.2 High pressure

The child and adolescent protection social casework is characterized as high pressure, which results from the intangible responsibility for the child/youth's safety in the casework, and a strict time frame regulated in the standard operating procedure. For instance, the high-risk family programme regulates that a social caseworker has to visit the client within 10 working days after the report is received (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2014). As for the child and adolescent protection, the social caseworker has to see the child/youth in person within 24 hours after the report is received, which should be documented as a report within four working days (Ministry of the Interior, 2006). The external source of pressure is the media and society, as social caseworkers become the target for criticism in child abuse related news (Liao, 2013:17). The potential explanation is the general lack of knowledge of the social work profession in media and society (Hu, 2013:66).

2.2.3 High risk

Protection social work is regarded as a high-risk work, particularly in the cases of domestic violence (Yan, 2010:155). Protection social caseworkers have to protect the victims from danger and also work with the perpetrators, who may be emotionally and psychologically unstable because of drug abuse or mental problems (Guo & Ye, 2010:189). In domestic violence cases, child and adolescent protection social caseworkers have to speak for the children and youths and confront with the perpetrators, which makes social caseworkers' role even more challenging. As mentioned previously, it is common that social caseworkers in child and adolescent protection have been either assaulted, threaten or even

attacked at work (Common health, 2013). Social caseworkers are exposed to a high-risk work environment without sufficient protection as they have to do direct service to clients, including involuntary clients (Guo & Ye, 2010:189).

3. Previous Research

With years of research on burnout in social psychology and psychology disciplines, Schaufeli, Leiter and Maslach (2009:210) argue that burnout phenomenon has spread out globally and is not only a North American or Western phenomenon. Despite linguistic and cultural divergences, it seems that the global track of research on burnout is in accordance with the economic development of countries. Propelled by organisational management, this trend of research on burnout is dominated by psychology and social psychology disciplines, where research focuses on causalities between different concepts and burnout. Research on burnout in disciplines other than social psychology, psychology, and occupational management is comparatively sparse. More qualitative research on burnout in different cultural and societal contexts is needed to comprehend this multidimensional phenomenon of burnout.

3.1 Research on burnout

Burnout has been studied as a medical and psychological condition, and as a social phenomenon, and this study is an example of the latter. Development of research on burnout has been a relatively slow, bottom-up process, grounded by people's experiences in the workplace (Maslach & Leiter, 2004:156; McGeary & McGeary, 2012:181). Due to the variety of burnout symptoms, definitions and consequences, burnout is definitional ambiguity (Schaufeli & Maslach, 1993:9), thus, over 40 years of development, there is a lack of consensus on the definition of burnout (Sundin, 2009:23).

Herbert J. Freudenberger, a German-born American psychologist, firstly introduced and discussed burnout as a social problem in the *Journal of Social Issue* in 1974, in which research on burnout innovated from a social psychological perspective and focused primarily on the human services profession. The original definition of burnout is derived from Freudenberger's report, where he explored and explained the feeling of burnout he experienced working in a free clinic. Freudenberger (1974:159) used the definition of the verb "burn-out" from an

ordinary dictionary as “to fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy strength, or resources”.

Christina Maslach, an American psychologist, continued the research on burnout and published the article *the Measurement of Experienced Burnout*, in which burnout was defined as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do ‘people-work’ of some kind” (Maslach & Jackson, 1981:99). Furthermore, Maslach and Jackson (1981:99) pointed out three aspects of the burnout syndrome – emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, which contributed to the refined definition of burnout as “a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity” (Maslach, 1993:20).

In the 1980s, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was designed and considered as a great development which took burnout research from an experience to a diagnostic level (Friberg, 2009:544). Meanwhile, the assumption that burnout exists exclusively in the human services profession was refined when MBI was expanded to the MBI-ES for educational profession and MBI-GS for non-human-service professions (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004:867; Sundin, 2009:22). Thus, definition of job burnout is no longer restricted to human-service profession and defined as “a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach & Leiter, 2004:155; Maslach & Leiter, 2008).

In the mid-1990s, Maslach and Leiter (1997) proposed a new perspective on burnout, in which burnout is regarded as the erosion of a positive state of mind – engagement (Bakker & Derks, 2010:202). Maslach and Leither (2008:498) stated: “People’s psychological relationships to their jobs have been conceptualized as a continuum between the negative experience of burnout and the positive experience of engagement”. The three dimensions on the continuum are individual dimension - exhaustion (emotional and physical), interpersonal dimension - depersonalisation (also known as cynicism), and self-evaluation dimension - reduced personal accomplishment (also known as inefficacy)

(Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Sundin, 2009: 22). The opposite scores on the MBI are accordingly defined as energy, involvement and efficacy, three dimensions of engagement (Bakker & Derks, 2010; Schaufeli, Leiter & Maslach, 2009). Another school of researchers agreed that work engagement is negatively related to job burnout, yet argued that work engagement is an independent concept, characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Nonetheless, this study does not engage in discussing whether work engagement is an independent concept or on the other side of continuum counteracting with job burnout.

Despite 40 years of progress, research on burnout still borrows general psychological concepts, and a comprehensive theoretical model is still required (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). Schaufeli and Maslach (1993:11) suggested that further research on the development of multifactorial models and process of burnout are required, as burnout distinguishes itself in its process (time) and multidimensionality (domain), for instance, burnout is considered as chronic job stress. Halbesleben and Buckley (2004:870) commented that burnout as a psychiatric disorder will be the main focus of research on burnout. Bakker and Derks (2010) indicated that the aforementioned positive psychological perspective may help further research on burnout.

3.1.1 Three-dimensional model of burnout

The most used definition in literatures is Maslach's definition of burnout as a three-dimensional psychological syndrome (Sundin, 2009:23), which is used to establish the modified theoretical framework in this study.

Emotional exhaustion refers to a depletion of one's emotional and physical resources. Depersonalisation refers to negative, callous and detached responses to job related issues. These responses are considered as a means to cope with exhaustion by distancing the sources of exhaustion. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to the notion of diminished competence and achievement in work (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Despite the fact that most empirical research, which used the MBI, seems to support the three-dimensions of burnout, the interrelation between these dimensions are still

challenging in scientific research (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Sundin, 2009). In other words, it is yet unclear whether burnout consists of two (exhaustion and depersonalisation) or three dimensions. Nevertheless, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the interrelation of these dimensions since this study concentrates on the exploration of job burnout.

3.1.2 Different perspectives on burnout from other disciplines

Besides social psychology and psychology, there are a variety of other disciplines doing research on burnout. The aforementioned global trend of research on burnout suggested that the organisation plays a significant role in the development of job burnout, which draws the attention of occupational behaviours discipline on job burnout and work engagement. In a similar vein, management studies focus on work stress and job burnout. Medical and health studies concentrate on job burnout and job dissatisfaction, which mainly targets human service professionals in hospitals such as nurses.

From the perspective of sociology discipline, burnout is regarded as a social problem related to the social structure. For instance, a qualitative study of burnout among young athletes in the U.S.A. suggested: “burnout as a social problem grounded in the social organisation that constrain identity development during adolescence and prevent young athletes from having meaningful control over their lives” (Coakley, 1992:271). In another qualitative sociology study on *tōkōkyōhi* (school phobia/refusal) in Japan, school phobia/refusal is considered as a social illness, school burnout, which results from the social structure of schools. Yoneyama (2000) stated that the dominating social ideology of *ganbaru* (to persevere, hold on and work hard) in Japanese schools and society may contribute to the social illness of school burnout. In summary, both sociology studies emphasized that burnout is a social problem resulting from the social structure rather than a medical problem.

3.2 Research on job burnout among social workers in Taiwan

As noted in the introduction, burnout among social workers is a global phenomenon, and by no means restricted to Taiwan. In Sweden, for instance, research shows that work stress and job burnout prevailed also among social caseworkers working with children and adolescents, which may result from the lack of support from the organisation, and making important decisions for children or families under the time pressure (Tham & Meagher, 2009; Tham, 2014). Consequently, the turnover became higher, and led to higher cost for the organisations and higher workload for the remaining social caseworkers (Eriksson & Noreliusson, 2013; Tham, 2007).

In Taiwan, majority of research on job burnout focuses on teachers and health care workers. Among the limited research on job burnout on social workers, the primary focus lies on either social workers working in the public sector or in hospitals. The literature review on job burnout among social workers in Taiwan confirms the dominance of quantitative studies, which support the reason why there is a demand for qualitative research on job burnout.

Albeit divergent characteristic, previous quantitative studies may be useful to methodological aspects of the interview in this study. For instance, previous research on job burnout among social workers in Taiwan indicated that education background and work experience may affect job burnout. Kim (1998) and Weng (1996) suggested respectively in their studies that social workers with little work experience are more vulnerable to burnout. In another study of job burnout among caseworkers in suicide prevention centres in Taiwan, caseworkers' burnout level differs depending on the educational background (Lin, 2013). In the aspect of work context, Kim (1998) proposed that social workers are more vulnerable to job burnout when working with those clients who have severe problems, and when the relationship between clients and social workers are not reconciled. In the aspect of organisational factors, Weng (1996) indicated that social workers' perception of job autonomy and support from supervision are the primary predictors to job burnout, and it is speculated on another study that social workers

are more vulnerable to job burnout when the workload is high and job autonomy is low (Kim, 1998). Chen and Zheng (2010) argued that social workers' role stress is positively related to job burnout, and social support is negatively related to job burnout and role stress, yet social support does not buffer the impacts of role stress and job burnout.

A previous qualitative study pointed out three adversities at work that child protection social workers may confront: the safety concern, psychological difficulties working as a child protection social worker, and difficulties at the organisational level (Bai, 2013). Bai (2013) highlighted that when working with involuntary clients, child protection social workers suffer from psychological pressure, and emotional frustration to the lack of expected improvement on the clients. Besides, child protection social workers suffer from the physical and psychological stress caused by case overload (Bai, 2013).

Liao (2013:13) indicated that heavy workload, violence at the workplace, role conflicts, low work achievement and salary, and lack of resources are the risks at work that may lead to job burnout or turnover among protection social workers. Additionally, chronic situation of high caseloads and casework documentation, and lack of support may result in job burnout (Liao, 2014). Guo and Ye (2010) suggested that the turnover problem in child and adolescent protection social work is a vicious cycle between loss of senior social workers and younger social workers with limited work experience. The social worker is the most valuable asset in protection social work, as the consequences of turnover are even higher risk at work to the remaining social workers, and difficulties in accumulating work experience (Liao, 2013).

Beside organisational factors, the emotionally and interpersonally demanding nature of protection social work may result in job burnout, as a qualitative research presented that compassion fatigue can affect and change protection social workers' cognition, emotion and behaviour, and eventually lead to job burnout (Liao, 2014). As protection social workers have to work with traumatized clients and even domestic violence perpetrators, their physical and mental health is affected in the long run, which may also contribute to turnover (Lin, 2010).

In summary, the majority of job burnout related research concentrate on work conditions and emotional risk factors such as emotional labour and compassion fatigue among social workers. These studies focus particularly on protection social workers, also known as social caseworkers, and they are considered as the most vulnerable group of social workers, which motivates the reason why this study focuses on social caseworkers.

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in this study is based on the social exchange model, where concepts such as job control, work overload and value conflicts are adapted to establish a modified theoretical model. In this modified social exchange model, how social caseworkers construct the notion of job burnout relates to their perceived reciprocity/lack of reciprocity on the interpersonal and organisational levels. It must be stressed that reciprocity should not be understood as an exchange between two equal parties, as the social worker – client relation per se represents an asymmetrical power relation (Skau, 2007). Concepts such as job control, work overload and value conflicts are adapted into the modified social exchange model to analyse how the perceived lack of reciprocity is constructed.

4.1 The social exchange model

The social exchange model is based on the equity theory of J. Stacy Adams (1965), who is a workplace and behavioural psychologist. In the equity theory, individuals look at the world in terms of inputs and outcomes (Landy & Conte, 2009:331). In the work context, an employee experiences fairness when the ratio between the perceived outcomes and perceived inputs equal to his/her colleagues, otherwise the employee perceives distress (Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli & Buunk, 2001). The distress results from inequity, which occurs under two circumstances: when the employee's outcomes relative to the inputs are lower than his/her colleagues, the employee perceives deprived; on the contrary, the employee perceives advantaged when the outcomes relative to the inputs are higher than his/her colleagues (Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli & Buunk, 2001). The equity theory elaborates on an individual's subjective perception of equity between inputs and outcomes, which are yet restrained to tangible inputs (e.g. time, experience, skill) and tangible outcomes (e.g. salary, recognition, employee benefit) on the organisational level.

Buunk and Schaufeli (1993) applied the aforementioned equity theory and social comparison theory to research on burnout among nurses for the first time, and indicated that burnout is associated with the social exchange processes between

caregivers and recipients (Schaufeli, 2006). In the social relationship, individuals seek the balance between what they invest in the relationship and what they gain from it, as Schaufeli (2006:89) explicated: “The strong universal preference for reciprocal interpersonal relationships is deeply rooted since it may have fostered survival and reproductive success in our evolutionary past”. The rewards that human service workers seek in return in the helping relationships are more symbolic rather than material, for instance, improvements in recipients’ conditions, compliance with workers’ advices, or recipients’ gratitude for the workers’ efforts. On the organisational level, however, human service workers may seek material rewards, for example, higher salary or better work conditions. The social exchange theoretical perspective may provide a new insight into the nature of burnout (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Schaufeli, 2006).

