"A Blessing and a Curse" - Stress and Wellbeing in Meaningful Work

A Qualitative Study of Employees' Experiences in Girl's Support Centers in Sweden

Authors: Jessica Paulsson and Linnéa Tullberg
Programme: MSc in Managing People, Knowledge and Change
Course: BUSN49 - Degree Project, Spring 2023

Abstract

Title: "A Blessing and a Curse" - Stress and Wellbeing in Meaningful Work

Course: BUSN49 - Degree Project in Managing People, Knowledge and Change, 15 ECTS

Authors: Jessica Paulsson & Linnéa Tullberg

Supervisor: Roland Paulsen

Examiner: Dan Kärreman

Submission Date: 19th of May, 2023

Research Question: How do employees in girl's support centers, who perceive their work as meaningful, experience stress and wellbeing in their jobs?

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to create a better understanding of work-related stress and wellbeing amongst employees who do meaningful work in volunteer-based organizations.

Methodology: Our data has been collected using 16 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with employees at different girl's support centers in Sweden. This thesis is based on constructionist ontology, interpretive epistemology and abductive reasoning.

Theoretical Perspective: The concepts of stress, wellbeing and meaning at work are used as a basis for the analysis. The main literature drawn upon is Dupret and Pultz's (2021) research on work in purpose-driven organizations, multiple scholar's research on calling and identification as well as the autonomy paradox and related research.

Conclusion: Our key findings relate to the ambiguous yet positive effects of meaningfulness on employee wellbeing. We have added to previous research by showing how experiences of autonomy and meaningfulness interact and contribute to both stress and wellbeing simultaneously.

Key Words: Stress, Wellbeing, Meaning, Meaningful Work, Volunteer-Based Organizations, Autonomy, Identification, Job Insecurity, Purpose-Driven Organizations, Non-Profit Organizations, Calling

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

1. Introduction

In Sweden, 15% of the population feel stressed and during the past fifteen years, this number has increased (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2023). The number of people who are on sick leave due to stress related diagnoses has increased by 13% between 2019 and 2022 (Försäkringskassan, 2022). When it comes to stress at work, and specifically in the non-profit sector, most employees state that this is something they experience (McClure & Moore, 2021). Happiness and wellbeing is something that people care about, not only in their private life but also at work (Fischer, 2014). According to Rath and Harter (2010 cited in Fischer, 2014), 'career wellbeing' is one of the most paramount aspects when it comes to overall wellbeing for people. These statistics highlight the relevance of work-related stress and wellbeing in contemporary society.

Simultaneously with the prevalence of work-related stress, there is an ongoing shift in how people view work and the purpose it should serve in their life. According to Anchor, Reece, Rosen Kellerman and Robichaux (2018), feeling meaning at work is increasingly important, and more than 9 out of 10 employees would exchange part of their salary for more feelings of meaningfulness at work. They also found that many currently feel like their work is not as meaningful as it could be. In a McKinsey survey, Dhingra, Samo, Schaninger and Schrimper (2021) found that the COVID-19 pandemic has driven employees to reflect on their purpose in life, and in turn also on their work. Amongst the employees they surveyed, 70% expressed that their work defines their sense of purpose. The growing interest, demand and strive for work-related purpose makes research surrounding the experiences and consequences of meaningful work more relevant than ever.

We are particularly interested in conducting research on the experiences of employees in 'girl's support centers', which is our translation of the Swedish term 'tjejjourer'. Girl's support centers are non-profit organizations that work with support and advocacy for girls, young women and in some cases trans and queer youth. There are over 60 girl's support centers in Sweden, and the core operation of most of these centers is providing free of charge and anonymous support, mostly relating to violence, mental health, sexuality or other topics the target group struggles with (Riksorganisationen för kvinnojourer och tjejjourer i Sverige, 2016). One of us authors has been involved in a girl's support center and seen first hand how passionate people get stressed or even burned out in their pursuit of developing the

movement. We have observed how some employees in girl's support centers struggle with stress at work, and this sparked our curiosity for how work-related stress and wellbeing is experienced and coped with by employees in these organizations.

We believe that girl's support centers represent a type of organization that has not received much attention from academia. Much research has been conducted about stress and wellbeing amongst employees in health care and social work (see for example Vander Elst, Cavents, Daneels, Johannik, Baillien, Van den Broeck, & Godderis, 2016; Judd, Breen & Dorozenko, 2017). Girl's support centers are distinct from these fields partly because they are non-profit, volunteer-based and non-governmental organizations. They are usually small in terms of number of employees, and the employer often consists of an unpaid, volunteer-based board. This has implications for the agency, autonomy and freedom employees experience in their work, in a different way to those who work with similar tasks in governmental or for-profit organizations.

Another distinctive feature of girl's support centers is that employees sometimes work directly with emotionally charged tasks (such as staffing the support lines), but more often work indirectly with it (for example with administrative work, financial tasks and coordination work). Even those who never work in direct contact with the target group are kept informed about the contents and statistics of the support lines, in order to know for example what areas of competence to focus on when educating new volunteers, or what to highlight in grant applications (in terms of which social issues the support line commonly faces). We believe that this kind of dynamic - where emotional work is present but not obvious in the work tasks, and where the purpose of the organization is deeply intertwined with the personal convictions of the individual - has not been researched enough. We think similar dynamics are experienced by other non-profit organizations, by certain public authorities and by socially oriented private organizations, and therefore we argue that this study makes a useful contribution also beyond the context of the girl's support centers.

Furthermore, we believe that studying this particular group of employees in Sweden gives insight into a part of the demographic that appears to be most affected by stress. As proven by the sample of interviewees obtained for the sake of this thesis, most of the employees at the girl's support centers are women aged between 25-40. The homogeneity in the research population makes it relevant to highlight and apply gender and age perspectives to the

statistics on stress. According to the national survey of the Swedish population, 27% of respondents aged 16-29 (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2022a) and 19% of respondents aged 30-44 (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2022b) feel stressed. In the 30-44 age group, women report feeling stressed to a higher extent than men - 22% of women compared to 15% of men. When it comes to the 16-29 age group, women report feeling stressed more than double as much as men do - 37% of women compared to 17% of men - and the percentage of women who feel very stressed is almost four times higher than the corresponding numbers for men - 11% of women compared to 3% of men. Additionally, during 2019-2022, approximately 75% of all newly initiated stress related sick leave cases in Sweden consisted of women (Försäkringskassan, 2022). We think it is crucial to address these statistics by conducting qualitative research that can give in-depth insights as to why women, and especially women below the age of 45, are stressed to such comparatively high degree. Although comprehensively answering this question falls outside of the scope of this thesis, we hope that our study can shed light on the experiences of at least some of the women who belong to this demographic, and inspire other scholars to conduct further studies on the topic.

Another contribution we aim to make is to better understand the working lives of employees in the non-profit sector, and especially in small and purpose driven organizations. We hope to improve the understanding of the challenges and hindrances for wellbeing at work for those who share purpose with, are passionate about and identify with their workplace on a personal level. Much of the current research on wellbeing in the workplace focuses on hedonic wellbeing (wellbeing as pleasant feelings) rather than eudaimonic wellbeing (wellbeing relating to self-actualizing, purpose and growth) (Gallagher, Lopez & Preacher, 2009). We aim to contribute with wellbeing research that takes the latter into account.

In order to make the contributions described above, we will dedicate our thesis to answering the following question: "*How do employees in girl's support centers, who perceive their work as meaningful, experience stress and wellbeing in their jobs?*". We are interested in understanding how employees in girl's support centers, who are passionate about the purpose of the organization and perceive their work as meaningful, experience their work in terms of wellbeing and stress and how they cope with balancing the challenges that come with it.

In the following chapter, we introduce previous literature and concepts relating to the chosen field of study. This is followed by an outline of the methodological approach that has been

applied in our study, along with a more detailed description of the context in terms of the girl's support centers and their employees. In the fourth chapter, the empirical material is presented along with our analysis, including how our findings relate to the previous research brought up in the literature review. Subsequently, the discussion provides a richer reflection on the findings of the analysis and discusses its potential implications for the broader understanding of wellbeing. Lastly, the conclusion summarizes our key findings, as well as contributions, suggestions for future research and limitations.

2. Literature Review

This chapter covers relevant literature relating to stress, wellbeing and meaningfulness. It begins with a focus on the concepts of stress, wellbeing and meaning. When relevant concepts have been explained, potential stressors are discussed. This is followed by a deep dive into research relating to meaningfulness, identification and calling. Furthermore, literature on autonomy is presented along with its potential implications for overwork and wellbeing. Lastly, we discuss the topic of handling stress and attempt to identify some enabling factors for wellbeing in meaningful work. Some of the literature presented is not directly connected to non-profit organizations, but can nevertheless facilitate in obtaining a basic understanding of the concepts before applying it to our context.

2.1. Workplace Stress as a Concept

Wajcman (2014) discusses the time-pressure paradox, and highlights how populations in industrialized countries feel more time pressure and stress than they previously have, although these perceptions are not necessarily supported by statistics on the objective amount of time we have. Nevertheless, people perceive time as more scarce, and this in spite of the economic development and technological acceleration during the past century (Wajcman, 2014). Dupret and Pultz (2021) note that despite increased wealth and quality of life in industrialized countries, as well as predictions of a future with less work, more free time and improved working conditions, work intensification appears to have increased.

Workplace stress can be defined as *"a negative psychological state with cognitive and emotional components"* (Cox, Griffiths & Rial-González, 2000, p.12), which affects both the individual and the organization. Workplace stress can also be defined as an "*extreme manifestation of increased pressures at work"* (Dupret & Pultz, 2021, p.492). Collins (2008) points out that stress is not the same as overbearing pressure, but rather the response to the overbearing pressure. An increased pace of work, stemming from tight deadlines, higher demands on skills and more flexibility in terms of tasks, is suggested by some scholars to be the cause of declining workplace health (Dupret & Pultz, 2021). Dupret and Pultz (2021) define work intensification as consisting of larger amounts of work, constant connectivity, increased complexity with no allocation of additional resources, unforeseen tasks, heightened pace and challenging deadlines. Furthermore, they assume that the experience of work

intensification is subjective. The authors argue that stress is not necessarily an indicator of work intensification, as perceived stress is also a reflection of other factors. Nevertheless, the authors state that work intensity is proven to have a negative impact on employee wellbeing, and work demands appear to be increasing in terms of both pace, time and emotional aspects.

It would be unreasonable to write a thesis about workplace stress and wellbeing without having a word on burnout. In this thesis, burnout is viewed as one of the most extreme consequences of workplace stress. The term can be used to describe a work-related state of stress (Fernet, Chanal & Guay, 2017), and it is considered to be an extensive experience of stress at work as a result of a discrepancy between work demands and personal ability to cope (Saeidi, Izanloo & Izanlou, 2020). According to the World Health Organization (2019), burnout is a result of unmanaged extensive stress consisting of three components. The first one relates to emotional weariness and feelings of exhaustion, the second to depersonalization and detachment from people at work and the third to a reduction in productivity.

2.2. Workplace Wellbeing as a Concept

In addition to stress and burnout, this thesis revolves around the experience of employee wellbeing. Workplace wellbeing can be defined as the *"dynamic state of mind characterized by reasonable harmony between a person's abilities, needs, and expectations and environmental demands and opportunities"* (Levi, 1992, p.201), and it is assumed to be measurable only by people's subjective experiences. Wellbeing is regarded as not merely the absence of stress and other negative mental states, but rather a positive and vibrant state of mental health (Fischer, 2014).

Many scholars have created frameworks in order to pinpoint what exactly wellbeing means, and make measurements of such a state easier. One example of this is Seligman's (2002) division of wellbeing into three dimensions, namely *positive emotions*, *engagement* and *meaning/purpose in life*. Another example is Ryff and Singer's (2008) six dimensions of psychological wellbeing: *self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, positive relationships, personal growth and autonomy*. Gallagher, Lopez and Preacher (2009) proposes a third alternative, in which wellbeing is divided into three dimensions: *hedonic*, referring to feeling pleasant and positive feelings; *eudaimonic*, surpassing pleasure and

focusing on self-actualization, purpose and growth; and lastly *social*, relating to the importance of relationships with others.

It should be noted that in practice, the dimensions in these models are not fully distinguishable and separable, but rather intertwined and correlated. For example, eudaimonic wellbeing has proven to be predictive of hedonic wellbeing (Waterman, 2008), and the notion of helping others relates to both eudaimonic and social wellbeing (Fischer, 2014). What is clear in these different models is nevertheless the relevance of *meaning* and *purpose* to wellbeing.

2.3. Meaning at Work and Related Concepts

In this thesis, meaning and purpose is used interchangeably. According to Frankl (2015), meaning is something that all humans are confronted with, and relates to the notion of having something to live (and possibly even die) for. Meaningfulness is by Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) argued to be *"a subjective experience of the existential significance and purpose in life"* (p.492). Meaning is intertwined with hedonic wellbeing, as positive affect can both be the cause and the effect of short-term experiences of meaning (King, Hicks, Krull & Del Gaiso, 2006). However, although there are connotations to hedonic as well as social wellbeing, meaning is brought up as an aspect particularly much in literature about eudaimonic wellbeing (Fischer, 2014).

According to May, Gilson and Harter (2004), meaningfulness has strong connections to engagement. When discussing meaning and wellbeing at work, engagement is therefore a relevant term to explain, along with commitment. The terms engagement and commitment have many definitions, and the concepts are often closely associated with each other (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Work engagement is a term with different meanings for different scholars, but it relates to connection, dedication, attentiveness, meaning and intrinsic motivation (Fischer, 2014). Beardwell and Thompson (2017) defines engagement as *"concerned with the employee's connections with and feelings towards their job"* (p.396) and commitment as *"positive attachment and willingness to exert energy for success of the organization, a feeling of pride in being a member of the organization and identifying with it at all levels"* (p.398). The authors argue that employees who are engaged usually show high commitment, but being highly committed does not necessarily equal high engagement. They

also state that the cognitive and emotional aspects of engagement also make it correlate with wellbeing.

According to Fischer (2014), organizational commitment can be split into two parts. The first part is coined *normative commitment*, which is when an individual identifies personally with the values and aims of the organization, and the second part is coined *affective commitment*, which refers to individuals feeling as though they are a part of the organizational family. Affective commitment thus has more connotations with social wellbeing, as it relates to feelings of belonging and embeddedness in the organization.

Closely related to commitment is organizational identification, which relates to individual employees agreeing with and supporting the values and goals of the organization they work for, to the extent that they consider it their own values and goals (Schneider, Hall & Nygren, 1971). This can be seen as a sort of appropriation of identity (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987 cited in Edwards, 2005) which is more likely to happen if there are strong positive perceptions of the organization (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). May, Gilson and Harter (2004) found that employees who experience deep engagement are more likely to identify with their job, and Dupret and Pultz (2021) saw high compliance between organizational goals and individual employees' feelings of purpose in organizations focused on 'making a difference'.

Pratt and Ashforth (2003 cited in Fischer, 2014) make a distinction between meaning *in* work and meaning *at* work. They argue that meaning *at* work relates to identification. In the case of girl's support centers, this could for example mean identification with the specific center one works at, ones' colleagues or the whole girl's support center movement. Meaning *in* work on the other hand, is argued by the scholars to be related to the work role itself, and the feeling that one is doing something that is important as well as self-actualizing. Steger, Dik, and Duffy's (2012) Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI), suggests that there are three different subscales that constitute meaning in work. These include *positive meaning* (e.g. relating to how the work contributes to one's life purpose), *meaning-making through work* (e.g. viewing work as a tool to understand oneself), and *greater good motivation* (e.g. feeling that one's work contributes to a higher purpose).

A concept closely related to meaning at work, is calling at work. According to Dik and Duffy (2009), calling relates to individuals' relation to work based on purpose and prosocial motivation. In order to understand calling at work, one needs to reflect on what work as a phenomenon means to people, and the different ways in which one can relate to work. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) discuss three different functions that work can have for an individual. The first one is work as *work*, in the sense that it is a means to earn a paycheck. The second one is work as *career*, where it is seen as an opportunity for achievement, developing skills and obtaining status. Thirdly comes work as *calling*, where work is seen as an opportunity to contribute to a greater good and is made morally inseparable from an individual's life. This last point means that the work itself, and not merely the output stemming from it, has meaning and value. According to Dik, Eldridge, Steger and Duffy (2012), calling at work has three separate aspects: *transcendent summons*, relating to being drawn to one's career by something beyond the self; *purposeful work*, relating to seeing work as a way to purpose in life; and *prosocial orientation*, referring to positive impact on others as the primary intention for one's career.

Fernet, Chanal and Guay (2017) claim that depending on what drives employee motivation, they can be more or less susceptible to burnout and stress at work. It is especially reasons based on intrinsic motivation and meaning that result in higher wellbeing at work (Trépanier, Forest, Fernet, & Austin, 2015). Reasons that are more focused on avoiding punishment and guilt or to increase self-worth perception tend to increase the occurrence of stress (Blais, Briere, Lachance, Riddle & Vallerand, 1993 cited in Fernet, Chanal & Guay, 2017) and emotional exhaustion (Fernet, Trépanier, Austin, & Levesque-Côté, 2016).

2.4. Potential Stressors in Purpose Driven Organizations

According to Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte and Lens (2008), burnout is dependent on the presence of demands (such as pressure) and the absence of resources (such as support). They argue that having resources at work creates engagement and motivation, and conclude that in order for employees to feel well and flourish at work, their needs must be satisfied. Vander Elst et al.s' (2016) findings indicate that the risk of burnout is higher when workload and emotional demands are high. Additionally, they claim that having social support is positive for engagement and lowers the risk of burnout. In the presence of social support, their findings indicate that there is less effect of high workload on burnout levels.

They also found a negative correlation between workload and engagement. According to the authors, the mainstream literature agrees that engagement contributes to employee wellbeing.

Social relationships are complex phenomena to understand in the context of workplace stress. They can simultaneously be a potential stressor and a potential source of support (Sparks & Cooper, 2013). In the context of girl's support centers, employees often have a consistent relationship with the board, which constitutes the legal employer and usually consists of a group of unpaid volunteers. When it comes to the influence of the board of directors on executives, research has found that when the board is perceived to be enhancing, the wellbeing of executives is higher and burnout lower, and the opposite is true when the board of directors is perceived to be interfering (Olinske & Hellman, 2017). Social relationships are however not only important if they are long-term (such as in the case of board members, managers and colleagues). In particular for those who have strong social motives, satisfying and helpful but impermanent interactions with for example customers (or in the case of girl's support centers, possibly the support seekers) may be positive influences on employee wellbeing (Fischer, 2014).

Dupret and Pultz (2021) found that insecure working conditions may contribute to work intensification. In the non-profit sector, temporary work is common, which seems to be a reflection of the short-term and project-based funding that organizations in the sector deal with (Saunders, 2004). This potentially leads to perceived job insecurity for employees in the sector, which is defined by Vander Elst, Van den Broeck, De Witte and De Cuyper (2012) as the threat of, and accompanying worries of, losing one's job. The scholars found that job insecurity impacts workplace wellbeing negatively, and that it prevents fulfillment of not only the financial needs of the individual, but also the psychological needs. It is theorized that anticipating job loss may have as impactful consequences as the job loss itself, and thus it is considered a significant work stressor. Furthermore, the scholars state that job insecurity is related to not only lower workplace wellbeing, but also burnout, lower work engagement, decreased organizational commitment, complaints about both mental and physical health, lower work performance and lower job satisfaction. Hence, job insecurity is an important aspect to consider for employers in any organization, but maybe especially important in grant-based non-profit organizations.

Judd, Breen and Dorozenko (2017) found that workers experienced stress and burnout when negative aspects outweighed the positives. Hence the presence of negative experiences alone does not necessarily lead to experiences of stress. They also concluded that it is the workers assessment of the situation rather than the actual situation that causes stress and burnout.

2.5. Meaningfulness, Identification and Calling

Madden, Bailey and Kerr (2015) claim that calling is generally seen as something positive for society and fulfilling for the individual. Meaningfulness at work has been found to have a positive impact on wellbeing (Michaelson, Pratt, Grant & Dunn, 2014) and engagement (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). According to Dupret and Pultz (2021), previous research has found that purpose plays an integral part in psychological wellbeing, and there are researchers who go as far as claiming that in the future, employees' motivation will be derived from their devotion to serving a purpose. However, the positive connotations to calling and meaning at work are not uncontested.

Experiencing calling at work leads to occupational identification, which turns rejecting a calling by for example quitting a job into more than an occupational choice, and rather a personal failure (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). In the crossroads of stress and identification with work, the potential hazards of interlacement between professional and personal identity becomes apparent. According to Sonnentag & Fritz (2015), a foundational factor for recovery from stress is psychological detachment, which is when a person refrains from performing and thinking about work-related activities during their personal time, and thus disengages from it mentally. The authors found that individuals' wellbeing is affected negatively from lack of psychological detachment, and that it may lead to for example burnout and lower life satisfaction. This relates to the conclusions of Dupret and Pultz (2021), who found that purposeful work requires negotiations of boundaries between work and non-work time, which could in turn decrease employee wellbeing.