Nevertheless, human service workers’ pursuit of reciprocity in helping relationships is slightly different from the social exchange process in daily life. In Marcel Mauss’s gift giving theory, which was originally published in French in 1925, reciprocity is constructed on three obligations: giving, receiving and reciprocating (Mauss, 2000). Giving is the fundamental means to create or maintain social relationships, and receiving decides whether the social bond is accepted or rejected (Mauss, 2000). In this study, giving can be a social worker’s effort into a client’s well-being rather than a material gift. Mauss’s gift giving theory accentuates the reciprocity that is generated by interactions between two parties, which is different from Schaufeli’s social exchange model that accentuates an individual’s perceived reciprocity generated by the perceived balance between inputs and outcomes.

Despite divergent motivation of giving or investing, this study argues that a new theoretical framework of the social exchange model can be established by adapting the three obligations of Mauss’s gift giving theory, which reinforces analysis of how individuals perceive reciprocity. Expressly, the obligation of receiving should also be evaluated in individuals’ perceptions, as the significance of obligation of accepting a gift is as important as giving.

As pointed out above, the notion of reciprocity should not be understood as an agreement between two equal parties, as a formal helping relationship is

established in the structure of power and control to either improve the person's life condition or prevent deterioration (Skau, 2007:30), and the helping relationships are usually based on power imbalance, particularly in governmental agencies (Beckett & Maynard, 2005:131). Social workers working in governmental departments or undertaking programmes of the government usually encounter the challenge of the dual role (Trotter, 2006:3): the legalistic role - keeper of public order, and the helping role – provider of public service (Lipsky, 2010:4). Both roles entitle social workers to the knowledge and control of social resources and regulations, which features the power imbalance in helping relationships (Skau, 2007:37), as social workers' control over desirable benefits and capacity to deny benefits can result in compliance (Lipsky, 2010:57). In summary, this power imbalance may affect the characteristic of helping relationships. Despite this feature of power imbalance in helping relationships, social caseworkers can still seek perceived reciprocity, as reciprocity is a fundamental property of a balanced social relationship, and vital to an individual's health and well-being (Schaufeli, 2006:89). This tends to be omitted, because social workers as the professional helper, their personal emotions and vulnerabilities are not in focus when interacting with clients (Skau, 2007:58).

The modified theoretical framework of social exchange model in this study is established on that a human service worker's perceived reciprocity is generated by the worker's perceived balance between investing and rewarding, and how the worker subjectively perceive reciprocity is constructed on three steps: investing, accepting, and rewarding. Investing is regarded as the foremost means to create or maintain a helping relationship or a work contract between the worker and the client. Accepting represents that the worker perceives that his/her investment is accepted by the client, which determines whether the helping relationship can be established or the work contract is valid. Eventually, built on the basis of accepting the investment, rewarding represents the response to the accepted investment. The three-step reciprocity applies to interpersonal and organisational aspects, which the theoretical models are presented respectively in figure 1 and 2, and will be elaborated in the following sections.

Figure 1. Reciprocity on the interpersonal level in the modified social exchange model

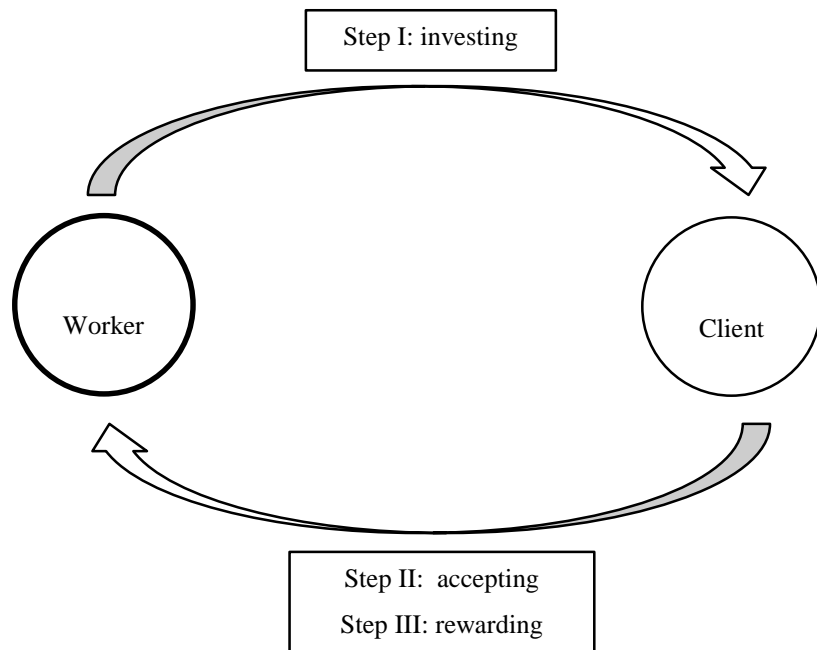
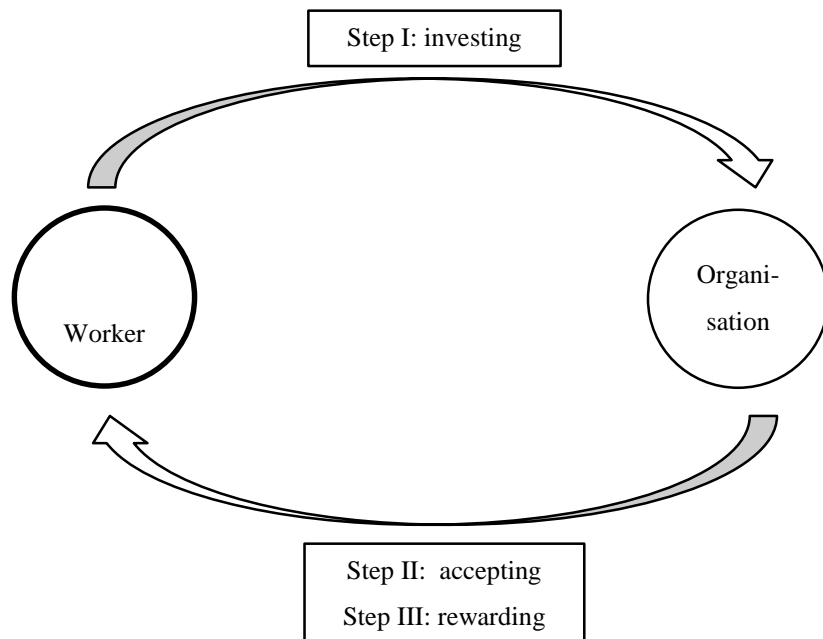


Figure 2. Reciprocity on the organisational level in the modified social exchange model



4.1.1 The interpersonal level

Schaufeli (2006) pointed out that professionals in human services seek rewards in return for the efforts they have invested in the helping relationship with the recipients. The rewards that human service workers seek in return are more symbolic rather than material. The rewards could be implicit such as improvements in recipients' conditions, compliance with workers' advices, or explicit such as recipients' gratitude for the workers' efforts. If workers fail to gain proportional rewards, perceived lack of reciprocity appears. Buunk and Schaufeli (1993) claimed that all three dimensions of burnout are related to lack of reciprocity. In an unbalanced helping relationship, a professional's emotional energy is drained, which results in the first dimension of burnout – emotional exhaustion. In response to emotional exhaustion, the professional diminishes investments in the relationship to restore reciprocity. Tellingly, the action that the professional withdraws psychologically from the recipient describes the second dimension of burnout – depersonalisation. Consequently, the indifferent and cynical approach leads to a deteriorated helping relationship, subsequently generates a feeling of incompetence, which depicts the last dimension of burnout – reduced personal accomplishment.

4.1.2 The organisational level

In a similar vein, Schaufeli (2006:90) suggested that employees have expectations of the exchange between themselves and their organisations, called a psychological contract. From an employee's subjective perspective, reciprocity on the organisational level represents that the employee should gain proportional rewards from the organisation based on his/her inputs. The imbalance between inputs (i.e., time and effort) and rewards from the organisation (i.e., benefit and salary) may result in emotional and physical exhaustion. In response to the depletion, the employee tends to either increase his/her own outcomes (illegitimate absenteeism) or decrease his/her inputs (reduced commitment, absentness, turnover), which is regarded as an approach to restoring reciprocity (Schaufeli, 2006:91).

4.1.3 Work overload

In the job demand – resource model (JD-R), the concept of work overload refers to excessive job demands and insufficient time and job resources (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). From an objective perspective, Maslach and Leiter (2004) explicated that excessive workload depletes an employee's capacity to meet the job demands, which may lead to exhaustion. The employee may not experience job burnout if the acute fatigue results from occasional work overload such as deadlines or crises, which the employee may recover after a rest. Nevertheless, a rest cannot help the employee to recover when work overload is a chronic situation, which may eventually result in job burnout.

In the modified social exchange model, employees consciously strive for the balance between inputs and outcomes, and a perceived work overload represents a threat to achieve reciprocity. Additionally, perceived chronic work overload makes employees struggle to put efforts to work, as the experiences of work overload suggest a consequence of lack of proportional outcomes. When the employees foresee a lack of reciprocity, the motivation to put efforts to work diminishes.

4.1.4 Job control

The concept of job control is derived from the demand – control model (DC model), which was part of Robert Karasek's sociology doctoral work in 1979 (Landy & Conte, 2009:413). In the DC model, job demand and job control are two factors to work stress, and job control is defined as the combination of job autonomy and discretion. Maslach and Leiter (2004:162) supplemented that job control also represents the access to the resources to do an effective job. The DC model proposes the combination of different degrees of job demands and job control generates four features of jobs. Jobs with high job demands and low job control are characterized as high-strain jobs which may lead to health problems. Jobs with high job demands and sufficient job control are considered as active jobs, which are stimulating and health promoting. The combination of low job demands and low job control is characterized as the passive job, and jobs with low job demands and high job control are labelled as low-strain jobs.

The DC model highlighted that jobs with high job demands are not necessarily subject to work stress if the employees have sufficient control over their work. O’Driscoll and Brough (2010:65) asserted that excessive high job demands foster an employee’s anxiety about job performance and work accomplishment within a certain time frame. In this situation, job control (job autonomy or discretion) is significant to buffer the anxiety. Additionally, the ability to exert control is regarded as a fundamental need to self-fulfilment, as the feeling of incompetence is generated if one lacked control of the environment.

In the modified social exchange model, perceived job control includes perceived job autonomy, job discretion, and the access to the resources to do an efficient work. Under the circumstances of high demands of inputs, an employee’s perceived job control represents a means to reach balance between inputs and outcomes, and eventually to achieve reciprocity. As such, perceived lack of job control suggests an uncertainty of reciprocity.

4.1.5 Value conflicts

Graeber (2001:1) elaborated the concept of value from a sociological perspective: “conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life”. In the work context, value refers to the original intentions and motivations that an employee has towards the specific job. Both interpretations of value highlight the significance of expectations. Maslach and Leiter (2004:165) purposed: “when there is a values conflict on the job, and thus a gap between individual and organisational values, workers will find themselves making a trade-off between work they want to do and work they have to do”. In other cases, an employee’s aspirations for the career may disaccord with the organisation’s values. An employee may also be distressed when there is conflicting values between the purpose and the actual practice of a project.

In the modified social exchange model, value conflicts may contribute to either perceived lack of reciprocity or perceived lack of desired reciprocity. In general, an employee puts efforts to the work with his/her own values, which includes specific expectations towards the outcomes. When the employee’s values disaccord with the client’s or the organisation’s values, the employee may not

gain the desirable rewards (perceived lack of desired reciprocity) or any rewards (perceived lack of reciprocity) in return.

5. Methodology

Job burnout has been researched in both quantitative and qualitative studies. In quantitative studies, different inventories and surveys have been used to figure out correlations between different variables. In qualitative studies, interviews and observations have been used to investigate the causes and consequences of job burnout from respondents' and researchers' perspectives.

To gain new information and to understand the experience and subjective understanding of job burnout from different angles, this study chose to use the combination of visual method and interview, also called photo-elicitation in interviews or participatory photo interview (Kolb, 2008; Lapenta, 2011). The usage of this method is inspired by Paulo Freire's research on the exploitation among street children in Brazil, in which one photograph opens the discussions about institutionalized exploitation in Peruvian barrio (Babbie, 2013:414). In this study, setting out from social caseworkers' perspective, the respondents were asked to take photos that represent or help to explain their experience.

5.1 Visual social research method

The origin and nature of the visual social research method is considered as a continuum, which consists of two extremes - found materials of unknown origin and researcher-generated visuals (Pauwels, 2011:7). The usage of visual material becomes popular in social science (Bryman, 2012:546), and the visual social research method used in this study is "respondent-generated imagery". The researcher gives the basic instruction and prompts the respondents to produce visual material within the research context. The visual output along with self-portrayals generated by the respondents are then analysed by the researcher, which eventually will be the research output (Pauwels, 2011:7-8). Different from most visual social research, the referent of this study is not a visual referent in the material world, but rather a conceptual representation of a phenomenon – job burnout. Visual sociology is a cross-cutting field of inquiry and a sociological method to conceptualize and present ideas, even though it may seem to be a novel method in the social work field (Pauwels, 2011:19).

5.2 Participatory photo-interview method

The originators of the photo interview method are considered as sociologist Douglas Harper in 1987 and anthropologist John Collier in 1991. Both used photos taken by professional photographers or researchers, as a tool when interviewing their research targets (Kolb, 2008). Subsequently, a participatory approach of the photo interview method was used by Ulf Wuggenig in his sociology study as he gave the research targets, who were also the interviewees, instant cameras to take photos (Kolb, 2008).