Madden, Bailey and Kerr (2015) found positive aspects to experiencing calling at work, such as feelings of joy, fulfillment and gratitude. At the same time, they also noted negative aspects, whereas it may compromise one's personal life in terms of long working hours and financial sacrifices. Similarly, Bunderson and Thompson (2009) found that calling makes people attribute meaning and importance to their jobs, but that it also comes with a perceived

moral obligation which makes them more prone to sacrifice salary and free time as well as accept less comfort and mistreatment from management. Berkelaar and Buzzanell (2015) also argue that pursuing a calling through work could compromise your private life, potentially leading to difficulties in fulfilling personal and familial needs. This subsequently has implications for work-life balance. According to the authors, people tend to endure exploitation and problematic working conditions in the pursuit of their calling. On a similar note, Dupret and Pultz (2021) found that when it comes to purposeful work, work intensification is often justified and employees seem to, at least to some extent, be prevented from raising resistance. This entails that the employees are willing to accept working conditions of lower standards.

The literature seems non-unanimous about whether meaning and purpose has a positive or negative impact on overall employee wellbeing, and it seems as though the effect is double-edged. Dupret and Pultz (2021) suggest that a dilemma exists between meaningfulness and stress. This paradox highlights the complexity of the role which meaning and calling plays in work-related stress and wellbeing in purpose driven organizations, and confirms the need for more research in order to further understand these dynamics.

2.6. Autonomy, Overwork and Wellbeing

Having an employer that consists of unpaid volunteers actualizes a discussion on autonomy at work, as the employer is usually not involved in the employee's daily work. Scholars such as Dupret and Pultz (2021) furthermore highlight the autonomy paradox as an important aspect in the portrayal of workplace stress in purpose driven organizations. According to the scholars, the autonomy paradox is a phenomenon that has been observed especially in highly qualified employees, and shows that employees who perceive themselves to have high levels of autonomy in their jobs tend to overwork, experience burnout and harm their health and relationships. Employees work beyond their limits on the basis of what they themselves portray as self-chosen work and effort. Similar notions of controlling freedom can be observed in neo-normative control (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009), where it is assumed that when employees feel more freedom and self-control, they will be more productive and give more of themselves at work (Bains, 2007 cited in Fleming & Sturdy, 2009). Self-management seems to produce norms of self-exploitation, and balancing this is yet another demand for

employees in contemporary society, in addition to the accumulating workload and the increased complexity and pace (Dupret & Pultz, 2021).

Other scholars have however shown that the notion of autonomy leading to overwork does not reflect the full complexities of autonomy at work. Contradictory to the autonomy paradox, Vander Elst et al (2016) found that the possibility to work autonomously increases engagement and lowers the risk of burnout. This is consistent with Bailey and Maddens' (2017) findings, which indicate that lack of autonomy when it comes to pacing of work and allocation of time leads to meaninglessness. Just like the literature on meaning, there seems to exist ambiguous views amongst scholars regarding the influence autonomy has on wellbeing.

2.7. Handling Stress and Enabling Wellbeing in Purpose Driven Organizations

The reactions to stressors vary amongst different people, and some seem to have better ability to cope with workplace stress than others (Cooper & Marshall, 2013). When it comes to individual characteristics that can predict the susceptibility to stress, people who are more sensitive when it comes to excitation and have lower sensory thresholds experience higher feelings of emotional fatigue and higher demands (Vander Elst, Sercu, Van den Broeck, Van Hoof, Baillien & Godderis, 2019). Employees who demonstrate high levels of wellbeing are more likely to handle pressure better and are better at dealing with negative aspects of their work (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017).

Maslach (2017) acknowledges that burnout often is stigmatized at work, for example by being viewed as a sign of weakness or lack of competence. According to the researcher, there seems to be a pattern of assigning responsibility to the individual, which in turn has led to little focus on solutions connected to redesigning work. She suggests that the best way to hinder burnout is to create engagement, as engaged people tend to handle challenges and stress better. According to the author, a common pattern in research about burnout is focusing on the relationship between the employee and their work setting. She claims that differences between efforts and expectations could be a source of stress, and that mediating this imbalance could be a way to manage interventions relating to burnout. According to Schabram and Heng (2022), the focus on solutions lies mostly within efforts from others with the goal of supporting the individual who is suffering from stress, and that common solutions include focusing on improving work conditions, enabling engagement and support as well as

providing techniques for coping. Anderson and Keillher (2009) suggest that some ways in which organizations can contribute to improving employee wellbeing is through providing transparency, trust, flexibility and freedom.

Social support, including both emotional and instrumental aspects as well as both giving and receiving social support, appears to be a potential buffer against workplace stress as well as a predictor of wellbeing (Shakespeare-Finch & Obst, 2011). Other scholars have made similar findings. Research on 15 different non-profit organizations indicate that most employees experience work-related stress, and that these employees believe that feeling close to their coworkers helps them relieve work-related stress (McClure & Moore, 2021). In their study, Dupret and Pultz (2021) observed support between colleagues and drew the conclusion that employee community is essential. Collins (2008) found social support to be one of the most important coping strategies when experiencing workplace stress, and concluded that there are both practical and emotional benefits to seeking support in for example colleagues. Furthermore, Xiaoqing and Xiao (2021) found that support from colleagues and managers is an important aspect in reducing stress and burnout at work. According to them, experiencing support can result in increased satisfaction, confidence and feelings of safety, as well as increased sense of professional identity and belonging, all helping to mitigate the negative consequences of stress.

In Nash and Stevenson's (2004) model for lasting fulfillment, four critical aspects were identified: *happiness*, relating to feeling content about your life; *achievement*, which refers to achieving things comparable to the accomplishments of others with similar goals; *significance*, defined as making a positive impact on those one cares about; and *legacy*, which entails contributing to other people's success. What is notable is that the authors stress that maximizing all of these aspects at once is unsustainable, and that maximization of one or two comes at the expense of the others. In practice, it is therefore suggested that seeking balance across all four aspects is the key to fulfillment that lasts in the long run.

2.8. Summary of Theoretical Concepts

In the literature review, a range of literature on the topics of stress, wellbeing and meaning has been discussed. Based on other scholars' definitions (Cox, Griffiths & Rial-Gonzáles, 2000; Dupret & Pultz, 2021; Collins, 2008), we define work-related stress as the negative

psychological state that consists of a manifestation of or reaction to overbearing pressures at work. Inspired by previous works in the academic sphere (Levi, 1992; Fischer, 2014), we regard work-related wellbeing as not merely a psychological state in which stress and other negative mental states are absent, but rather as a subjective, positive experience of harmony between needs, abilities, demands and expectations. One aspect of wellbeing of particular interest in this thesis is eudaimonic wellbeing, which is particularly focused on self-actualization and purpose (Gallagher, Lopez & Preacher, 2009). We interpret meaning and purpose as interchangeable concepts, and with inspiration from Frankl (2015) as well as Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009), we see meaning as something subjective that relates to the notion of having something to live for. Meaningfulness and calling appears to be intertwined with stress and wellbeing in multiple ways, with some examples from previous research being how employees tend to accept worse working conditions (Dupret & Pultz, 2021); less work-life balance (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015; Dupret & Pultz, 2021); and lower salaries (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Madden, Bailey & Kerr, 2015) for the sake of meaningful work. Still, research shows that meaningfulness has largely positive implications for wellbeing (Michaelson et al. 2014).

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines our chosen methodological approaches and the reasoning and motivation behind the choices made. Firstly, the chosen research approach and philosophical grounding is presented, followed by the case context. Subsequently, the method for collection and analysis of data is presented, discussed and argued for. The chapter is finalized with discussions on our ethical considerations, reflections on familiarity and distance as well as a note on the limitations of our study.

3.1. Research Approach and Philosophical Grounding

As we are interested in providing in-depth depictions of how employees in girl's support centers subjectively experience work-related stress and wellbeing, a qualitative research method was deemed suitable. We examine the chosen topic from the ontological perspective constructionism, which assumes that meaning is socially constructed and continuously evolving (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Furthermore, we utilize an interpretive epistemology to investigate the proposed research question. Interpretivism focuses on social construction based on individual interpretations, experiences and understandings (Prasad, 2018). More specifically, the method of this thesis has been influenced by a specific category of the interpretive approach called symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the creation of meaning through interpretations by individuals, without disregarding the notion that the individual is a result of social construction (Prasad, 2018). In alignment with symbolic interactionism, we acknowledge that experiences and interpretations are subjective and hold varied meaning for different people.

Abductive reasoning is the foundation of this thesis, meaning that we have actively gone back and forth between theory and empirical findings to uncover new insights and conclusions (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Abductive reasoning is not simply a mix of deductive and inductive reasoning, as each time you move back and forth between the two, new interpretations can appear (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). The choice of abductive reasoning is justified with the intention to not let existing literature narrow down this study too much and thus potentially overreach new interpretations, but at the same time to let it provide guidance around what has been researched before, which helps us generate novel and useful insights that builds on and complements previous research. As a consequence of this, the

literature review in this thesis is neither exhaustive nor systematic, but rather used as an inspiration and as guidance for what to focus on when collecting the empirical material.

3.2. Case Context

A short introduction to the girl's support centers' operations was given in the introduction, but to provide the reader with a deeper insight into what their operations consist of, more details surrounding the context is provided here. We have also included a compilation of background information about the participants and their general work tasks, information which was collected during the interviews.

3.2.1. Girl's Support Centers

The target group of the girl's support centers, mostly girls and young women but in some centers also trans and queer youth, is provided support either physically at the center, through phone calls, via chat or by email, in relation to topics such as experiences of violence, mental health issues or other issues they struggle with (Riksorganisationen för kvinnojourer och tjejjourer i Sverige, 2016). Topics brought up in the support lines range from commonplace talk about family, friends and school, to more specific struggles with for example loneliness, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts and bullying (Larsson, Pettersson, & Eriksson, 2016). According to ROKS (Riksorganisationen för kvinnojourer och tjejjourer i Sverige, 2016), the centers sometimes provide support in contacting appropriate authorities for additional support (e.g. police, mental health services or social services), but their main task is to listen, empower and encourage. Furthermore, ROKS state that many girl's support centers also work with advocacy by organizing lectures, demonstrations and campaigns to protect the rights and interests of the target group (Riksorganisationen för kvinnojourer och tjejjourer i Sverige, 2016).

According to NCK (Nationellt Centrum för Kvinnofrid, 2022), the girl's support center movement in Sweden started in the late 90's. However, they state that the 'women's support center movement' (our translation of the Swedish term 'kvinnojoursrörelsen') had already been actively working with support and advocacy for women subject to violence in intimate relationships since the 70's. The difference between girl's and women's support centers according to NCK is not only the younger target group, but also the broader span of topics that girl's support centers work with. They claim that whilst women's support centers are

generally focused specifically on violence in intimate relationships, girl's support centers also encompass other topics such as bullying, mental health problems, relationships and drugs. NCK also states that a difference between womens and girl's support centers is that preventative and external work, also referred to as advocacy, is carried out by girl's support centers to a greater extent than by women's support centers.

A study on the 'support seekers' (our translation of the Swedish term 'stödsökande', referring to those who utilize the support lines) in the specific girl's support center Tjejzonen found that the target group uses the support lines in order to have someone to talk to who will not judge them (Larsson, Pettersson, & Eriksson, 2016). The study also found that it is important to some support seekers that the volunteers they talk to are not part of the healthcare system, and that they are not professional psychologists or counselors. Some of the support seekers reached out to the girl's support center even though they already had contact with health care professionals, because they still felt the need to talk to someone who would listen without judgment. This shows how girl's support centers function as a complement to healthcare and other services from authorities.

There are major differences between support centers across the country, for example in terms of niched competence, ideological viewpoints and whether the centers have employees or run completely on a voluntary basis (Nationellt Centrum för Kvinnofrid, 2022). NCK states that some girl's support centers are intertwined with women's support centers, where both centers belong to the same organization, whilst others are entirely independent. However, they state that despite several differences, what is common for all the support centers is that they rely on and revolve around the unpaid work of volunteers. The board, which constitutes the employer in the girl's support centers, normally also consists of unpaid volunteers. This has implications for the experiences of participants when it comes to agency and autonomy, as the involvement of the employer on a daily basis is limited.

3.2.2. Participants

In our study, 16 participants who are currently or were recently employed in a girl's support center somewhere in Sweden have been interviewed. All of the participants in this study identify as women, and a majority of them are between 25-40 years old. Some of them work or have worked at independent girl's support centers, and some work or have worked in

combined girl's and women's support centers. They have all completed some sort of higher education, and many of them hold a bachelor's or master's degree. The fields of study vary significantly, although the most common ones are social work and gender studies. The roles they have or have had in their respective support centers varies, with some examples of titles being volunteer coordinator, education officer, support coordinator and coordinator for violence prevention (our translations). Common work tasks for the participants include arranging volunteer trainings, advising and keeping in touch with volunteers, creating schedules for the staffing of the support lines, applying for and reporting back on grants, hosting workshops at schools and conducting administrative tasks. Some roles are more niched, which is often the case in support centers with several employees, and some roles are very broad, which is usually the case in support centers with one or two employees.

What is notable in the context of girl's support center employees, is that almost all of the participants started out as volunteers in a girl's support center before being employed. Some were previously volunteers in the same support center they subsequently were employed in, and some were volunteers in other support centers. Many participants also have experience from being elected officials in a girl's support center, meaning that they have previously been part of the board. Moving from volunteer, to board member, to employee does not seem to be uncommon in the field. Additionally, it is not uncommon to continue being a volunteer also alongside employment. Some have volunteer assignments in the support centers they are employed in, and make a distinction between paid work and volunteer work based on the input of effort and responsibility in particular tasks (e.g. hosting a member's meeting on request from the board equals paid work, whilst participating in a member's meeting based on own interest equals volunteer work). It does however seem to be more common for employees to have a volunteer assignment, often a board assignment, in a different support center than the one they are employed in. Alternatively, employees may have a volunteer assignment in an umbrella organization where their support center is a member. There are also participants who do not have volunteer assignments alongside their work.

3.3. Collection of Data

In this section, the choices surrounding data collection and selection of participants is explained and discussed.

3.3.1. Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

The data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. As our goal was to make a deep-dive into employees' experiences and perceptions, interviews were deemed the suitable option. Interviews provide a broad and varied spectrum of information (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The decision to use semi-structured interviews was motivated by the benefits of having a basic structure and focus, but leaving room for spontaneous follow-up questions depending on what was brought up during the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As suggested by Bryman and Bell (2011) as well as Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), we prepared an interview guide (see *Appendix 8.1.*) that contained themes and questions of interest to focus on during the interviews. As Bryman and Bell (2011) suggest, we used different kinds of questions in the interview guide and throughout the interviews, and we included introductory questions, follow-up and probing questions, specifying questions, direct questions, indirect questions, structuring questions, silence and interpreting questions. The choice of questions was motivated by reasons given by Bryman and Bell (2011), such as giving nuance to the interview, leaving room for the participant's interpretations and not being too leading in our questions, checking if we had understood the participant correctly as well as striving to uncover more information and examples than initially provided. During the course of the interviewing period, the interview guide was continuously developed and adjusted based on the themes we identified in the participants' responses.

Each interview lasted for 30-50 minutes and both of us authors were present for all of the interviews. One of us focused on leading the conversation whilst the other took reflective notes and inserted follow up questions when necessary. Having more than one interviewer has been found to have its advantages (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and we decided that both of us should be present in order to increase the likelihood of us interpreting and portraying participants in a fair and sound way, capturing what they said between the lines and minimizing the risk of missing any subtle hints or important information.

As the girl's support centers in Sweden are distributed across the country, we decided to conduct the entirety of the interviews digitally. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. We later translated the quotes that were selected for presentation in the thesis from Swedish to English. The decision to conduct the interviews in Swedish and

translate them to English was made due to the initial participants' apparent preference for speaking in Swedish.

3.3.2. Finding and Preparing Participants

The choice to focus on employees in this thesis stemmed from the fact that volunteers in girl's support centers have quite different roles and responsibilities. We deemed a focus on volunteers to be too broad and extensive for the scope of this thesis. We were also specifically interested in the dynamics of being employed within the non-profit sector and conducting paid work in an area and organization that many consider their passion. As most support centers only have one, two or three employees, it was a natural decision to conduct an interview study on girl's support centers across Sweden rather than pursuing a case study on one single girl's support center.

Even though many of the girl's support centers work in close collaboration with women's support centers, the decision was made to exclude employees from the latter in the study. The reason behind this was that the work tasks at the women's support center were assumed to deviate too much from the ones at the girl's support center. It was assumed that it would be difficult to conclude and generalize findings in such different types of organizations, despite the many similarities between these two types of support centers.

In order to find potential interview participants, we emailed all the girl's support centers listed as members of the following umbrella organizations for girl's support centers in Sweden: Förenade Jourer, ROKS and Unizon. Employees and former employees at the girl's support centers were also encouraged to participate in the study via a social media group for employees and volunteers in the girl's support center movement, as well as in a chat tool for Förenade Jourer. The chat tool as well as the social media group was accessible to us thanks to the personal involvement in a girl's support center of one of us authors.

Prior to the interviews, the participants received a selection of example questions in order for them to have time to reflect on their answers. Both before and during the interviews, participants were informed that the interview questions were not exhaustive and comprehensive for the topic explored, but that they rather should be considered as a guide. All participants were also asked to reflect on any situations or experiences related to stress and wellbeing in their work that could be relevant to the topic, but that was not covered by

the questions we asked. The reasoning behind this was that we wanted to minimize the risk of missing or leaving out information of importance due to our own biases and selectiveness.

3.4. Analysis of Data

According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), there are problems with *chaos*, *representation* and *authority* when conducting research analysis. This refers to having no order in the data, an impossibility to present all data collected and difficulty in framing the contribution to research. To overcome these problems they suggest sorting, reducing and arguing. Although we do recognize that the analysis starts already during the interviews depending on the themes observed and what follow up questions are asked, this section is mostly focused on the process after the transcriptions of the interviews, which is where most of the analysis of this thesis took place.

3.4.1. Sorting

The empirical material was initially scanned, sorted and coded into different themes. Sorting the collected material is commonly done through categorizing it into themes depending on its content (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018), and this is what Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995 cited in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018) suggests when coding based on transcripts. As suggested by Gubrium and Holstein (1997 cited in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018) we focused both on looking at *what* was being said in the interviews but also *how* it was being said, when trying to sort the data into different themes. After the themes were outlined, we returned to the transcripts to search for and compile illustrating examples for each specific theme. There was also a short summary and overview created for each interview, consisting of a maximum of one paragraph, with the purpose of getting a better overview of the findings.

The themes emerged at different stages of the process, which is in line with Kvale's (1983, 1997 cited in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018) analysis approach of *distilling*, *categorizing* and *interpreting* the data. Initially, we started distilling the data we collected by sorting the data into themes, such as 'coping strategies'. This was followed by further categorizations of the different themes, where sub themes such as 'seeking support in colleagues' were created.

3.4.2. Reducing

Due to the vast amount of data collected there was a need for reduction. The reasoning behind reducing the material is to both to make it more manageable but also to create a greater and more specific contribution to the current body of research (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). After going through the material and prioritizing, we created an initial disposition of themes. These included eudaimonic wellbeing, social wellbeing, burnout and stress, professional and individual identity, work environment as well as coping. After spending more time processing the material and finding connections between the different themes, we narrowed it down to five main topics. As can be seen in the analysis, these consist of: *Experiences of Stress; Stressors; Meaningfulness, Identification and Calling; Autonomy, Overwork and Wellbeing;* and finally, *Handling Stress*. The themes *Stressors* and *Handling Stress* were further divided into more specific subcategories. Based on the finalized themes, we also revisited the interview summaries to reflect upon the data once again, in order to identify and add any information which could contribute to our analysis but that we had initially left out or overlooked.

3.4.3. Arguing

Arguing is centered around making interpretations of the data and supporting claims with the collected material (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2016). This is achieved by doing something the researchers call theorizing, which is a form of argumentation or formulation of a general message based on the data. To analyze and create arguments of theory around our data, we initially based our analysis around the structure of what Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995 cited in Rennstam & Wästerfors) call excerpt-commentary units that follow a structure of: *theme, analytical point, orientation, empirical excerpt* and *analytical comment*. In the beginning stages, every section followed this structure, but as the process evolved we integrated paragraphs and quotes with each other. This was in order to make the text flow better and more easily connect otherwise separate points. Much like the semi-structured interviews, we decided to start with a structure, but along the way make appropriate adjustments. In practice, this meant that the text was initially short, concise and rather dense, but in order to make the reading experience more engaging and provide a richer portrayal of the collected material, the text was developed into a less organized but more insightful structure.