There are two reasons in using participatory photo interview method in this study. Firstly, the respondent-generated materials produced by using this method can offer an insider perspective within the social and cultural context (Kolb, 2008; Pauwels, 2011:8). Maslach pointed out that different occupations may experience job burnout differently (Friberg, 2009:544), and the method used in this study aims to present job burnout from social caseworkers' perspective. Secondly, this method may present job burnout in a novel fashion that complements to the barrier of language and makes it clearer to understand within its cultural and societal context.

5.2.1 Phases of participatory photo interview method

Kolb (2008) suggests four phases when conducting participatory photo interview method in a research. The process of this study can be examined through the four phases as followed.

1. Opening phase

I invited potential respondents to start the cognitive process of interpreting the research questions and considering how to take photos that could reflect their experiences and ideas to the research questions (Kolb, 2008). The introduction paper and photo shooting guide (see appendix 3) were delivered to the respondents to explain the research purpose and questions. In this study, the recruitment of respondents occurred also in the opening phase, as the potential

respondents decided to participate in the research or not after reading the introduction and the photo shooting guide.

2. Active photo shooting phase

In the active photo shooting phase, respondents should take photos to reflect their experience and ideas to the research questions in their social and material surroundings (Kolb, 2008). In this study, every respondent conducted the active photo shooting phase in five working days without any control or influence from me. The respondents decided what, when and how to take the photos as long as the photos reflected on the research purpose – “how do social caseworkers perceive work exhaustion?”

In order to guide the respondents to reflect on the research purpose, two descriptive photo shooting guides were given – “Take photos which from your perspective represent work exhaustion” and “Take photos which from your perspective associate with work exhaustion”. This study assumed that not all the respondents had experienced job burnout during their social casework careers, therefore, the verb “associate with” was used instead of “experience”. Furthermore, the respondents were asked to take photos that reflected their experience or ideas of the opposite of work exhaustion, as another way to approach and analyse the concept.

The type of camera used in a research depends on the cultural setting (Kolb, 2008). The ubiquity of smart phones in Taiwan makes it easier for people to take photos. Therefore, I offered digital cameras, but asked if the respondents preferred to use their own smart phones to take photos. Every respondent in this study preferred to use his or her smart phone.

3. Decoding phase

I conducted the photo interviews with the respondents individually. Every respondent played the expert role when explaining his or her photos and verbalized his or her reflections based on the photos he/she took. In order to decode the photos and interviews systematically, I designed a photo interview guide (see appendix 4), which focuses on the research questions in this study. An

interview began with the story of the photos taken, and then extended to the interviewee's general experience or idea of work exhaustion in his/her social work career. The interview may complement the relatively short photo shooting phase and capture the respondents' understandings of work exhaustion. Every interview took approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and took place one to two days after the active photo shooting phase, so that the respondents could still remember the situation and feelings they had when they took the photos. Every interview was recorded and transcribed. The follow-up interviews were conducted with two of the respondents after the first interview sessions in order to confirm the interview materials from the first interview sessions.

4. Analytical scientific interpretation phase

Finally, I analysed all the collected data from the opening phase to the decoding phase, including respondent-generated photos, semi-structured interviews, and observation. The data analysis is elaborated in the subsequent section.

5.2.2 Data analysis and the trustworthiness

The participatory photo interview method generates two diverse types of research materials, the visual materials and the text material from interviews (Kolb, 2008:25). Kolb (2008:26) emphasized that every respondent-generated photo can be regarded as a respondent's approach to answering to the research questions, and these photos stimulate the subsequent interviews (Bryman, 2012:547). As such, this study is more talk-focus, concentrating on what the respondents want to say about the photo (Tinkler, 2014:149), and *how* the notion of work exhaustion is socially constructed by the respondents in their social and cultural environment. In this study, the process of photo interviews included also data analysis together with the respondents, which is called "a collaborative endeavour", and thus, the participatory photo interview can be a method for both data collecting and analysis (Jenkins, Woodward & Winter, 2008).

At the early stage of data analysis, I used qualitative content analysis to identify prominent themes of content in both photo and interview materials (Tinkler, 2014; Silverman, 2005:163). Content analysis is originally used to analyse written or

spoken texts (Rose, 2001:54), and can also be used to analyse photographs (Bryman, 2012:547). In this study, 16 respondent-generated photos were collected in total, which consisted of nine photos representing work exhaustion and seven photos representing the opposite of work exhaustion. Every photo was described and explained by the respondents in the interviews. Based on the description and the content of the photos, I categorized the photos into three themes, work exhaustion in interpersonal aspect, work exhaustion in organisational aspect, and the opposite of work exhaustion. Then, I used the codes derived from the theoretical framework of the modified social exchange model to complete the coding. Finally, the frequency of the codes appeared in the interview transcripts were counted before moving on to the next stage of data analysis.

Subsequently, to explore how the respondents perceive work exhaustion, I used narrative analysis to analyse the interview transcripts, which connected the content of photos with stories or incidents (Tinkler, 2014:133). Bryman (2012:582) stressed that narrative analysis concentrates on “how do people make sense of what happened and to what effect?”, and the modified social exchange model was used as a tool to assist narrative analysis.

Jacobsson (2008:166) suggested that when discussing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, it is critical to discuss the methodology’s strength and weaknesses, samplings, and a reasonable conclusion of the data, which are presented in the following sections. The trustworthiness of this study can be discussed in terms of credibility and transferability. The participatory photo interview is a multi-method which produces two sources of data in the study of work exhaustion, and Tinkler (2014:17) commented on this combined method: “a combination may also serve to cross-check findings – triangulation – and enhance the validity of the researcher's conclusions”. Bryman (2012:390, 392) suggested that triangulation is a technique to strengthen the credibility (internal validity) in a qualitative study. Nevertheless, it is challenging to ensure the transferability (external validity) of this study, as this study used small samples, and thus, as many qualitative studies, the findings cannot be generalized across social settings (Bryman, 2012:390).

5.2.3 Limitations of the method

The primary limitation of the method is that the qualitative material collected by the participatory photo interview method is the respondents' subjective interpretations. The findings of this study cannot apply to the general population of social caseworkers in Taiwan.

Another limitation is the limited period of time for the respondents to conduct the active photo shooting phase. Some respondents reflected that social caseworkers' working cycle is approximately one month. If the active photo shooting phase is prolonged to one month, the respondents can go through every work content, which may enrich both the visual and interview materials. However, the respondents who gave this reflection did express that one month would be a burden for social caseworkers to join the research, since social caseworkers are packed with work every day. I argue that if the active photo shooting phase lasts one month, the possibility to recruit sufficient respondents would be relatively low. Additionally, the quality of the data would be affected, as the respondents reflected, the active photo shooting phase required their active awareness to their own emotional and physical conditions, which was not easy when they were occupied by work.

5.2.4 Advantages of the method

The usage of the participatory photo interview method has the advantage that the respondents were given five working days to observe their own work content and their physical and emotional conditions. These five working days offered the respondents an opportunity to recall their work experiences and to organise their own reflections in their social casework careers. The five working days served as the fundamental preparation and the cognitive process in order to produce more insightful and in-depth data for the subsequent interview sessions, which enriched both photo and interview materials, comparing with using only interview method (Tinkler, 2014:151). Additionally, this method encourages respondents to express their views in a natural and non-judgmental approach, which may be difficult to achieve the same effect if the study only uses the interview method.

5.2.5 Translation difficulties

As mentioned in the introduction, there is no agreed translation for the English word “burnout” in Mandarin, and thus, I chose to use the translation that is closest to the term “job burnout”. The Chinese term used in this study is *gōng zuò hào jié*, which is the Chinese term used in other academic research on job burnout in Taiwan, and can be translated to work exhaustion or depletion. Other translation difficulties occurred in the phase of transcribing interview materials. The phrases and terms that the respondents used has the culture and language background. Thus, I chose to use literal translation instead of transliteration.

5.3 Sampling

This study used linear snowball sampling (Bryman, 2012:424), which is an efficient approach to finding potential respondents as one social caseworker recommends another social caseworker who is qualified to participate in the research. However, one drawback of the non-probability purposive sampling approach is that the generated data could not apply to the general population in the research (Bryman, 2012:201-202). The sampling method fits well in the current study because of limited time, financial and contact resources in Taiwan. The number of respondents was aimed to be six to eight, considering the richness and quality of data I could collect within the limited time. Eventually, six respondents in total participated this research (see table 2).

Table 2. The respondents

Respondent	Gender	Work context	Work experience in social casework
Andy	Male	Child and adolescent protection (City government)	8 years 5 months
Bella	Female	High-risk family programme (NGO A)	2 years 2 months
Cindy	Female	High-risk family programme (NGO A)	1 years 7 months
Denise	Female	High-risk family programme (NGO A)	1 years 6 months
Emily	Female	High-risk family programme (NGO A)	8 months
Fanny	Female	High-risk family programme (NGO B)	6 months

All respondents in this study possess a diploma of bachelor degree in social work, and have worked as a social caseworker in the field of child and adolescent protection at least six months, which is their first social work job. Five respondents work with the high-risk family programme in NGOs, and they are all permanent employed by the NGOs. One respondent works with child and adolescent protection social work as a contract employee under the city government.

One potential drawback of the sampling is that four respondents are from the same organisation, which may diminish the diversity of the data, particularly on the second research question – “how do social caseworkers perceive work exhaustion in relation to the organisational culture?” Likewise, despite the fact that social caseworkers in NGO A, NGO B, and the city government all work with in the field of child and adolescent protection social work, the work content, work objects and caseload vary between the secondary prevention work – social casework in the high-risk family programme and the third prevention work – social casework in child and adolescent protection. The fact that only one respondent in the sampling works under the city government may have an impact on the data.

5.4 Ethical considerations

The importance of ethical considerations is emphasized in this study not only to protect the respondents who joined the study, but also to secure other people who may be taken photo by the respondents. The transparency, self-determination, confidentiality, and autonomy regulations are specifically highlighted in this study (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).

The transparency requirement: The participants were informed with the research purpose and method during the recruitment. In order to protect participants' interests and ensure that they understand the research process, participants were asked to sign the approval paper, which was written with the research purpose, method, and usage of material of the research, and participants related interests. The interview sessions started after obtaining the participants' consent.

The self-determination requirement: The participants had the right to join the research and the right to discontinue the photo shooting activity or the interview.

The confidentiality requirement: The participants are guaranteed the anonymity regarding the usage and presentation of the photo and interview materials in the research. The recording of interviews had also obtained the participants consent. All respondents' names are anonymous by English names in the study. Additionally, the participants were particularly asked to keep the anonymity of the people who would be in the photos. The photos presented in this research had obtained consent of both the respondents and the people in the photo.

The autonomy requirement: The participants are guaranteed that the material gathered in the research would be used only in this thesis.

6. Results and Analysis

This chapter presents empirical data collected from the active photo shooting and the subsequent interview sessions. Table 3 and appendix 5 provide an overview of the visual data, which consists of nine respondent-generated photos representing work exhaustion and seven respondent-generated photos representing the opposite of work exhaustion (or what could be described as satisfaction at work). The in-depth interviews were constructed around the specific themes or issues captured in the photos. The interview data consists of six individual interview sessions after the active photo shooting phase, and two follow-up interviews to confirm data.

Table 3. Visual data

Respondent	Work exhaustion	Satisfaction at work
Andy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A corner of casework documentation and the Work Guidebook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lunch time at the office
Bella	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The telephone with decorations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing casework documentation of a progressive case
Cindy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorming for a client • The dying mint plant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure time and hobbies
Denise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My motorcycle in a rainy day • Waiting for my client in front of a fast food store • The old building and the welfare system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sunny day at work • An active case termination
Emily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cloudy day and my mood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An inspiring card from my schoolmate
Fanny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My messy desk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The external supervision

As we shall see, the results render that respondents have different understandings of work exhaustion based on their unique work experiences. In this study, respondents interpret work exhaustion as work stress, frustration at work, helplessness, lacking job satisfaction, and feeling depressed at work. Factors that respondents associate with work exhaustion are work overload, value conflicts, and poor work conditions. As for satisfaction at work, respondents interpret even

more diversely, and it is perceived as either coping strategies to work exhaustion or original aspirations to the job where energy comes from.

Despite the variety of understandings, the results can be roughly categorized into two aspects: work exhaustion related to interpersonal relations or related to organisational contexts. From the interpersonal aspect, the results show that the nature and content of social casework may attribute to work exhaustion. This unique type of work exhaustion is contextually generated within the interpersonally demanding social casework. From the organisational aspect, work exhaustion seems to be more commonly seen in many different occupations.

The first section of the analysis discusses work exhaustion in interpersonal contexts. Respondents noted different factors in the interpersonal aspect fostering work exhaustion: lack of reciprocity, lack of control to complete the work, and working when values are different. The modified social exchange model is used in this section to analyse how a perceived imbalance between investment and rewards in helping relationships relates to work exhaustion. The second section discusses work exhaustion related to organisational contexts. Respondents reflected factors in the organisational aspect resulting in work exhaustion such as lack of reciprocity, work overload, and value conflicts. The modified social exchange model is used in this section to analyse how the respondents perceived work exhaustion when there was a perceived imbalance between their inputs and rewards from their organisations. The last section discusses how respondents understood satisfaction at work from the notion of work exhaustion, which assists in giving insight to how the respondents perceived work exhaustion.

6.1 Work exhaustion related to interpersonal relations

The results render that respondents' understanding of work exhaustion highly relates to the nature of social casework – demanding interpersonal relations with clients at work. The fact that social caseworkers are subject to work exhaustion seems to be ascribed to that social casework does “people work”, which includes occupations such as teachers, and nurses. The demanding interpersonal relations of human service professionals with their clients has been pointed out in other

studies as the main cause of burnout (Maslach, 1993:17). As the front line of social work, social caseworkers have to take first and direct contact with the unprivileged group, which includes involuntary and welfare dependent clients, who are usually not highly motivated or even resistant to cooperate with social caseworkers. Additionally, it is inevitable that social caseworkers have to work with the clients that may not share the same values and goals. Under both circumstances, social caseworkers may perceive lack of control to the work, as half of the efforts and decisions depend on their clients.

6.1.1 Lack of perceived reciprocity on the interpersonal level

In this study, half of the respondents specifically pointed out how the perceived lack of reciprocity related to their perception of work exhaustion, the rest of the respondents only briefly mentioned that lack of perceived reciprocity on the interpersonal level did happen in their social casework careers. It is difficult to explain this difference in this study. Nonetheless, one potential explanation is that the respondents valued every factor to work exhaustion differently depending on what they had experienced in their social casework careers.

Bella has worked as a social caseworker with the high-risk family programme in the NGO A for 2 years and 2 months. Figure 3 shows her interpretation of work exhaustion, which represents *the frustration side of the job*. The story behind the photo is that Bella just finished a 1.5-hour long conversation on the phone with a client, whom Bella described as lacking competence and unwilling to accept suggestions from others. Bella stated that this particular client often did not keep her promises to Bella, which did not help the case to progress. During the interview, Bella expressed her frustration:

I spent lots of time on this client, and visited her even more frequently than other clients, but I have not seen any effect on her. I cannot feel any sense of achievement in this situation.



Figure 3. The telephone with decorations

Bella described the situation as *emotional exhaustion*. Bella had to hide her irritation and find solutions to change this client's mind on the phone although she knew already that situation would remain the same. Bella explained the photo to me that she put a decoration of grass horse to represent her irritation, because the grass horse in Mandarin is pronounced similarly to a swear word in Taiwanese (a dialect in Taiwan). Both decorations posed lying and facing down, expressing how Bella felt emotionally and physically after the phone call. Bella emphasized: "I can handle the situation if there is only one client like this. I don't think I can continue the job if there are lots of clients like this". This view was echoed by two other respondents, Emily and Cindy. Emily has worked as a social caseworker with the high-risk family programme in the NGO A for eight months, and she said:

Some clients were not motivated and ignored the housework instructor that we (NGO A) offered. Even the children took it (my efforts) for granted. I have done that much, yet there is no changing. Then I cannot find the sense of achievement.

In summary, both Bella and Emily described how the perceived lack of reciprocity at the interpersonal level may foster work exhaustion. Firstly, Bella and Emily emphasized what they had invested in their clients. Bella expressed how much more efforts, time, visits and emotions she had invested in the specific client. Emily named the service she offered to certain clients. Secondly, both Bella and Emily expressed disappointment that their expectations were not fulfilled, and they did not receive any rewards from their clients based on what they had invested. Bella did not see improvement on the client, and Emily felt that the indifferent attitudes from certain clients. Ultimately, the imbalance between investing and rewarding generates lack of reciprocity in helping relationships.

This lack of reciprocity depleted Bella's emotional and physical energy, because she identified the situation as emotional exhaustion. As Buuk and Schaufeli (1993) propose, Bella had the action of restoring reciprocity, as Bella showed depersonalisation when she deliberately put the decorations on the phone to highlight her anger.

In this section, one noteworthy issue is that both Bella and Emily sought reciprocity when investing in helping relationships with their clients. This expectation of reciprocity is constructed on two conditions from the clients' perspective: firstly, clients must accept the helping relations or work contracts with social caseworker – accepting; secondly, clients must change or at least show gratitude to the service – rewarding. To generate reciprocity, two questions emerge.

Firstly, why must clients accept the helping relations or work contracts? This question is particularly important when it comes to involuntary clients, which is not a minority in the field of child and adolescent protection work, especially prevention programme such as high-risk family. Social caseworkers in child and adolescent protection work has a complex role (Hu, 2013), and Trotter (2006: 68) suggested that it is vital to obtain a right balance between the legalistic and helping roles in child protection work. Although high-risk family programme is emphasized as a critical prevention work in child and adolescent protection, social caseworkers working with high-risk family programme have a relatively ambiguous role definition. Since it is not mandatory for the families to cooperate with social caseworkers to do the investigation and to accept these services in high-risk family programme, the social caseworkers lack sufficient legalistic role when doing the work, which makes it even more challenging to work with involuntary clients. Lipsky (2010:57) suggested that without the coercive role, which entitles social caseworkers the power to resources and regulations, the clients cooperate only when they perceive that cooperation would be beneficial to themselves, or dissent would be unproductive. As such, the power relation may affect how helping relationships develop.

Secondly, why are clients' improvement and gratitude important to social caseworkers? Social work profession differs from its origin as a charity work,

where the giving is unconditional. On the contrary, with the legalistic and helping roles, social workers do value clients' improvement and gratitude (Lipsky, 2010:58). In Emily's case, Emily perceived that her investment went in vain, since it was "ignored" by the clients, and she got indifferent attitudes such as "ignorance" and "taken for granted", instead of accepting or gratitude from the clients. Additionally, both Bella and Emily concluded the situation as lacking a "sense of achievement". In summary, perceived reciprocity is fundamental to either recognize the respondents' work performance and efforts or fulfil the respondents' aspirations to the job. Lipsky (2010:59) suggested: "The relationship is primarily determined by the priorities and preferences of street-level bureaucrats, but the character and terms of the relationship are substantially affected by the limits of the job", despite the power social caseworkers may have, the helping relationships are affected by the limited legalistic role that social caseworkers have in high-risk family programme.

The discussion above plausibly points out the problem of the modified social exchange model in this study. The modified social exchange model focuses exclusively on social caseworkers' perspective, that is, how the notion of work exhaustion is constructed by social caseworkers' *subjective* perceptions. To capture an *objective* understanding of how work exhaustion is constructed, it is necessary to include clients' perspective and the power and control relations in helping relationships.

When discussing work satisfaction, Bella reflected perceived reciprocity at the interpersonal level in the photo and interview data. Bella defined work satisfaction: "I see hopes in these families and room for improvement. These families are willing to change, and the fact that they have changed spurs me to engage more to the work". In accordance with the photo that Bella took after visiting a client, Bella described the photo: "I can feel that the family (client) tries to solve problems at home actively, because they made much progress based on what I asked them to do in the last meeting". Bella's statement suggested reciprocity from her perception: "They (clients) receive the subsidy and we (social caseworkers) gain joyful work experiences".

In Bella's story, the balance between investing and rewarding in the helping relationship is emphasized. Bella stressed on two actions: the confirmation of accepting, and the desirable and proportional rewarding, as Bella stated: "they made much progress based on what I asked them to do in the last meeting". On one hand, the desirable and proportional rewarding is an extrinsic outcome – improvement, based on what Bella had invested. On the other hand, the desirable reward represents intrinsic outcome – recognition to Bella's efforts and job performance. The result of perceived reciprocity is a positive stimulation, which encourages Bella to invest more in this helping relationship, which may be intrinsic self-fulfilment or extrinsic work dedication.

6.1.2 Working when values and goals are different

To analyse the aforementioned cases, perceived lack of reciprocity in helping relationships seems to occur, particularly when social caseworkers work with involuntary or welfare dependent clients. These clients are usually less motivated or even resistant to change, and thus may not share the same values and goals when working with social caseworkers. It is noteworthy to mention that all three respondents, who reflected that the perceived lack of reciprocity as an issue, agree that value conflicts is also related to their perception of job burnout.

Bella used the word "frustration" to describe her feeling when she had to work with clients who may not share the same values and goals with her. Bella remarked:

I used to think that one thing can only be judged as right or wrong. However, two-year work experience has made me realized that I was wrong, and I should try to consider some things as "different". This is *depleting my energy*. I keep trying to adjust my values and to persuade myself that this work *can only reach so high quality*.

Emily revealed similarly that the most challenging issue at work is when she worked with involuntary clients. Emily emphasized the importance of building relations with clients to collect information needed for social casework, which could be difficult when it comes to involuntary clients. Emily explained:

Some clients cannot accept us (social workers) and block me outside of the door from visiting. Sometimes I was insulted. It is an *emotional stress*. [...] In order to complete my work, I have to force myself to do things that I don't like to do. It conflicts with my personality and values.

Both Bella and Emily agreed that it is more challenging to do their work when clients do not share the same values and goals, especially involuntary and welfare dependent clients. The situation is described as “depleting energy” and “emotional stress”. To solve value conflicts, Emily discarded her values in order to complete the work, and Bella tried to put her expectations in line with the clients', and convinced herself to accept the reduced personal accomplishment. From an alternative perspective, to avoid perceived lack of reciprocity, Bella adjusted her values and lowered her expectations, which made it easier to gain certain outcomes. As such, Bella's desirable outcome is as easy as making the clients to work with her, which may eventually help in completing the work.

Tellingly, one feature of social work is the interpersonally demanding aspect, as social workers primarily work with individuals with different backgrounds rather than documents or projects. It is inevitable that social workers have to work with clients who have different values. This value conflict may hinder helping relationships from establishing, which suggests that social caseworkers may perceive a lack of reciprocity or a lack of desirable reciprocity. This study argues that conflicts lie not only between a client's value and a social caseworker's value, but also between the value of helping and the value of client self-determination. The latter points out the contradiction when it comes to involuntary clients. Social caseworkers are assigned to help even involuntary clients; meanwhile, social caseworkers should adhere to the principle of client self-determination. Consequently, this contradiction puts social caseworkers in a distressing dilemma (Maslach & Leiter, 2004), and Lipsky (2010) suggested the potential explanation is that street-level bureaucrats have insufficient resources to obtain client compliance.

6.1.3 Depersonalisation resulting from chronic lack of reciprocity and value conflicts

This section presents Cindy's reflection, which is a combination of the previous two aspects of work exhaustion – perceived lack of reciprocity and value conflicts. Cindy has worked as a social caseworker with the high-risk family programme in the NGO A for one year and seven months. She chose to be a social worker because she has a sense of justice and likes to help people. She asserted that she would be a social worker for her whole life.

Cindy stated that she has never experienced work exhaustion so far, instead, she has experienced a moment when affected by her clients and felt down. Three months after starting the job, Cindy had a case which irritated her and affected her the most. This client was a single parent who needed help to find a kindergarten for her child. Cindy gave the client the contact of a kindergarten. After the client had talked with the manager in the kindergarten, the manager called Cindy and asked for some information about the client. Then both the manager and Cindy realized that the client lied to them. Consequently, the client's child did not get admitted to this kindergarten. The client was upset and blamed Cindy for not being helpful when talking with the manager of the kindergarten. Cindy described:

This client had a really bad attitude when she talked with me. It was irritating to be doubted by a person you did not like. At that time, I often asked my supervisor if I could terminate this case, and of course I could not. It was a period of time that I felt *helpless* when working. I had tried many methods and I was doing the same thing every month. The result remained the same.

Similar to Bella and Emily, Cindy perceived a lack of reciprocity in this particular case that she shared during the interview. Noticeably, Cindy chose to withdraw from the helping relationship with this client, and developed a depersonalised attitude toward this client. It seems that Cindy had so strong depersonalisation that she did not care about her personal accomplishment at work and wanted to terminate this case as soon as possible.

During the interview, Cindy concluded that there were two reasons why it was a painful experience. On one hand, she had worked only three months, and she did not know that it usually takes at least a half year to recognize any changes on clients. Expressly, Cindy had excessive expectations towards her work performance and this client's situation. On the other hand, Cindy revealed that she had too much self-projection on this client, which hindered her from generating empathy for the client. Cindy explained:

I cannot stand welfare dependent clients. I grew up also in a single parent family, and why cannot you (clients) help yourself more? [...] When I just started the job, I would compare my clients with myself. Sometimes they (clients) would disappoint me.

When I asked Cindy how she discovered this obstacle, Cindy replied:

When I discussed this case with my manager at work, I could not conceal my emotion. My supervisor advised me to empathize with the client so that I could build up a relationship with the client. But I would get emotionally injured if I empathized with the client. There was a fire of anger in my heart. If I empathized with the client, someone would have to empathize with me.

To solve the problem, Cindy tried to let go her self-projection, and similar situations did not happen lately. Cindy remarked: "If I do not let it go, then I am abusing myself when facing these clients. I am getting used to accepting the fact that clients are like this in the high-risk family programme". Similarly, Cindy described how value conflicts affected her emotions and work abilities, and how she compromised with her personal values with the clients'. Cindy's example reflected on previous research that social workers are more vulnerable to job burnout when the relationship between social workers and clients are not reconciled (Kim, 1998). Nonetheless, in this particular case, Cindy's perception of work exhaustion did not exclusively relate to the unreconciled relationship between Cindy and her clients as Kim's study may indicate. This study argues that the modified social exchange model can provide more insights in Cindy's example. From the perspective of the modified social exchange model, the unreconciled relationship resulted from two factors – value conflicts and lack of reciprocity. Cindy had a strong personal value (self-projection) when she had

inputs in this helping relationship, and the value conflicts between Cindy and her clients made it more challenging for Cindy to perceive reciprocity/the desirable reciprocity. In summary, this study suggests that the modified social exchange model can provide insights into the process of work exhaustion and highlight the details, which the previous research could not achieve.