The way the analytical comments were theorized and interpreted was focused on reading between the lines and on the underlying meaning of *what* had been said as well as *how* it was said, in the selected excerpts. We also tried to find contradictions, tensions and paradoxes, initially within the material itself and eventually also in comparison with previous research. The aim with this was to achieve a deeper understanding of the employees' experiences, as well as the underlying norms, opinions and assumptions made amongst employees in the girl's support center movement. One example of this is our interpretation that most employees tend to see stress as something inherently bad and incompatible with workplace wellbeing (see the discussion on demonization of stress in section *4.1. Experience of Stress in Girl's Support Centers*), despite the fact that this was never explicitly stated.

Each identified theme was explored in the light of previous research. The comparison between previous research and our findings are presented in the analysis section rather than in the discussion. The reason for this is that we wanted to avoid unnecessary repetition and to clearly contextualize our findings in the arena of previous research. The slightly shorter discussion focuses on further developing what is presented in the analysis chapter, and thus provides a deeper insight into the findings of our study as well as their implications.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

In this thesis, individual participants and support centers have been anonymized to protect their integrity. Any information that could be considered personal or lead to uncovering information about the identities of specific participants has been removed. A list of participants is not provided for the reader, and all participants' names have been changed from their original. As some of the participants were informed about the total number of interviews conducted as well as which number in the order that their interview was, and additionally had colleagues that they knew were supposed to participate either before or after themselves, we have decided to use fictive names when referring to our findings, rather than referring to them as numbered (such as "Interviewee 1").

Consent forms were distributed to all participants prior to the interviews, in order to inform them about the data collection and their rights (see *Appendix 8.2.*). In the consent form, it was stressed that the participation is completely voluntary and that the participants may retract their participation at any time up until two weeks prior to the final submission of the thesis.

At the start of the interviews, each participant was asked if they had understood the consent form, and they had the opportunity to raise any questions, concerns and wishes in terms of data collection and anonymity.

3.6. Familiarity and Distance

At the time of writing this thesis, one of us authors was actively engaged as a volunteer and elected official in a girl's support center. As the topic of stress and wellbeing may be considered personal and sensitive to talk about, it was deemed crucial to gain and establish trust from the participants in the study. For this purpose, it was a positive circumstance that one of us was involved in the girl's support center movement, and thus was more easily able to relate to the participants' answers and understand their experiences (Ybema et al. 2009). On the other hand, it was also considered positive that the other author had no prior experience of girl's support centers, as it helped us minimize the risk of making assumptions based on previous knowledge, and thus enabled us to identify and explore new perspectives more easily (Ybema et al. 2009). We attempted to minimize potential bias by refraining from interviewing employees from the specific girl's support center that one of us was an elected official and thus employer in at the time of conducting this study, as it could risk severely compromising the participants' ability to be honest, transparent and open in the interviews. This means that prior to the interviews, neither one of us authors had close relationships with the employees participating in the study.

3.7. Reflexivity and Limitations

An important caveat to keep in mind for the remainder of this thesis is that experiences of wellbeing, as well as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement, calling and other similar concepts, vary over time and from day to day within individuals (Fischer, 2014). This makes it difficult to study with interviews conducted at a single point in time. The short-termed and cyclical nature of emotions should be kept in mind when observing empirical evidence regarding meaning, stress and wellbeing in relation to work.

As with all qualitative research, a limitation is its subjective nature (Styhre, 2013), which makes it hard to draw generalized conclusions based on the findings. However, we deemed that the advantages of taking a qualitative approach - such as getting a deep and rich insight into the experiences of the participants - outweighed these potential limitations. On the topic

of qualitative research, it is important to reflect upon the fact that the results presented from interviews are dependent on the researchers' interpretations (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). In other words, an identical study of the same participants conducted by other researchers may lead to significantly different findings and conclusions. The findings made in this thesis can therefore not be seen as an absolute truth, both in the sense that it is dependent on the participants' interpretations of their experiences, but also that it is based on our interpretation of their depiction of their experiences. It is often a good idea to go back to the participants for a follow-up interview, in order to discuss the researchers' interpretations of what was said the first time (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). However, due to time restraints and the limited extent of this thesis, this step was not conducted even though it could have provided further insights and validation for the findings.

Regarding the use of Swedish as the interview language, it could be argued that some meaning and nuances in the quotations of the participants may have gotten lost in translation. To minimize this risk, we went over the translated quotes several times and tried to not only directly translate what was said, but also to capture the meaning and feelings behind it. Translation can be seen as *"a sense making process that involves the translator's knowledge, social background, and personal experience"* (Xian, 2008 cited in Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.488), and despite our best efforts, there is still a possibility that misinterpretations or miscommunications occurred during translation.

According to Prasad (2018), symbolic interactionists tend to complement interviews with observations and avoid only one type of data collection. Due to the fact that the participants in this study often work with sensitive information surrounding support seekers and volunteers, we decided that making observations was not appropriate nor plausible in this study. Our focus was the experiences of employee stress and wellbeing, and during the process we found that 16 in-depth interviews gave us a sufficient amount and quality of data, making observations less relevant and likely to add further depth and understanding to our study. When deciding on the number of interviews to conduct, the elimination of observations as a collection method was taken into consideration. In other words, we conducted more interviews than we would have done if we would have also collected data through observations.

It is important to have a word on some of the specific circumstances which prevents generalizability for the findings of this thesis. We want to stress that the focus of this thesis is on employees in girl's support centers, and that their experiences and thoughts about their work cannot be generalized to encompass those who are not employed but have other assignments in support centers (such as volunteers or elected officials). The same holds true for support centers that are completely volunteer-based and do not have any employees.

Finally, there could also be a potential bias in our selection of participants. Even though we directly contacted all girl's support centers we know to exist, and reached out more broadly to groups of girl's support centers on social media and in a chat tool, one could imagine that the people that decided to participate in the study may be homogenous in some way. It is possible that they decided to participate for similar reasons - maybe because they do indeed experience stress at work, because they have personal experience of burnout and thus a personally motivated conviction surrounding the importance of employee wellbeing, or potentially because they are extra passionate about contributing to research within the field. Whatever the reason may be, it is important to keep in mind that this likely influences the findings as well as the generalizability of this study.

4. Analysis

In the following section, the empirical results are presented and interpreted. To start with, employees' experiences and perceptions on stress in their work are presented. This is followed by a deeper dive into the identified stressors. Furthermore, the prevalence and effects of meaningfulness, identification and calling in girl's support centers are explored. This is followed by a section on autonomy and its implications in terms of overwork and influence on wellbeing. Lastly, the handling of stress in girl's support centers is discussed. Throughout the analysis, our interpretations of the material have been included, and we have also included comparisons to previous research as presented in the literature review.

4.1. Experience of Stress in Girl's Support Centers

The experience of stress in girl's support centers is ambiguous. Most participants do however state that they do feel stressed, at least periodically, which is consistent with previous research that shows most employees in non-profit organizations do indeed experience stress (McClure & Moore, 2021). Almost all participants emphasized that the workload varies across time, and that certain periods are more stressful than others. The more stressful periods are usually influenced by especially work intensive events, such as volunteer trainings and grant applications. One participant says that *"it is a more stressful period right now during spring, with the annual meeting, annual report and finishing that whole thing. We also have our volunteer training and grant applications"* (Angela). Periodical stress is also characterized by unpredictable things happening, such as commitment from volunteers being low or as the following quote shows, that colleagues get sick:

> *We had a lot of people sick this winter and then we have a lot to do periodically. At those times I experience stress. I would say that we could have one week when there is really a lot to do, and then we have a relaxed week, and then there is another hectic week. So it really goes up and down all the time.* (Nina)

During periods with high workload, the source of stress seems to be that there is an array of different things to do combined with a perceived lack of possibility to influence, receive practical help with or unburden the workload. Previous research has found high workload and high emotional demands to be predictors of burnout, but that high workload contributes less

to burnout in the presence of social support (Vander Elst et al. 2016). These findings seem to align with the findings of our study. Vander Elst et al. (2016) also found that high workload leads to decreased engagement, something which our study has not been able to confirm.

Some participants contrarily say that they do not experience themselves as stressed at work on a regular basis, alternatively that they mostly experience what one participant calls *"positive stress"* (Frida). When asked if she feels stressed, another participant answers that she does not, and says *"it can be many things to juggle at the same time. [...] But I like it, I am used to it."* (Birgitta). The acceptance of a large workload and unforeseen tasks could be seen as consistent with research that finds work intensification to be legitimized in purpose driven organizations (Dupret & Pultz, 2021). Our findings nevertheless show that most employees in girl's support centers feel stressed at times, but it is interesting how differently it seems to affect people's overall experiences.

When the participants are asked about what they think experiences of other employees in girl's support centers are in regards to wellbeing and stress at work, the answers vary. Some believe that other employees enjoy their work and generally feel good in their jobs, whilst others paint a picture of stress and burnout as common and recurring phenomena amongst the employees in the field. One even expresses it as *"very bad"* (Frida), and another anticipated that this study would only find that employees say that they *"feel like shit"* (Hedda).

Something that stands out in the discussions surrounding stress amongst participants, is that many describe the stress as different to the stress they have experienced prior to working in girl's support centers. One participant compares her current stress to something different from the stress she felt when she worked at a restaurant:

> *I thought I was the most stress resistant person since restaurants are really workplaces where there is a lot of acute stress. [...] But it is a different kind of stress involved in this job, one that is a bit more low key and constant stress over things working out.* (Hedda)

Another participant experiences stress in the work at girl's support centers differently from stress she has felt before in the sense that the work has some sort of limitlessness to it:

> *Periodically I am very stressed at work, but it is a kind of stress I have not experienced in other situations. [...] There is no job description in the world*

that could cover all that I do. Which means that there are a lot of loose ends in
my brain constantly. (Angela)

Reflecting on the above, the stress experienced by employees in the support centers is described as constant and lingering rather than acute. Some of the participants have personal experiences of stress that has also led to burnout. In the end of one of the interviews, the participant's partner leans in, having eavesdropped during the course of the interview, and says *"you have to say that you got halfway to burnout as well"* (Agnetha). Another participant says the following about her experience with burnout:

There is no support when you need it. Knowing that people within the support
center movement also are people that are very passionate about something, it
is not always positive. I would say it is positive for us, but in a place where
there are no frames and no hands to guide and hold you, it becomes negative
instead. I have experienced that I often had to take other people's fights, and
my own fights, and also had to work with topics relating to violence daily. It
easily becomes limitless. [...] So I went through a period of burnout and
depression. (Frida)

Many participants also commented that they perceive it as quite common for people within their field to experience burnout. There seems to be both a perceived risk for burnout but also an actual problem with people being on sick leave, with one participant stating that she thinks *"that there is a quite big risk of people getting burned out, that they don't have the energy or don't last in the long run"* (Selma), and another one who says that *"many people are on sick leave, many people don't show up to work because they don't feel well."* (Maria). It seems to be almost accepted or expected, within this field of work, that there is a possibility that you will work until you reach burnout.

Many participants describe that there is a culture within the girl's support centers where stress is acknowledged as a serious problem, and colleagues encourage each other to not compromise with their free time and make sure not to contact each other about work outside of working hours. One participant exemplifies this in the following way:

I have a great collaboration with my colleague, we usually talk and encourage
each other. I think that has always been good in this workplace, that we

encourage each other, like: 'now you need to stop'. If someone says 'I was
going to go workout today but I won't' then it is like 'yes you will'. (Hannah)

In other words, there seems to be a culture that encourages colleagues to set boundaries and take care of themselves. However, the same participant simultaneously perceives that there is a contradicting culture in the girl's support center movement, one that accepts and glorifies overworking. She says the following about it:

In some cases there has been almost a pride surrounding having overtime
hours. People talk about it in a little bit of a complaining way, but it is also
some kind of proof of how passionate you are. [...] The culture we have tried
to create where we encourage each other to be sick when we are sick, exercise
when we need to exercise or walk or whatever it could be. I think it is a
reaction because we have all been in that 'performance trench', and then it
becomes extra important to applaud each other when you are able to keep
your boundaries. (Hannah)

Other participants also touch upon this subject and talk about people within the industry as *"over-achievers"* (Agnetha), passionate and limitless in how much they want to accomplish and how devoted they are. To summarize, there seems to be a simultaneous demonization and romanticization of overwork and stress in the girl's support centers. On one hand, many participants seem to view overwork and stress as negative, problematic and as a hindrance for employee wellbeing. But on the other hand, there are instances where employees are perceived to indirectly or subtly brag about working too much. To some extent there seems to be an unspoken understanding that overworking is proof that you care about the cause of the organization. This can be connected with Dupret and Pultz's (2021) finding that work intensification is legitimized in purpose driven organizations, and that loss of work-life balance tends to be accepted by employees who feel a calling to their work (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015).

There seems to be a contrast to previous research which found burnout to be stigmatized (Maslach, 2017). In the girl's support centers, it appears that this is not the case: burnout is not viewed as a sign of weakness or lack of competence. There is however at times an emphasis on individual characteristics, which is in line with Maslach's (2017) observation

that individuals often are assigned responsibility for burnout. One participant described it as hard not to overwork when you are passionate, and that there is a large individual responsibility to not *"take on too much"* (Agnetha). Another participant said the following:

> *I also want to say that in this industry people can be so different, that you handle stress differently. I feel like I can handle this work quite well, having no boss, no employer and a lot of individual responsibility. I feel like I can handle it in a good way, but I know that other people that work at support centers are not able to handle it at all, and that some end up getting burned out since they don't get any support from their employer.* (Maria)

Depending on who you are as a person, there is a perception that you will be more or less likely to feel stressed and get burned out. Cooper and Marshall (2013) studied the ability to cope with workplace stress and did indeed find that there are those who can handle it better than others. The view that ability to cope varies from individual to individual in the girl's support centers appears to come with an expectation that it is your personal responsibility to set boundaries. This is something which is described as difficult when you are ambitious and passionate. Some participants display elements of self blame for their inability to cope with the stress at work. Excessive focus on the individual is something which Maslach (2017) sees as problematic, as it turns focus away from redesigning work in a way that lowers workplace stress.

4.2. Stressors in Girl's Support Centers

The reasons as to why stress is experienced in the girl's support centers is elaborated on in this section. The stressors identified can be summarized as the nature of the work tasks, financial stress, feelings of insufficiency and a challenging work environment (with focus on psychosocial aspects).

4.2.1. The Limitless Nature, Unpredictability and Variety of Work Tasks

Several participants point out that the nature of the work tasks in girl's support centers is limitless, and that you can always do more. When working for a great cause on a societal level, there is always more work that can be done. This is especially highlighted in terms of the work with violence prevention:

At the support center we have the support line that is our core and is very important, but we also have the preventative work where there is no limit to what you can do, and where you would want to do a lot more than we do today. You want to be part of everything all the time. (Sophie)

There are also several references to having to juggle too many different work tasks at the same time and not being able to plan ahead for much of the work. One participant describes her biggest challenge as the fact that you cannot prepare for a lot of the tasks, as they often turn out to be more complicated and more broad than first anticipated (Nina). She also describes *"that you need to be someone who can do and know a little about everything"*, and that this is both a challenge but also something that makes it more fun. Other participants also testify that there is sometimes no limit to what becomes your responsibility at the center:

I would say that when I feel stress it is almost always connected to that in such a small organization you have to do everything yourself. We don't have an IT person, HR department or someone that cleans. (Selma)

There seems to exist negative attitudes towards lack of boundaries regarding work tasks and having to perform a very broad and diverse set of work tasks at the centers. Paradoxically, variety in work tasks is also what makes many of the employees enjoy their work.

4.2.2. Financial Stress

In nearly all of the interviews, the grant-based nature of the organization is brought up as a major stressor. The girl's support centers are financed mainly by grants from the state or the local council, and just like previous research on the non-profit sector confirms (Saunders, 2004), the time frames of the grants are often relatively short. This means that the financial state of girl's support centers is generally rather unstable, and sensitive to political changes and shifts. It furthermore means that temporary contracts are common, and thus job security for employees is low. Previous research confirms that job insecurity has a negative influence on employee wellbeing, and can lead to for example burnout, lower work performance and lower job satisfaction (Vander Elst et al. 2012). The results in this thesis confirm the previously established relationship between job insecurity and decreased wellbeing.

One participant says that *"we will see if I will have to apply for a new job [soon]. It is absolutely stressful to not know what is happening."* (Nicole). This feeling of uncertainty is expressed in most interviews and one participant describes it as a universal problem that all support centers face. She further makes a connection to how this is affecting people's wellbeing by saying that it *"wears people out"* (Hedda) to always have to worry about the survival of the center. Beyond the survival of the center itself, there seems to also exist stress in regards to the survival of the movement as a whole. One participant talks about this in relation to the stress and uncertainty that is created when there is a political shift or when changes in the supply of support services occur:

> *What happens to us when private actors are starting to come into the scene and saying that 'we can do it better than you?' I think that there is also, somewhere, an overall stress relating to the survival of the support center movement.* (Eva)

Previous research suggests that job insecurity can prevent fulfillment of financial and psychological needs amongst affected employees (Vander Elst et al. 2012), but our interviews show that an additional dimension is that stress over finances in girl's support centers can be both personal and organizational. On one hand, their individual financial and work-related situation is at stake, which has implications for their personal lives. On the other hand, the fate of the whole organization is also at stake, which could be a major stressor for employees who care about and identify with the cause of the organization. A job loss may in this case lead to identity related problems, especially as many of the employees are also very passionate about their work tasks and professions. This is consistent with previous research that suggests how an otherwise rather insignificant occupational change may be perceived as a personal failure in the presence of calling at work (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009).

A unique circumstance for grant-based organizations such as girl's support centers is that employees often are responsible for applying for grants that cover their salary expenses, meaning they are in practice responsible for securing their own jobs. This can be a cause of additional pressure on the employee according to some of the participants, one of which who says the following:

If you have a bad period, perhaps in life or at work, at the same time as grant applications are to be submitted, then you may not get the money you applied for, and then you may lose your job - which becomes an additional stress factor. (Maria)

The financial stress is in other words magnified by the fact that a lot of times the responsibility for both the survival of the organization and the preservation of your own or your colleagues' jobs, is put on you as an employee. It furthermore seems as though the stress employees experience due to job insecurity can be worsened by poor communication from the board.

4.2.3. Loneliness, Feelings of Insufficiency and Ethical Stress

Some of the employees point out that the girl's support centers have too little resources. A reoccuring theme in the interviews is participants expressing that they feel like they are not enough, that they are insufficient. They suggest that being granted more money and thus being able to have more employees is a necessity in order to lower the stress and work intensification. One participant claims that she would not be able to manage her job if she did not have any colleagues (Maria). Several other participants also made similar remarks, and loneliness was a recurring theme for participants in girl's support centers with only one employee.

Previous research confirms that in order for employees to flourish and avoid burnout, their needs must be met (Van den Broeck et al. 2008), which is not compatible with the absence of resources and simultaneous presence of demands observed at the girl's support centers. By extension, the perceived lack of resources generates a need for prioritization of work tasks. This leads to what one participant refers to as ethical stress. She describes it as following:

There is a kind of ethical stress as well: I see what should be done but I cannot prioritize it and have to let it be. Then I walk around and think about what I should do. But I can't, because I only have 40 hours. That is actually a kind of stress I feel all the time, that I am never enough. (Agnetha)

When an employee is passionate about the cause of the organization, and thinks that all of the services and tasks carried out by the organization are important on a moral level, choosing to

deprioritize a certain task comes with stress and a sense of guilt. What in another organization may be a simple act of rearranging priorities, turns into a moral dilemma at a girl's support center. This aligns with Bunderson and Thompson's (2009) finding that experiencing calling at work increases feelings of moral obligation. When making any decisions, having a colleague to bounce ideas and discuss with seems to be very important, and this seems to be especially true when it comes to decisions that have moral aspects and implications. This becomes clear when one employee describes how much easier it is to for example decide to close the support line in the case of lack of volunteers:

> *There is a huge difference between being alone and having your colleagues. It makes such a big difference. Then you can decide that 'we will skip doing this because we don't have time'. That is a decision that can be quite hard to make by yourself, to close it [the support line]. But if you are more than one person, then we can make those decisions and prioritize together.* (Elise)

Making decisions alone is perceived as more difficult and creates more guilt for the individual employee. There is a resistance towards feeling solely responsible for decisions. One employee even goes as far as saying she feels like a dictator when making decisions on her own all of the time (Maria). The stress caused by lack of collaboration and feedback in girl's support centers with only one employee is noticeable. The finding that colleagues are important in decision making is consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of social support when it comes to stress and wellbeing (Vander Elst et al. 2016; McClure & More, 2021; Dupret & Pultz, 2021; Collins, 2008; Xiaqing & Xiao, 2021). We find that in dilemmas with moral aspects, it is especially important to share the responsibility and feel support from colleagues.