Cindy experienced this challenging case when she started the job only three months, and it seems that the supervisor was a supportive resource which helped Cindy to overcome the difficulty. An interesting contradiction can be identified in Cindy's story. Cindy said that she chose to be a social worker because she likes to help people, which means that she agrees with the philosophy of social work. However, she has difficulties in empathizing with single parent families because of her self-projection, and she expressed that such clients should stand on their own feet. This is maybe a single case on how self-projection contradicts with the philosophy of social work. As discussed previously, there is a contradiction between social work philosophy and certain clients who are low motivated or even welfare dependent.

6.1.4 Perceived lack of control to complete the work

Denise has worked as a social caseworker with the high-risk family programme in the NGO A for one year and six months. She took a photo to represent her *feeling of helplessness* when she was forced to wait for a client who was late for the meeting in front of a fast food store. Denise explained: "I cannot control. [...] I have to coordinate my schedule to clients when doing this job. It could happen that my clients stand me up even if I have made appointments with them". Even though Denise got wet and cold from the rain, she still had to wait there. Denise had to visit and collect adequate information from this client in person so that she could submit the report within seven working days as regulated. Denise explained how the lack of control affecting her work performance:

The government sets the regulation that social workers have to visit clients at least once a month. However, during summer and winter vacations, it is difficult to reach the parents and I cannot go to school to visit the children as usual. It

does not depend only on me if the goal (visiting every client once a month) can achieve. It involves also my clients.

Fanny, who has worked as a social caseworker with the high-risk family programme in the NGO B for six months, reflected a similar situation that sometimes she has to visit clients after work around 8 or 9 o'clock at night due to her clients usually work or go to school during daytime.

According Denise and Fanny's description, social casework is characterised as a high-strain job, which is a combination of high job demands and low job control. High job demands reflect on that social casework has an intense time frame on visiting clients and casework documentation. Furthermore, social casework requires high mobility, as social caseworkers have to visit clients in different places rather than meet clients in the offices. The perceived lack of job control that Denise and Fanny referred to is a lack of access to the resources needed to do efficient work, rather than job autonomy and discretion. Denise's statement suggests that perceived lack of job control poses an uncertainty of completing the work, which affects one's emotion. In the modified social exchange model, this perceived lack of job control represents an uncertainty of reciprocity. Denise described this perceived lack of control as "a feeling of helplessness", which corresponds to what O'Driscoll and Brough (2010:65) proposed that the ability to use control is considered as a fundamental need to self-fulfilment. To clarify, the ability to use control can represent two kinds of control (O'Driscoll & Brough, 2010). One is what O'Driscoll and Brough proposed – the ability to control the situation and to exert skills in work. The other is to have the power to make decisions at work. This study suggests that Denise's feeling of helplessness is a combination of both kinds of lack of control – to control work situations and to make decisions at work.

In this section, the aforementioned issue is identified again – how much job control social caseworkers should perceive in order to do efficient work as social work emphasizes the importance of client self-determination? To summarize different challenges on the interpersonal level, social caseworkers are more subject to work exhaustion when working with involuntary clients with low motivations and different values.

6.2 Work exhaustion related to organisational contexts

Besides the interpersonal relations, the results render that respondents' perception of job burnout also relates to the following organisational factors – work overload, lack of perceived reciprocity, and value conflicts. All the respondents in this study agreed that work overload relates to job burnout. The situation of work overload could be acute or chronic which led to how the respondents perceived job burnout. One respondent reflected that her perception of work exhaustion relates to lack of reciprocity on the organisational level, as the respondent perceived a lack of proportional rewards from the organisation. The end of this section shows how value conflicts on the organisational level affects social caseworker perceive work exhaustion and eventually turnover intention.

6.2.1 Work overload

In this study, every respondent has mentioned that work overload relates to job burnout. This section presents the results of two respondents who chose the work overload as the theme of the photo representing how they perceived job burnout.

Andy is a senior social caseworker who has worked in the field of child and adolescent protection work in the city government for eight years and five months. Figure 4 presents Andy's understanding of work exhaustion, and he used the term "work stress" to express work exhaustion in the interview.



Figure 4. A corner of casework documentation and the Work Guidebook

Andy stated that the Work Guidebook regulates how child and adolescent protection social workers should do the social casework. For example, every contact with clients (including visits, conversation on the phone) has to be

recorded into casework documentation which should be submitted to the manager within a specific deadline. Andy explained the photo:

This is only one part of the casework documentation. [...] Every document is a pressure and the documents accumulate more and higher. On top of the casework documentation is the Work Guidebook, which is quite thin yet includes all principles that social caseworkers should follow when doing casework documentation below. [...] In my opinion, the Work Guidebook is the most stressful thing because social workers must follow rules in the book to do the work. As a matter of fact, it is impossible to follow the rules 100 % and complete the work. As a consequence, the work is accumulated.

Andy described how he was overwhelmed by the heavy documentary work, which seems to be a *chronic* situation because Andy revealed the fact that social caseworkers could not complete the work in the end. Furthermore, Andy noted that the stress came from the responsibility and obligation to work, and that social caseworkers must follow the rules.

Every document represents a life, which we (child and adolescent protection social workers) are responsible to protect.

Andy's comment reflected the reality that social caseworkers are not only accountable to managers and clients, but also society. Once something goes wrong with the casework and reported on the news, social caseworkers are the one that society blames on. The responsibility and obligation to casework may cause work stress, yet the indirect violence cause by other authorities and the media is additional invisible work stress (Liao, 2013)

Andy noted that another factor to work stress is insufficient human resources: "If there is sufficient human resources, every social caseworker do not have to undertake excessive cases. I have never had sufficient time at work. Some casework documentation takes me one working day". Andy's primary job is the child and adolescent protection work, including casework documentation and direct services. However, due to insufficient human resources and governmental policies, Andy has to do extra work – administrative work of child adoption. Andy stressed that the main source of work stress is the administrative work of

child adoption, which is not as important, yet usually is more regulated and time consuming, comparing with child and adolescent protection work. Andy stated:

It takes me one to two working days every week to do administrative work, which takes time away from my main task – child and adolescent protection casework. If there weren't the administrative work, the stress level would not increase so fast.

Based on Andy's reflection, the work overload has become a chronic situation, and he is aware how the work overload can foster work stress. Previous research suggested that the perceived work overload may diminish an employee's capacity to meet the job demand, which may lead to work exhaustion (Maslash & Leiter, 2004). Nevertheless, how can the process be understood from a sociological perspective? This study suggests that the modified social exchange model may provide an insight to the process, particularly when the perceived work overload is a chronic situation, which is a threat for an employee to achieve reciprocity.

The precondition in Andy's example is that, work exhaustion is a cognitive process which is predictable according to Andy. Andy was aware that the work overload would diminish the possibility to complete the work even if he had put efforts in the work, and work overload would also diminish the outcomes that Andy perceived. As a consequence, Andy failed to achieve the balance between inputs and outcomes, which leads to a lack of reciprocity. Maslash and Leiter (2004) suggested that an employee's capacity to meet the job demand is diminished when perceiving work overload. The modified social exchange model in this study provides an alternative perspective: an employee knows from the experience of work overload that the possibility to complete the work is low even if he/she put efforts into it. In order to avoid the situation of imbalance between inputs and outcomes, the employee might choose to put only some efforts into the work, and accept the fact that the work cannot be done by himself/herself.

It seems that the employee might avoid the situation of imbalance *this time*. Nevertheless, if the work overload has become a vicious cycle, and the employee lacks the autonomy to improve the situation, can the employee avoid the work exhaustion *ultimately*? To obtain a balance between inputs and outcomes, Andy

expressed his aspiration to sufficient human resources at work, which is beyond Andy's autonomy to improve the situation. Weng (1996) suggested that social workers' perception of job autonomy is one of the primary predictor of job burnout. Another research explicated that when the workload is high and job autonomy is low, social workers are vulnerable to job burnout (Kim, 1998). How is Andy's cognitive process of work exhaustion different from an unconscious work exhaustion when both are caused by work overload? The metaphor that Andy used to describe his understanding of work exhaustion may provide an insight:

It is like a swimming pool with dirty water. The clean water is filled in continually while the dirty water has not been drained away completely. The water is still dirty in the end, and I have to swim in this dirty water no matter what.

Again, Andy's definition to work exhaustion depicted an imbalance between inputs and outcomes in a chronic situation of work overload. Andy perceived continuously demand of inputs at work, while the outcomes that Andy perceived is comparatively insufficient, in which work exhaustion may occur. The last comment, "I have to swim in this dirty water no matter what", implied the frustration of lack of control in this familiar situation. Interestingly, four other respondents in this study shared similar views, as words such as helplessness and frustration were used to define work exhaustion.

Fanny, who has worked as a social caseworker in the high-risk family programme in the NGO B for six months, perceived work exhaustion in a similar way as Andy did. Fanny took a photo of her desk in the office to represent her understanding of work exhaustion (see figure 5). Fanny described the day when she took the photo:

In the morning, I got phone calls from three different authorities regarding one specific client, who receives many social resources. Therefore, I have much casework documentation to do because a phone call means a casework documentation. Meanwhile, I just got two new case reports, which I have to do home visits within 10 working days as regulated. It was a situation of new reports plus old casework. Besides, I have a group meeting report to write, and a

project to prepare for. In the afternoon I have to join a meeting. Heavy workload and messy.



Figure 5. Fanny's desk at the NGO B

I asked Fanny how it felt to have so many phone calls, and she replied: "It is an invisible *pressure* to me. Since I wouldn't know who is calling, I have to recall right away what I talked with the person last time. I have to remember lots of things and deal with different authorities". Fanny explained the photo that the computer screen shows the online system for high-risk family programme, where social caseworkers are required to record information within a specific deadline. In the system, all cases are classified with different levels. A case at the basic level, low crisis, requires the social caseworker to visit the client once a month and a telephone conversation every two weeks. Fanny said: "It seems not much. However, it is a heavy workload because I have 24 cases". The heavy workload affected Fanny's efficacy at work and the quality of work life, as Fanny expressed that sometimes, she has to bring her work back home to continue at night or on the weekends.

Despite the different length in work experience, both Andy and Fanny characterized work overload as high caseloads, intensive timeframe, trivial work, and much casework documentation. Work exhaustion results from a perceived imbalance between the continuing demand of inputs and the low coming of outcomes, which leads to a lack of reciprocity on the organisational level. Nevertheless, Andy and Fanny shared two different approaches to recovering from work exhaustion resulting from work overload.

Andy took a photo of the lunch time at office to represent his understanding of satisfaction at work – *the joy of work*. Andy explained that, on one hand, the joy of work comes from material things such as a cup of coffee or a chocolate bar,

which represent a relax moment without work. On the other hand, the joy of work comes from spiritual encouragement such as supervisor and co-workers' caring, and clients' gratitude, which gives him a positive energy to continue the work. Andy remarked that the joy of work helped him to control and cope with work stress, and eventually avoid the work exhaustion.

Based on Andy's reflection, on one hand, a sufficient period of rest time may help to restore and recover from the chronic situation of work overload. On the other hand, the social support and reciprocity in the helping relationships are the intangible rewards that Andy can regain energy from. Candies and coffee can be interpreted as rewards that Andy gave to himself.

Fanny took a photo of an external group supervision to represent her understanding of satisfaction at work. The external group supervision was held by the Department of Social Affairs, and the purpose is to gather social caseworkers working with programme of high-risk family to discuss the cases that are still not terminated after the 18- month deadline¹¹. Fanny said:

I didn't have to present any cases since I have only worked for six months. I didn't have to hand in any reports to my organisation either. I would feel stressful if I have to do any documentary work. I could concentrate on listening to other organisations' cases, which may be beneficial to solve some problems I have at work and give me different perspectives at work. It helped a lot.

I asked Fanny to clarify the reason why she chose an external supervision instead of an internal supervision. Fanny replied: "I prefer this specific external supervision. Even if I had an internal supervision within these five working days (during the active photo shooting phase), I wouldn't regard it as satisfaction at work, because it is my casework that is discussed during the internal supervision. What's more, I have to submit a report about the internal supervision afterwards".

Fanny perceived this specific external supervision as an opportunity to restore energy from the work overload and also a reward to balance her inputs. Besides, the external supervision represents growth and learning at work, which may play

¹¹ According to the regulation of high-risk family programme, the government would stop funding to the casework once the case has crossed the 18-month deadline.

an intrinsic motivational role in balancing the high demand of input and outcomes, and eventually buffers the perception of work exhaustion. Interestingly, Fanny regards an internal supervision as a demand of inputs. Emily shared a similar view, and commented that internal supervision is a source of support, but also can be a source of stress, particularly when social caseworker and supervisor have different opinions. Nevertheless, in the previous section, Cindy reflected that internal supervision was one of the resources she had to cope with work exhaustion. Denise commented that internal supervision helped the progress of her casework. The results show that social caseworkers perceive the function of internal supervision differently depending on the situation and personal experience.

6.2.2 Lack of perceived reciprocity on the organisational level

Fanny mentioned that a factor resulting in heavy workload was helping her co-worker. Fanny described it as a situation where a beginner tries to help a new beginner, because she had only six-month work experience and there were only two social caseworkers in NGO B. Fanny remarked:

If there are five new casework, the manager will give me three to four casework and one casework to my new co-worker. Since my new co-worker is not familiar with the work content, I have to go visit her clients with her, and discuss her cases. I have my own casework and I think my workload is quite heavy already. The maximum is 25-30 cases per social worker, and I have 24 cases now. The quality of casework would decrease if the number of cases increases.