4.2.4. A Challenging Work Environment

The work environment in girl's support centers is described as problematic by many participants. The irregular working hours are brought up, where working on evenings and weekends is common because of the limited availability amongst volunteers. This has a tangible impact on the private lives of employees. One participant describes it as following:

> *Since the chat is open outside office hours, I am available if there would be anything. [...] If a volunteer is sick, they usually write in the evening and that*

results in me working uncomfortable hours. It is special in the non-profit sector, you don't clock out a specific time after which no one will contact you. I think it suits me well, I don't suffer much from it. (Nicole)

The irregular working hours does not seem to be perceived as a major problem in terms of the work environment, but is rather seen as a necessary evil that you have to accept. This is in line with Berkelaar and Buzzanell (2015) as well as Dupret and Pultz (2021) findings that there tends to be an acceptance of shortcomings in working conditions if the work is experienced as purposeful. What is perceived to be a bigger and not as accepted problem in the girl's support centers is the psychosocial work environment, where working with volunteers, having a volunteer-based employer and working without hierarchy seems to be prevalent stressors. These factors will be discussed in the following subsections.

4.2.4.1. Working with Volunteers

There is a recurring stress regarding the volunteer-based nature of the organization. Volunteer commitment is described by one participant as *"going in waves"* (Hannah), which has a direct effect on stress amongst employees. For example, high levels of stress are perceived in times where the girl's support centers are struggling to fill up the schedules for staffing of the support lines, as illustrated below:

> *To be dependent on individuals that do this voluntarily is absolutely a stress factor. For example, at the moment we have had a period where a lot of our experienced volunteers, for different reasons, have had to pause their assignments and immediately it becomes very fragile to try to fix a schedule for the chat. And the chat is the core of our operations, which means it is very sensitive. And there is nothing I can do about it. I try to puzzle as well as I can with the pieces that I have, but I cannot magically make pieces appear. So it is absolutely a big stressfactor.* (Angela)

In some support centers, employees take on empty slots in the support line schedules when commitment amongst volunteers is low, or when volunteers cancel with short notice. In other support centers, difficulties with staffing the support line are met with an emphasis on recruiting and training new volunteers as fast as possible. Regardless of the approach used to solve the issue of low commitment amongst volunteers, it means that the workload for

employees is significantly higher when volunteers do not contribute as much. There are however instances where volunteers are very committed and help fill empty slots in the chat schedule, which contributes to lowering the workload of employees. In other words, despite being a potential stressor, volunteers can provide employees with support when they are perceived as committed.

In general, working with volunteers is described as unpredictable, challenging and occasionally frustrating. Nevertheless, there are also times where it is portrayed in a more positive light and described as something motivating, fulfilling and meaningful. One particular participant describes it as following:

> *I think one reason for why people stay is because they get to surround themselves with those who are engaged voluntarily. I think that is a reason that makes employees stay longer, that you can get empowered by the volunteers. But of course you can only live off of others' motivation for so long.* (Frida)

Several participants talk about how they do not want to burden volunteers with too much or 'boring' work, as it is seen as important that volunteers think their assignments are fun. The fear is that the volunteers would otherwise not be as committed, and that they would leave their assignments if there was too much pressure. One participant claims that *"if there is pressure and stress then there will not be a good feeling in the organization"* (Elise). Another participant says that on one occasion where there was an internal conflict going on, she did not want to burden volunteers with it, as she was afraid that it could *"shed a negative light on the organization and trash our purpose"* (Fredrika). These participants show that it is not uncommon to prioritize the organization above the self and one's needs. This is also seen in another interview, when an employee talked about what motivates her despite feeling stressed and experiencing the work as too monotone:

> *The support center must exist. Those seeking support must be able to find the center. The support center must continue. The show must go on, with or without me. But it has to go on, I can't just let it go, I have to make sure it goes well.* (Agnetha)

To conclude, there seems to be a dilemma when it comes to volunteers. On one hand they are crucial for the operations, and given that they are committed, they have the opportunity to support and unburden employees with work tasks. On the other hand, employees do not want to stifle volunteer commitment by assigning them too much workload, responsibility and pressure. It is striking that most employees have a very selfless view in regards to this, even though it in some cases significantly contributes to their experience of stress. The employees want to make volunteering fun, they do not want to burden them and they show great understanding for when volunteers have to take a break. Reading between the lines, there seems to be a prioritization of the organization and over one's own interests as an employee. Indeed, calling at work has been found to infringe on the personal lives of employees, and potentially hinder them from fulfilling personal and familial needs (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015; Dupret & Pultz, 2021).

4.2.4.2. Having a Volunteer-Based Employer

The views on having a volunteer-based board as one's employer vary, and several participants point out that the quality of the collaboration depends a lot on the commitment and involvement of a specific board constellation. There are examples from participants where the relationship with the board is well functioning, such as one participant who stated that *"we [the board and her] work very closely and try to meet once a month to discuss direction, workload and things like that. I feel an enormous support."* (Sophie). There are also contrasting examples where the relationship is highly dysfunctional, and a major stressor for the employees. In these cases, one of the following three scenarios are usually identified as the cause of the stress: the board is perceived as not committed or involved; the employees feel that the board lacks the necessary competence to do a good job as an employer; or, there are internal conflicts that disturbs the collaboration either within the board or between the board and the employees. One participant expresses that she sometimes perceives an *"empty kindness"* (Maria) from the board, where they claim to care about her work situation, but does not actually do anything about problems or give her tools to improve her work situation.

Some participants bring up that lack of continuity is a major issue regardless of the degree of involvement and competence in the board. The board is usually at least partially replaced every year, and it is described as draining to always be a constant in an ever-changing context. One participant phrases it as follows:

It is very short-term, important people are exchanged every year. It is hard to build relationships. It is hard to create continuity. […] There is no feedback. There is no transparency and understanding for what our work implies.
(Frida)

According to the participants' ambiguous experiences of the relationship with their employer, it can be concluded that the board can either be a positive or negative factor for employee wellbeing. When the collaboration between the board and employees works well, the board is perceived as a support and a facilitator. When the collaboration does not work well, such as in the case of conflicts or a perceived lack of competence or commitment, the relationship with the board is itself perceived as a stressor. This is consistent with previous research on the relationship between board of directors and executives, which found that wellbeing amongst executives increases and the prevalence of burnout decreases if the board is perceived as enhancing (Olinske & Hellman, 2017).

Just like with volunteers who are not elected officials, there is also a hesitancy amongst employees when it comes to encumbering the volunteer-based board with work, even though the board constitutes the employer. When employees experience stress, they may choose not to inform the board, either because they feel as though it would not make a difference to their situation, or because they do not want to overload them with work tasks. One participant expressed that *"they are there on a voluntary basis and should not do too much"* (Hannah), and another says that *"it is very hard to have a voluntary employer, because I feel like I do not want to burden them with too much"* (Jennie). It appears that it is not uncommon for girl's support centers to struggle with gathering enough volunteers to form a board, and without the board, the organization cannot exist. This may contribute to employees keeping their stress to themselves, in order not to make the volunteer-based board assignment more work intense and thus harder to recruit for than it already is. Again, this seems to be consistent with previous research that shows how employees who experience purpose in or a calling to their work tend to accept poor working conditions at the expense of their wellbeing (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015; Dupret & Pultz, 2021).

4.2.4.3. Authority, Hierarchy and Relationships

The informal work setting is identified as one of the positive influences on employee wellbeing, where the relationship with colleagues is deemed especially important. However, although it does seem to contribute to the social wellbeing of employees at the girl's support centers, the informal work setting does not exist without challenges. The flat organization of employees, where there is no manager and all employees are on the same formal level of hierarchy, is prevalent in many girl's support centers with more than one employee. Although this may be an enabling factor for the informal social setting between employees, this has also been brought up as a potential problem, especially in the case of having a colleague who does not contribute as they should or do their work properly. This is brought up and problematized by a participant who is skeptical of the lack of authority employees have over each other:

> *When you are colleagues and one doesn't have a higher position than the other it is like, what mandate do you even have to tell someone to step up and get it together? It is such a weird route [to go to the board] that you do not want to do it, because it can create a difficult dynamic going forward, when you have 'gossiped' to the board.* (Hannah)

In this scenario, none of the colleagues have any formal authority over the other, and there is no manager to turn to. If making an informal request to the colleague does not result in a desired change, another option could be to contact the board. Considering that the board is usually not involved in the employees' daily work, this option is perceived as relatively drastic. Employees do not want to cause conflict with their colleagues, as such a conflict could result in additional stress at work. This means that there is no solution perceived as viable in the described scenario, and this could be a stressor. There is thus a tradeoff between the contribution to wellbeing and the potential authority related issues that may stem from the informal and non-hierarchical relationships between colleagues in girl's support centers.

One participant suggests that the nature of the work in combination with the flatness of the organization and lack of structures increases stress. Lack of hierarchy combined with the emotional burden of working with violence is described as problematic, even if you have colleagues and get great support from them:

Working with violence and victims of violence presumes that a lot of other things need to be predictable. I think it is a big stressfactor to come to a workplace where there is nowhere to land. [...] I do not only need to carry these stories, I also need to carry myself and my colleagues and I need to carry the entire organization on my shoulders. It makes me very lonely. (Frida)

Previous research finds that social relationships are indeed complex, and can be both a stressor and a source of support (Sparks & Cooper, 2013). The problems regarding authority in the social dynamics between colleagues, as well as the challenges with having an employer who works on a voluntary basis, seems to be minimized in girl's support centers that have a hierarchical structure with an operations manager. In those cases, the manager can facilitate conflict mediation, decision making and proactively focus on ensuring that employee wellbeing is being tended to.

Employees in support centers with operations managers usually have limited contact with the board. In these organizations, the stress levels seem to be perceived as lower, and all of these employees appreciate the structure, support and guidance from their managers. One participant claims that *"one of the nice things that reduces the challenges we face is that we have an operational manager. It gives a huge feeling of security"* (Angela). Another one says that *"I have a very good manager, extremely competent, so I can bounce thoughts around specific cases with her, but she is also very caring."* (Eva). All in all, some kind of hierarchical structure seems to lower the stress experienced by employees and contribute to improved wellbeing.