As Fanny described herself as a beginner when helping another new beginner, it implies that helping her co-worker requires lots of inputs, which includes time, effort and also emotion. Nevertheless, Fanny did not perceive right proportion of rewards from the organisation, because Fanny did not perceive more job resources, salary, or human resources to help Fanny's own work. It indicates that from Fanny's subjective perspective, Fanny did not gain proportional rewards from the NGO B based on how much effort Fanny has put into the work; that is, there is a lack of perceived reciprocity at the organisational level. Fanny noted:

It is difficult for me to separate my work and my private time. [...] I choose to compensate the overtime work with compensatory time off, which I have to use within three months. [...] The welfare to social caseworkers in the organisation is not so good, and I think the organisation is not generous enough.

Other respondents in this study did not reflect similar views like Fanny's. However, regarding social caseworkers' welfare, Emily echoed with a similar comment that social caseworkers have a long working hour, while the salary is not relatively high.

6.2.3 Value conflicts on the organisational level

Over half of the respondents in this study reflected that value conflicts on the organisational level relates to work exhaustion. The results show that values conflicts between a social caseworker and the organisation/the welfare system may cause a consequence of lack of reciprocity or lack of desired reciprocity to social caseworkers, which relates to the work exhaustion.

Fanny mentioned that one factor to work exhaustion was the religious culture in NGO B. Fanny said when she was in the job interview, she respected the organisation's religious culture and did not think that it would affect her work as a social caseworker. However, Fanny said that the organisation "encouraged" their workers to join activities held by the priest, which take place every Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 8.30 to 9.00 and from 15.30 to 17.00. Fanny explained:

Managers in the organisation are Christians, but not my co-workers and I. The lights are usually turned off (when the religious activity starts), so I cannot really do anything at the office. If I do documentary work, the managers want me to join (the religious activity).

Fanny clarified that joining these religious activities is not meaningless because it brings positive influences sometimes. However, Fanny reflected that joining these religious activities has affected her work, because these activities are irrelevant to the social casework. Fanny stated: "It is a waste of time to join the religious activities when I have a lot to do at work. [...] Sometimes, my work was interrupted because I have to join extra unexpected religious activities. It affects

my work plan and takes up my work time”. I asked Fanny if she is required to join these scheduled or unexpected religious activities. Fanny replied: “Well, the organisation records how many times I have joined these religious activities on my monthly work evaluation, which is stressful”.

In this particular case, Fanny’s personal value to work conflicts with the organisation’s religious value. Fanny did not anticipate that the religious practice would be a part of the work, when she took the job, and the religious practice was definitely not the reason why Fanny was attracted to the job. Additionally, the religious practice requires Fanny’s inputs of time, which takes up Fanny’s time for the real work – social casework. The behaviour, that the NGO B records their workers’ attendance to the religious practice on the monthly work evaluation, generates a psychological distress for Fanny.

It is worthy to explore the organisational purpose of “encouraging” their workers to attend religious practice during working hours. Do those Christian managers perceive it as an extra demand of inputs as Fanny does? Or on the contrary, do they perceive it as supportive job rewards from the organisation? Is the attendance record on the monthly work evaluation utilized as a tool to examine the employees’ work performance or to check if the employees have sufficient social support? Interestingly, in this case, Fanny becomes the recipient of the gift, which she is encouraged to accept.

Denise reflected a similar view of how value conflicts on the organisational level relate to work exhaustion. Figure 6 presents the photo that Denise took to represent her feeling of *helplessness* when working as a social caseworker in a residual welfare system in Taiwan. The old building in the photo was where Denise had a meeting with the supervisor and the project undertaker from the city government. Denise described the photo: “The whole welfare system is like this old building, which is difficult to change unless someone tears it down. No matter how many times people have renovated it, it is still an old building”.



Figure 6. The old building

Denise noted that under this residual welfare system, the government takes measures only when problems emerge, and there are not many social resources to remedy. Denise commented:

The government wants social caseworkers to do their work without giving them any resources. For example, the high-risk family programme is a project to prevent child abuse. However, the government wants social caseworkers to intake only severe reports as cases. Other cases, which seem to be fine after the home visit, can be terminated (without further intervention), but there are still some problems in these cases. I don't understand what kind of standard the government has. [...] Sometimes, social caseworkers want to do the casework with a better quality, but the government would reject it and ask social caseworkers to terminate cases in hand as soon as possible.

Bella expressed similarly that the poor social work environment can lead to work exhaustion. Bella stated: "The city government does not have much resources. Still, the city government requires social caseworkers to do services at the same standard as other cities do". The central government regulates the maximum is 30 cases per social caseworker, and the government would stop funding a case once it has passed the 18-month deadline. Bella commented:

It is very difficult to maintain the quality of service when a social caseworker is asked to do 30 casework within about 20 working days every month. If a social caseworker can only do a little intervention to each client every month, the situation of casework is prone to regress, particularly in a city with insufficient resources.

In Denise's description, her helplessness resulted from a value conflict from the government – social caseworkers are asked to do prevention work without

sufficient resources. Additionally, both Denise and Bella were caught between conflicting values of the government – social caseworkers perceive a difference between the lofty project purpose and actual practice.

Bella said that fortunately, NGO A¹² increased the human resources in order to lower the amount of caseload from 30 to 20 cases per social caseworker. Nevertheless, Bella revealed that the city government usually assigns projects with a large number of cases in a short time, which causes distress to social caseworkers in NGO A. For instance, the government assigned NGO A to undertake 60 cases of national health care investigation with only names and addresses, which suggested that social workers could not make an appointment before visiting clients. Bella remarked: “Fortunately, NGO A recruited a new social worker to undertake the majority of national health care cases then. Still, each social caseworker had to undertake eight national health care cases besides 10-20 cases of high-risk family. [...] This affected our (social caseworkers’) work attitudes and everyone was going nuts”. Despite the fact that the manager in NGO A had reported to the government regarding the difficulties in undertaking such heavy workload, there was no solution. The social caseworkers still had to work overtime under that period of time, and took compensatory time off afterwards.

It seems that Bella perceived that NGO A shared the same value with her, and they had the same picture of outcomes in terms of social casework, that is – quality is more important than quantity. The approach that NGO A recruited additional social caseworkers was perceived as a support to social caseworkers to do an efficient work. With organisation’s support, social caseworkers could maintain their work accomplishment, which assists social caseworkers to achieve reciprocity and diminish perceived work exhaustion.

Denise gave a similar example of the value conflicts on the organisational level. The government regulates that social caseworkers should do visiting four times every month if the case is classified in high crisis, which is impossible to follow in Denise’s opinion:

¹² The city government entrusts the private sector (NGO A and NGO B in this study) high-risk family programme, and pays the NGOs the fee for a social caseworker who has to undertake 30 cases. For instance, if an NGO undertakes 120 cases, the city government pays totally four social caseworkers’ fee.

We (NGO A) have reported it to the city and central governments, and even the city government has also reported it to the central government. However, it is a system that no one can change. The situation is helpless. We (social caseworkers) work in the front line, but there is no use to report to the government about what we have seen. Those who work above us does not have practical work experiences and would not listen to us (social caseworkers).

Bella reflected similarly: “Those who enact the laws and regulations are scholars who do not do practical social work. They don’t know about the actual situation”. Denise was affected physically and emotionally by her unsatisfactory to the welfare system, which affects Denise’s perspective to new interventions. Denise revealed that she began to doubt the effect of new interventions, and then she lost the energy to work and had turnover intention.

Both Bella and Denise reflected that it is distressing for social caseworkers to do their work when those who enacts regulations does not have the same value with social caseworkers. Additionally, social caseworkers perceived a lack of control in their work when they had tried to voice and reflect the heavy caseload yet went in vein. Under the circumstances of value conflicts and lack of control, the possibilities to balance between inputs and outcomes are lower. The results relate to a previous study that when there is a value conflict between the lofty project purpose and the actual practice, social caseworkers are distressed (Maslach & Leiter, 2004). In Denise’s example, she withdrew to work inputs, because she had less faith to new interventions that the government supplied.

In summary, the results show that when social caseworkers perceive a demand on high inputs and insufficient resources in hand, it challenges social caseworkers’ pursuit of the balance between inputs and outcomes. Additionally, the value conflict between the government and social caseworkers’ aspirations to the job is critical to how social caseworkers perceive work exhaustion.

6.3 Satisfaction at work

6.3.1 Motivations to do social casework

As mentioned previously, Friberg (2006) argues that the giving in Mauss's gift giving theory is a social relationship without motivation to help others, which differs from the giving in human services. Thus, motivation is critical to the action of giving or investing in human services. Furthermore, motivation is regarded as the original attraction for an employee to take the job, which is associated with the factor of value (Leiter & Maslach, 2003:99). Thus, this section presents the respondents' motivations to do social casework, which is regarded to relate to how the respondents perceived work exhaustion and satisfaction at work.

The results show that the most common reason why the respondents chose to do social casework is that social casework is challenging, which is suitable to start with when I am still young and energetic.

Cindy stated: "To begin with the toughest job is a good training to me. Besides, I like visiting clients instead of sitting at the office all day".

Denise replied: "It takes physical energy to do casework so I want to do it when I am still young and energetic. Additionally, I can gain experience working with social casework, which would be useful if I do indirect service work in the future. [...] After discussing with my sister, who is also a social worker, I chose to do high-risk family programme, which has more variation than economy subsidy social work and less stress than child and adolescent protection social work".

Emily said: "I like the organisational culture and atmosphere at work when I did my internship in NGO A. It seems to be challenging for a beginner who just graduated from university to do social casework in high-risk family programme, but I want to try the job and learn".

Fanny answered: "I like to interact with people. I am young and motivated, which is suitable to do social casework in the high-risk family programme. Doing social casework can broaden my vision, which is a merit in the future".

It seems that over half of the respondents have a clear understanding to the social casework before they chose to do the job. They perceived social casework as a physically and emotionally demanding, tough and challenging job in a positive way that is beneficial to social work career. This perception may indicate that some of the respondents are psychologically prepared for the tough situations at work, and their passions will support them to overcome the challenges at work. They agree that the experience of working as social caseworker gives them an advantage in the future career. This study suggests that there is a potential topic for further research regarding how an employee's understanding of the job relates to the process of work exhaustion. Does an employee perceive work exhaustion differently because of a better preparation to possible challenges?

6.3.2 The interpretation of work satisfaction

The results show that the respondents' understandings of work satisfaction come in different forms, and it probably depends on how the respondents related work satisfaction to work exhaustion. The results can be roughly divided into two categories.

The respondents in the first category, Andy, Fanny, Bella, and Cindy literately interpreted their understanding of work satisfaction based on their understanding of work exhaustion.

Andy reflected the lunch time with coffee and chocolate bar as work satisfaction. This short lunch time represents the period of time, when Andy can restore the energy and recover from the high job demand, which was the chronic work overload depicted in Andy's photo of work exhaustion. It is accordance with Andy's definition of work satisfaction: "The joy of work. I can find the source of energy to continue the work, which can cope with work exhaustion". Likewise, Fanny expressed the work overload as her understanding of work exhaustion. However, Fanny reflected the external supervision as work satisfaction, which represents growth at work with light workload, as she defined: "Rewards. The workload is relatively light".

Bella's definition of work satisfaction depicts the opposite of perceive lack of reciprocity in helping relationships: "It is when I see hope on these families and there is room for progress. The families' willingness to change and the fact that they have changed spur me to do more for the families". Bella's description presents a symbolic reward that by showing willingness to comply with Bella. Bella felt the return of the efforts that she invested in helping these families. Lipsky (2010:58) stated: "Relationships are always reciprocal to some degree", and social caseworkers' power to control affects also how the helping relationship would be. As a social caseworker, Bella has the power to evaluate whether the client has shown the desirable changes, and thus whether she should grant more resources or not.

Cindy, who is not used to examine her own emotional status, expressed that she did not like to talk or think about negative emotions. She revealed that if she talks or thinks about negative emotions, she usually interrupts herself subconsciously. It seems that her interpretation of work satisfaction reflects her personality. She expressed that doing hobbies after work or during lunch time generates positive emotions that lasts during work, which is how she interpreted work satisfaction. Cindy defined work satisfaction: "Things that recharge my energy and make me to continue to work and move forward", which indicated the importance of positive emotions during work.

The respondents in the second category, Denise and Emily, took a different approach to definition of work satisfaction. When interpreting work satisfaction, Denise and Emily related to the aspirations they had when they started the job.

Denise defined work satisfaction: "A sense of achievement, growth and rewards", which is coherent to the photo Denise took. Figure 7 shows Denise's client in the last meeting before an active case termination¹³. Denise gave the client positive feedbacks recognising his changes, and gave him a present on behalf of NGO A. Denise described that the client was in a good mood, and made a victory gesture

¹³ Two types of case termination in the high-risk family programme: an active termination is that the social worker has intervened with resources, and the children/family's situation has improved eventually. A normal termination is when the case has received other interventions, or the family has serious problems such as child sexual abuse or child neglect, and the case is referred to child and adolescent protection work.

for the photography. Denise said: “comparing with a normal termination, I gain more sense of achievement from an active termination. It feels like there is hope in life and I am happy for the child. I am also grateful to these families, who have broadened my life experience”. Additionally, Denise emphasized that what makes her energetic and move forward is usually related to clients’ feedbacks, which makes her feel that she has done the right thing and reminds her of the original aspiration she had.

In the similar vein, Emily took a photo on a card, which she got from her school mates, to represent work satisfaction. The card is a vegetable superman. Emily explained: “I feel supported when I see the card. [...] It makes me feel that my role is important. I am capable and motivated to help more people. It reminds me of my mission”.



Figure 7. An active case termination

In summary, the results of work satisfaction come in two categories. Firstly, work satisfaction may represent the approach that the respondents used to cope with work exhaustion. Thus, work satisfaction is contextual and applies to certain situations. For instance, under the stress of work overload, it may be helpful to withdraw from the stressful work situation to restore energy and reciprocity. Another example is that a successful case of reciprocity in a helping relationship may give hope to the social caseworker, and may buffer the frustration resulting from other unbalanced helping relationships. Due to the limitation of the research method, this study can only conclude that these coping strategies seemed to be contextual in this research. In the second category, work satisfaction may be interpreted as the aspirations and motivations that the respondents had when they started the job. In this study, the aspirations and motivations are concluded as the

factors that actively foster work engagement, and passively buffer the phenomenon of work exhaustion.

Some previous research on job burnout have changed the research direct to focus on research on work engagement. Despite the fact that the work engagement is not the focus of this study, research on work engagement can provide this study insights to analyse the results of work satisfaction interpretation. Bakker and Derks (2010:203) suggested that there are two schools of research on work engagement: one school of scholars suggested that work engagement is the other side of the continuum that is opposite to burnout; however, another school proposed that work engagement is an independent concept, which is negatively related to job burnout. Interestingly, the two categories of work satisfaction in this study provide further support for both schools of research. In the first category, the respondents interpreted work satisfaction based on the work exhaustion they perceived. Thus, the results are in accordance with the school of research that work engagement and work exhaustion are contextually dependent. In the second category, the respondents interpreted work satisfaction as the original aspirations they had, which reflected the proposal of another school that work engagement is an independent concept, which is negatively related to job burnout.

7. Concluding Discussion

This study suggests that perceived reciprocity/lack of reciprocity plays a primary role in social caseworkers' perception to work exhaustion. By social caseworkers' subjective way of thinking, when social caseworkers invest their efforts in a client, they expect the client to follow their advice and improve or to express gratitude to the social caseworkers. Subconsciously or consciously, social caseworkers strive for reciprocity in helping relationships between themselves and their clients. Therefore, perceived lack of reciprocity on the interpersonal level closely relates to social caseworkers' perception of work exhaustion. The rewards or response that social caseworkers expect to receive can be client's tangible improvement, problem solving, and intangible gratitude from the clients. Additionally, the response from the clients should be proportional based on how much social caseworkers have invested.

To answer the first research question proposed in this study, this study has identified three ways in causing perceived lack of reciprocity in a helping relationship. Firstly, it is impossible to establish reciprocity when clients refuse to accept social caseworkers' inputs, which is also known as involuntary clients. In this study, the results are in line with the previous research that child protection social workers encounter psychological pressure when working with involuntary clients (Bai, 2013). This study suggests that when involuntary clients refuse to work together with social caseworkers, social caseworkers suffer from both psychological and physical exhaustion caused by the repeated investment of efforts, which go in vain eventually. Additionally, social caseworkers suffer from emotional exhaustion caused by value conflicts between themselves and their clients, as well as involuntary clients' response to their efforts.

Secondly, a lack of reciprocity occurs under the circumstances that clients accept social caseworkers' inputs, but refuse to reciprocate, which are also known as welfare dependent clients. Social caseworkers experience a drain of efforts when welfare dependent clients do not respond to the continuing efforts that social caseworkers have invested. Respondents in this study highlighted that welfare dependent clients have different values and goals when working with social

caseworkers, which makes it challenging to generate reciprocity, because welfare dependent clients usually do not respond to their efforts, or they do respond but in an unexpected way.

The consequence of lack of reciprocity when working with either involuntary or welfare dependent clients generates the third type of perceived lack of reciprocity, that is, when the social caseworkers are forced to give inputs again (depersonalisation). In this study, some respondents reflected that chronic situation of perceived lack of reciprocity in helping relationships results in depersonalisation. Social caseworkers experience frustration after they have experienced lack of reciprocity for a period of time. In order to restore reciprocity, the social caseworkers chose to distance themselves from the clients to avoid investing more. Eventually, the social caseworkers are unwilling to invest more in the helping relationship. This type of perceived lack of reciprocity in helping relationships results from social caseworkers' refusal to invest in certain clients.

In summary, the first major finding was that under the emotionally and interpersonally demanding nature of social casework, social caseworkers strive for balance between what they invest in helping clients and what responses these investments generate. Nevertheless, social caseworkers are not decisive to reciprocity, because it is the clients' decision to accept and reciprocate. The fact that the clients refuse to accept causes distress to social caseworkers in terms of an aspiration for reciprocity. Even if the clients accept social caseworkers' investment, whether the clients will reciprocate or not is another challenge to social caseworkers.

To answer the second research question, this study has found that social caseworkers' perception of work exhaustion relates to reciprocity/lack of reciprocity existing in the psychological contract between the social caseworkers and their organisations. This study identified three organisational factors may associate with social caseworkers' perceptions of work exhaustion: lack of perceived reciprocity, perceived work overload, and value conflicts. Firstly, work exhaustion relates to social caseworkers' lack of perceived reciprocity between the social caseworkers and their organisations. When social caseworkers invest

efforts in work without receiving the right proportions of rewards from their organisations, a lack of perceived reciprocity generates.

Secondly, the results show that the respondents perceived increasing uncertainty to reciprocity when they perceived work overload. A possible explanation is that social caseworkers are afraid of failing to complete the work under the high demand of inputs, and this concern of imbalance between inputs and outcomes distresses social caseworkers. The results show that the perceived work overload results from the editor culture of caseworker documentation, extra administrative work and trivial work in social casework. Both junior and senior social caseworkers in this study reflected that work overload relates to their perception of work exhaustion. Previous research suggested that social workers with less work experience are vulnerable to burnout (Kim, 1998; Weng, 1996). Despite the fact that the finding in this qualitative study cannot support previous research, this study suggests that work experience does not affect the source of work exhaustion.

Finally, this study suggests that value conflicts play the primary role in how social caseworkers perceive work exhaustion. Work exhaustion relates to value conflicts between social caseworkers and organisations when social caseworkers aspirations and values are not accordance with the organisation's value or even the welfare system's values. Under the circumstances, social caseworkers perceive work exhaustion, which were expressed as the feeling of helpless in this study. As Maslach and Leiter (2004) suggested, social caseworkers feel that they must do what the organisation wants them to do, and the inputs conflicts with their own values. Additionally, the results show that social caseworkers perceive work exhaustion when they are distressed by conflicting values between the statement of the project and the actual work.

To answer the last research question, the study suggests that social caseworkers have two approaches in constructing desirable work situations, in contrast to work exhaustion. The first approach is based on problem solving – to avoid work exhaustion. For example, the desirable work situations are established on restoring energy to prevent from work exhaustion, which reflected on the rest at work, positive learning at an external supervision, and successful examples of reciprocity in helping relationships. The second approach is to independently

construct desirable work situations – to fulfil social caseworkers’ aspirations to social casework. For instance, the original motivation and aspiration to do social casework can provide more energy to continue the work. In this approach, work exhaustion is interpreted as the obstacle to fulfil social caseworkers’ aspirations to social casework.

The foremost finding in this study is that, due to differences of cultures and societies, social caseworkers in Taiwan may not have precisely the same interpretation of job burnout as Western countries. The fundamental reason is that in Mandarin there is no precisely equivalent to the English word “burnout”, as some respondents in this study are not sure what job burnout means and have even never heard of it. The word “burnout” does not ring the bell to Taiwanese like for instance Swedes do. Instead, the empirical materials in this study suggest that job burnout is more commonly understood as *work exhaustion* in Taiwan, which were built on some common expression in Mandarin, such as, frustration, helplessness, stress. An example is the action that Bella used a decoration of grass horse, which sounds similar to a swear word in Mandarin, to express her anger.

On the other hand, the cultural notion of job or labour may imply that the notion of burnout takes a certain shape. Work exhaustion has not been discussed commonly until recent years, which is probably associated with the virtue of perseverance and diligence at work without complaint that traditional Taiwan society values. Additionally, society in Taiwan emphasizes the hierarchy at work, which may be a reason to why the discussion of work exhaustion is suppressed. One respondent in this study revealed that social caseworkers usually do not express their emotional exhaustion when the manager is in the office. Another respondent shared a similar experience that her manager overheard her expression of being burned out at work, and her manager replied: “You just started the job, you should not say that you are burned out”. The topic of work exhaustion seems to be forbidden to talk about in front of managers. Another respondent reflected that expressing sorrow or depression is a token of weakness, which is the reason why she does not like to show negative emotions at work. This perspective may result from the respondent’s personality, or it may be a consequence of society’s criticism towards “the strawberry generation”. This study suggests that it would

be worthwhile for further research to explore how social caseworkers' perception to work exhaustion is affected if work exhaustion is a forbidden topic or shameful to talk about at work, and whether there is a gender difference in this matter.

In conclusion, the findings of social caseworkers' perception of work exhaustion show that work exhaustion takes in diverse shapes depending on what social caseworkers experience and value the most at work. Furthermore, the findings in this study present job burnout or work exhaustion within the cultural and social context in Taiwan. This study indicates that how social caseworkers perceive work exhaustion closely relates to the imbalance between their investment and the perceived rewards that their investment generate both on the interpersonal and organisational levels. Besides, a lack of perceived control to social caseworkers' job makes social caseworkers vulnerable to work exhaustion. Value conflicts both on the interpersonal and organisational levels hazards the reciprocity that social caseworkers strive for. The chronic situation of perceived work overload also represents an uncertainty to reciprocity. One of the interesting findings in this study is that social caseworkers may construct their desirable work situations in two different approaches, and thus, the interpretation of work satisfaction comes in two categories. In one category, work satisfaction is constructed on the purpose to restore energy to prevent from the undesirable work situations, the work exhaustion. In the other category, work satisfaction is established on social caseworkers' aspirations to the job.

This study indicates that social caseworkers' perceptions of work exhaustion relate to perceived lack of reciprocity on both the interpersonal and organisational levels. Critical points of work exhaustion lie on the first two steps, investing and accepting in the modified social exchange model. This study raises a fundamental question – is it reasonable for social caseworkers to seek reciprocity in a helping relationship? From the giver's perspective, no matter it is a gift giving or investment in a helping relationship, the giver gives part of himself/herself along with the gift or the action, which is on behalf of the giver. The key lies in that the purpose to the action of giving. The gift giving theory suggested that the giver's intention to give is the initiative means to create and maintain a social relationships in the daily situation (Mauss, 2000). However, in a helping

relationship, the giver is obliged to give something in a specific role, such as, nurse, social workers. With a specific role, the giving becomes also investing.

In terms of investing, several questions should be posted. What is social caseworkers' original purpose to invest in clients? According to the organisations' culture, what kind of purpose social caseworkers should have when investing in clients? Based on the original aspirations that social caseworkers have, what kind of purpose social caseworkers should have when investing in clients? Do social caseworkers encounter with any role ambiguities in investing in clients? In the similar vein, questions should also be raised regarding the action of accepting, especially when it comes to involuntary and welfare dependent clients. The modified social exchange model in this study, which focuses exclusively on social caseworkers' subjective perspective, is insufficient to answer these questions. Why should involuntary and welfare dependent clients work with social caseworkers? Why do involuntary and welfare dependent clients reject the service? What does the service mean to involuntary and welfare dependent clients?

This study suggests that further research on how social workers relate work exhaustion to reciprocity/lack of reciprocity is required. Additionally, it would be interesting to research on how work experiences with involuntary and welfare dependent clients relates to reciprocity/lack of reciprocity.

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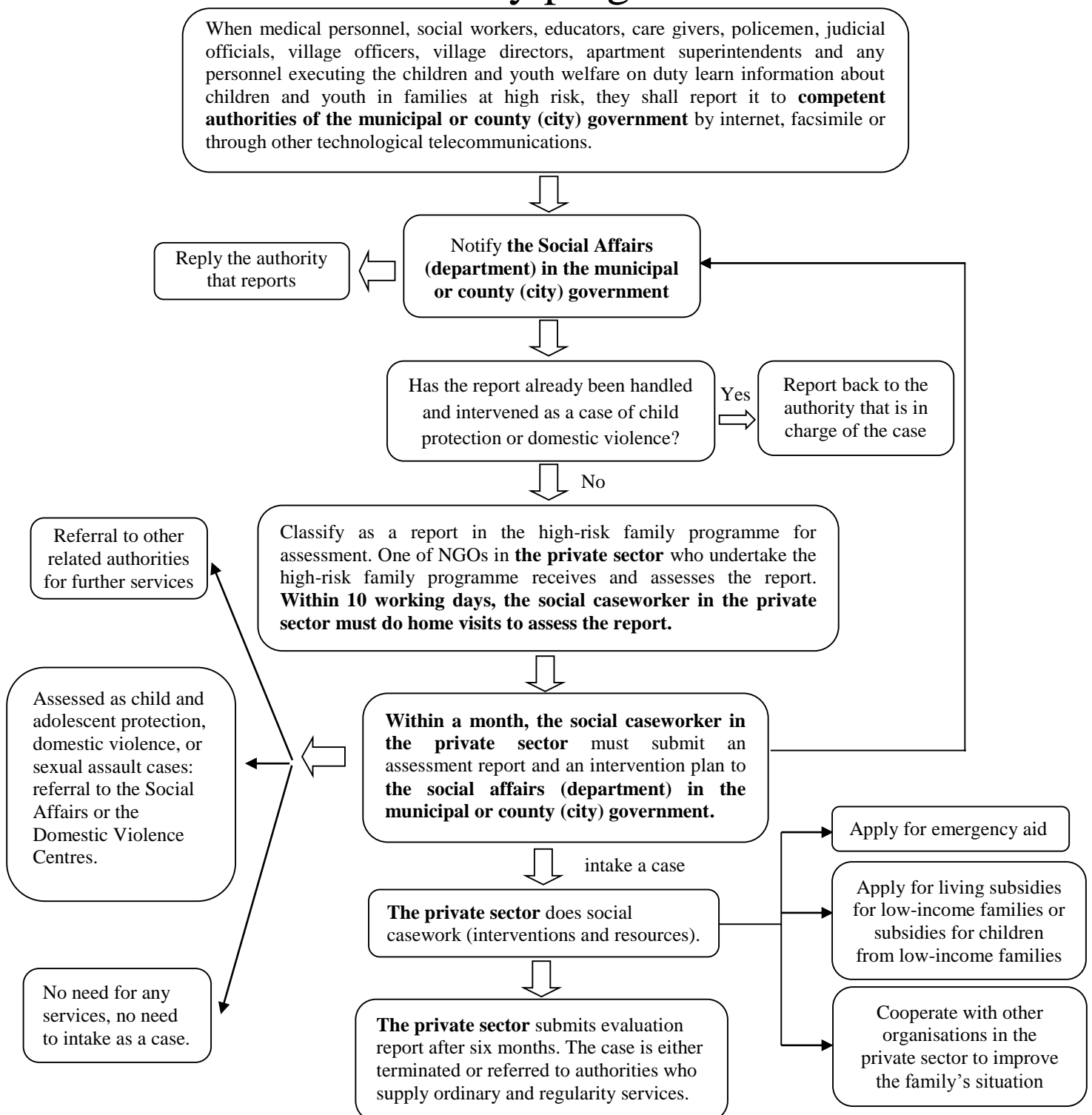
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Appendix 1 – Work procedures of high-risk family programme

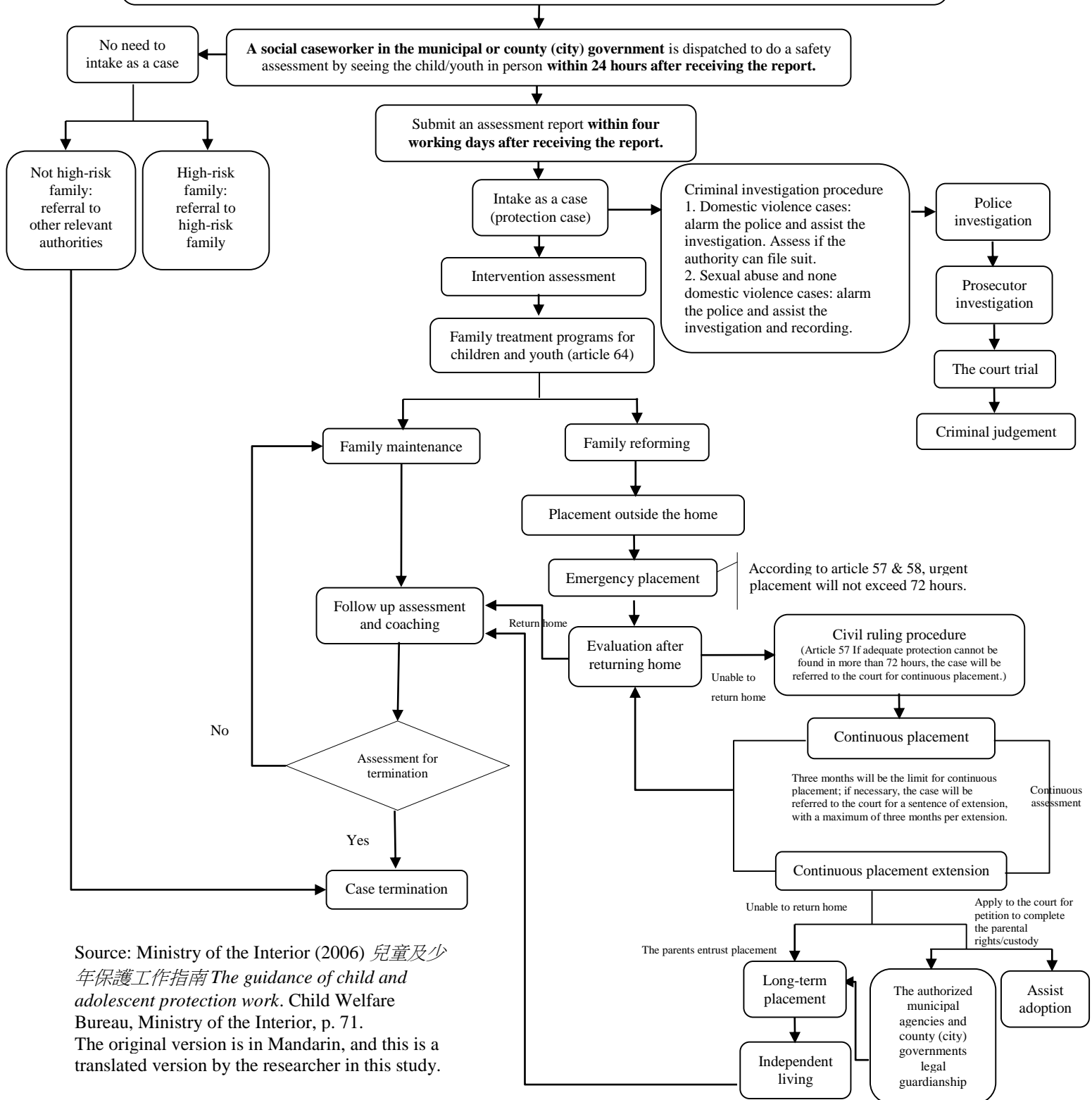


Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare (2014) “推動高風險家庭關懷輔導處遇實施計畫.doc” “Implementation of the programme of child and youths in families at high risk” (electronic), Social and Family Affairs Administration, Ministry of Health and Welfare, updated 4 March 2014 <<http://www.sfaa.gov.tw/SFAA/Pages/Detail.aspx?nodeid=105&pid=719>> (29 August 2015) The original version is in Mandarin, and this is a translated version by the researcher in this study.

Appendix 2 – Work procedures of child and adolescent protection work

For the municipal or county (city) government

Article 53 in the **Protection of Children and Youths Welfare and Rights Act** regulates that medical personnel, social workers, educational personnel, day care personnel, police, judicial personnel, administrators of villages (community) or other conductors implementing children and youth welfare that acknowledge on their duties one issue of the below issues relating to children and youth will report it to **the authorized municipal agencies and county (city) governments in no less than 24 hours.**



Source: Ministry of the Interior (2006) 兒童及少年保護工作指南 *The guidance of child and adolescent protection work*. Child Welfare Bureau, Ministry of the Interior, p. 71. The original version is in Mandarin, and this is a translated version by the researcher in this study.

Appendix 3 – Active photo shooting guide

Within these five working days, please take photos according to the following descriptive guide. You can decide when, where, what and how to take photos. If the photos you take may concern your privacy and clients' confidentiality, I will edit the photo to obscure their identities before presenting the photos.

Please take one to two photos ...

...which from your perspective represent work exhaustion.

...which from your perspective associate with work exhaustion.

Please take one to two photos ...

...which from your perspective represent the opposite of work exhaustion.

...which from your perspective associate with the opposite of work exhaustion.

Please send the photos to the email address: jessica_shine@hotmail.com.

Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions during the photo shooting phase. I appreciate your participation!

Appendix 4 – Participatory photo interview guide

Participant's basic information:

- Gender:___ Age:___ Education:_____
- Social work experience:___ years
Social casework experience:___ years
- Employment: contract employee, permanent employee
- Work context: child and adolescent protection, high-risk family programme

Interview questions: (estimated interview time: 60-90 minutes)

Opening

- Why did you choose to be a social worker?
- Why did you choose this social casework job?
- How would you describe your personality?

Work exhaustion

- Please explain why this photo represents your understanding of work exhaustion.
- Please describe the situation and surroundings when you took this photo.
- How did you associate the situation in the photo with work exhaustion at that moment?
 - What are the factors that made you associate the situation in the photo with work exhaustion?
 - Among the factors you mention, which one is the main factor? Please explain why.
- How did you experience work exhaustion at that moment?
 - What are the factors that made you experience work exhaustion at that moment?
 - Among the factors you mention, which one is the main factor? Please explain why.
- Please describe how you felt physically and psychologically at that moment.
 - What are the factors that made you feel this way?
 - Did your physical and psychological conditions at that moment affect your work, life or other aspects?
- (Extended questions depending on the respondent's answer)
- Does the photo remind you of any particular experience or incident you had in your social casework career? Please tell me the experience or incident.
- If you look back to your social casework career, what are other factors which can result in the situation that is similar to this photo?
- How would you define work exhaustion according to your understanding or experience?

The opposite of work exhaustion

- How would you define the opposite of work exhaustion according to your understanding or experience?
- Please explain why this photo represents your understanding of the opposite of work exhaustion.
- Please describe the situation and surroundings when you took this photo.
- How did you associate the situation in the photo with the opposite of work exhaustion at that moment?
 - What are the factors that made you associate the situation in the photo with the opposite of work exhaustion?
 - Among the factors you mention, which one is the main factor? Please explain why.
- How did you experience the opposite of work exhaustion at that moment?
 - What are the factors that made you experience the opposite of work exhaustion at that moment?
 - Among the factors you mention, which one is the main factor? Please explain why.
- Please describe how you felt physically and psychologically at that moment.
 - What are the factors that made you feel this way?
 - Did your physical and psychological condition at that moment affect your work, life or other aspects?
- (Extended questions depending on the respondent's answer)
- Does the photo remind you of any particular experience or incident you had in your social casework career?
- If you look back to your social casework career, what are other factors which could result in a similar situation in this photo?

Summary

- Before attending this research, have you ever noticed the phenomenon of work exhaustion? Have you ever actively tried to find related information of work exhaustion?
- Do you consider that your work seniority affected how you took photos in the active photo shooting phase? Why?
- Did you decide to attend the research because that you have impressive experiences of work exhaustion?
- How do you feel after the interview?

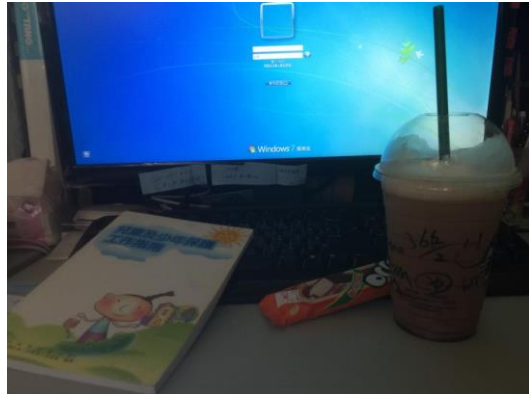
Appendix 5 – Visual data

Work exhaustion	Work satisfaction
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Andy



A corner of casework documentation and the Work Guidebook



Lunch time at the office

Bella



The telephone with decorations



Doing casework documentation of a progressive case

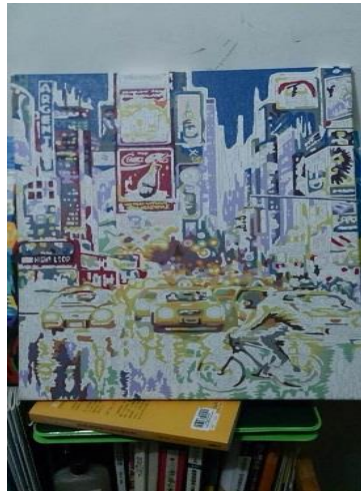
Work exhaustion

Work satisfaction

Cindy



Brainstorming for a client



Leisure time and hobbies

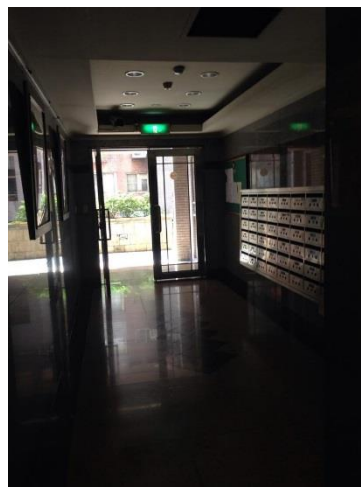


The dying mint plant

Denise



My motorcycle in a rainy day

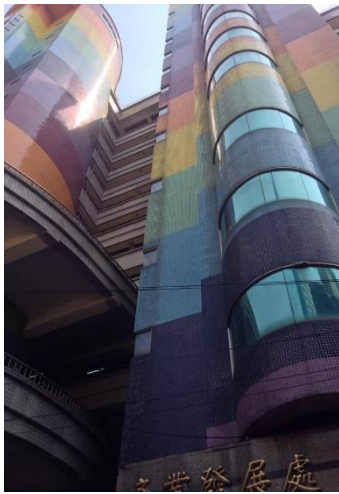


A sunny day at work

Work exhaustion

Work satisfaction

Denise



The old building and the welfare system



An active case termination



Waiting for my client in front of a fast food store

Emily



The cloudy day and my mood



An inspiring card from my schoolmate

Work exhaustion

Work satisfaction

Fanny



My messy desk



The external supervision