4.2.4.4. Lack of Status at Combined Support Centers

When it comes to support centers that are combined girls and women's support centers, there seems to be a norm of prioritizing the work tasks of the women's support center over the girl's support center. This is true even for employees that are hired to work specifically and exhaustively with the girl's support center. They often help their colleagues at the women's support center with their tasks. One participant says that *"especially during periods of stress, particularly at the women's center, that work is prioritized"* (Sophie). When asked if the colleagues at the women's support center reciprocate the support for those who work at the girl's support center, participants state that support is not given to the same extent. They can

turn to the colleagues in the women's support centers for emotional support, but when it comes to practical help and unburdening of work tasks, it rarely happens and when it does, it is only after active requests regarding very specific tasks.

The fact that employees who should be working with tasks related to the girl's support center regularly have to help out with the women's support centers' work tasks contributes to the stress they feel at work. Additionally, they are not feeling the equivalent support in their own work tasks. Several participants confirm that the work tasks of the girl's support centers are deprioritized, with one example being a participant who says that *"since my colleagues at the women's support center are busy and I also have a lot to do there, it feels like the girl's support center ends up not being prioritized."* (Fredrika). Another one says the following:

> *The women's support center always comes first. It is an unwritten rule that no one has spoken, but everyone understands that the women's support center always comes before the girl's support center. The girl's support center can exist because of the existence of the women's center. It is the women's support center that gets us more or less all grants.* (Agnetha)

This suggests that there is an underlying understanding that the work of the girl's support center is of lower status and importance than that of the women's support center. This has practical implications for employees at the girl's support centers in terms of for example less support and more workload. But it also has psychological implications, as it could be discouraging, demotivating and a contributor to feelings of insufficiency amongst participants. However, it should be noted that the participants who work at combined centers are often employed alone in the girl's support centers, and despite the apparent deprioritization still find that having colleagues at the women's support center is an important emotional support. To some extent, the benefits and drawbacks of being employed at a girl's support center in a combined support center seem to balance each other out.

4.3. Meaningfulness, Identification and Calling in Girl's Support Centers

Most of the participants express strong positive emotions in regards to their work, and some even claim that they find working a different job to be unthinkable. Feelings of meaningfulness are time and time again recognized as overwhelmingly present in the work at the girl's support centers. In many of the interviews, it is noticeable that the employees

identify with their organizations on a personal level. For example, one employee says that *"what I work with defines me a lot as a person - to be an activist at heart"* (Angela). This is not surprising as their employment often started out as a volunteer assignment, which they pursued because they feel passionate about the issues that girl's support centers deal with. Several participants state that they work with what they do, despite stress and a suboptimal work situation, because they are passionate about helping the target group. One participant describes it as follows:

> *I do a lot of school visits and stuff like that, where you're out meeting young students and then some student chooses to stay after class and talk a little, and they dare to open up and tell me that 'I'm in a very deep depression' or 'I suffer from mental illness and haven't talked to anyone about it, but I feel like I can talk to you [the center]'. It's just things like this where you feel like 'damn, we're really important'. And by that you can show that you are making a difference, and even if it's just for one single person, it's still worth it.* (Maria)

The positive effect that the interaction with support seekers seem to have on participants could be seen as an example of how, for those with strong social motives, satisfying interactions within impermanent relationships can contribute to wellbeing (Fischer, 2014). Another participant explicitly highlights how her work has a function related to her identity:

> *It feels good to be able to go to work everyday and feel like I am doing something that is meaningful to me, and that I can actually make a difference. I can brag a bit about what I do because it simply feels so good and that is important to me. It varies for people how important it is that your job fulfills that existential and identity function.* (Eva)

As the quotes above imply, participants assign meaning and importance to the work they do. It appears as though the participants view their work as more than just work - it is not merely a means to earning a paycheck or an opportunity to reach achievements and status. The participants fall into the category of viewing work as a calling, meaning it is an opportunity to contribute to the greater good, and that their work is morally inseparable from the rest of their lives (Bellah et al. 1985). The participants display elements of both meaning *in* work and meaning *at* work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003 cited in Fischer, 2014). Meaning *in* work is

exemplified in the quotes above, where the importance of the actual work is highlighted. But there also seems to be a strong identification with the organization, the colleagues and the purpose, which can be seen as elements of meaning *at* work. Collectively, they seem to fulfill all three aspects of work-related calling, whereas they choose to dedicate their careers to something beyond themselves (*transcendent summons*); they seem to view work as an opportunity to live a purposeful life (*purposeful work*); and finally, their primary motivation in their work is to make a positive impact on other people (*prosocial orientation*) (Dik et al. 2012). Experiencing the work as meaningful seems to be a major reason to stay employed in the girl's support center movement, and not experiencing meaning appears to make employees want to leave the field. As calling and meaning at work has been proven to contribute to feelings of joy and fulfillment (Madden, Bailey & Kerr, 2015), engagement (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004) and wellbeing (Michaelson et al., 2014), these findings are perhaps not very surprising.

The participants generally display high engagement as well as both normative and affective commitment to their organizations. Just like in other purpose-driven organizations that focus on making a difference in society (Dupret & Pultz, 2021), there is a high compliance between the organizational goals and the purpose of the individual employees in girl's support centers. The participants identify with their work and organizations, which previous literature claims to be more likely to happen if there are strong positive perceptions of the organization (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994) and if employees experience deep engagement (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). The employees in girl's support centers do indeed display signs of strong positive perceptions of the organization as well as deep engagement in their work. The personal commitment to the purpose and the apparent identification with the organization seems to be a majorly positive factor for wellbeing for the participants.

However, one of the drawbacks in regards to personally identifying with the organization and its purpose seems to be that it leads employees to accept lower standards relating to their work situation than they otherwise would have. For example, one of the participants stated that she sacrificed having a higher salary to work with her current job, which she describes as both meaningful and a *"dream job"* (Angela). Another participant said the following:

> *If you compare it with other jobs I've had before, I haven't been willing to adjust or adapt things in my daily private life. I am more prepared to do it*

[now] because I am simply so passionate about what we do and I think it is
important. (Elise).

This aligns with several other scholars' findings that employees endure loss of work-life balance (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015; Dupret & Pultz, 2021), poor working conditions (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015; Dupret & Pultz, 2021) and lower salaries (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Madden, Bailey & Kerr, 2015) if they feel a calling to their work. Bunderson and Thompson (2009) found that occupational identification is high when it comes to employees who feel a calling to their work, and Berkelaar and Buzzanell (2015) found that there is a risk that work with a calling infringes on the private lives of employees and prevent them from fulfilling their personal and familial needs. Similarly, this thesis finds that when the identification with the organization and its purpose becomes very strong, employees may feel as if their work has taken over their whole identity. This is demonstrated by the following statement:

> *Sometimes I lie about what I work with, when I don't have the energy for*
> *questions. [...] I experience that I very much become my profession and that I*
> *never get to be just Fredrika. I think it is a safety mechanism. It is easier to say*
> *I work at a preschool sometimes because then I don't get so many questions.*
> (Fredrika)

It seems to be both a blessing and a curse to be passionate about the work that the girl's support center does. Many express themselves as extremely grateful to have their dream jobs, but simultaneously struggle to put up boundaries between their personal and professional lives. Most of the employees experienced the transition from having a volunteer-based role to being a paid employee as difficult for this exact reason. A few participants felt that it was a natural step and a relief, but the majority had difficulties with orienting themselves in their new role, at least initially. One employee even felt that it killed the passion for the movement that she used to feel as a volunteer, and decreased her social wellbeing in the organization:

> *It killed quite a lot of the creativity and joy. It really killed the spontaneity and*
> *the interest for the topics. [...] It can be hard to go from being a volunteer to*
> *an employee because you lose some friendships, since all of a sudden you are*

supposed to be a supervisor to the support line volunteers. It is a whole different role. You become very lonely. (Agnetha)

What is clear is that the strong identification with the organization, as well as the transition from volunteer to employee, poses major challenges with putting up boundaries between work and free time. One employee says that she does not have much of a private life, and that *"it feels like work is such a big part of my life, and that is of course for better or for worse."* (Nicole). Another example of this is the following statement:

> *In the beginning I more or less worked around the clock. I answered volunteer questions at 11pm and I posted stuff on Instagram even though I didn't get paid to do it, because I would never have time during my working hours.* (Agnetha).

Normative commitment appears to be high, and according to some participants, working hard becomes a way to prove your commitment to the cause. Many participants admit that finding balance and drawing lines between work and free time is indeed difficult and problematic for them. One participant says that:

> *A person who is so deeply committed to these issues, who may also have a volunteering assignment as well within this movement, I think many of these people find it difficult to turn off work.* (Maria)

Another one states the following:

> *I think it is so freaking fun, and that is also what makes it a blessing and a curse - that it is hard to stop. It is hard to say 'no, I don't care so much about this'. You think everything you do is super important.* (Selma)

Others disagree and think that they are good at setting boundaries. What can be observed is that many state that they disengage from work by for example turning off their work phones or leaving their computers at work, but simultaneously cross those boundaries when it is 'necessary'. The situations when it is deemed necessary varies for different employees. Some deviate from protecting their free time as they normally would when the workload is unusually large and the time during the workday is not enough, and others when a volunteer needs support late at night. One participant even said that she answers support calls when she

forgets to turn her work phone off (which she normally does during non-work hours), because she is so keen to help and contribute (Birgitta).

It becomes clear that the participants seem to, to a great extent, identify with the values, goals and purpose of the girl's support centers, which leads to difficulties in separating their work from their personal lives. This indicates that psychological detachment may be low, which is confirmed by statements from various participants about how they during non-work hours think about or conduct activities related to their work, their organizations or the girl's support center movement as a whole. Previous research has concluded that low psychological detachment is related to poor wellbeing and potential burnout, as the lack of mental disengagement prevents adequate recovery from stress (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). This is thus an additional example of how identification with the organization and its purpose seems to influence the employee wellbeing in girl's support centers negatively.

It is clear that work affects the personal life of the participants, but how do their personal lives affect their work? Many of the participants talk about how they can be themselves at work and often talk about how you get a different kind of relationship with your colleagues because it is welcomed to be more personal and talk about emotions to a greater extent than in other workplaces. This may indicate that neo-normative control is at play (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009). Nevertheless, there seems to be a large flexibility when it comes to adapting your work to what fits your private life, which is especially expressed in those participants who have kids (and can for example bring them to work or leave early to pick them up from kindergarten).

One participant furthermore spoke about how they perceive many employees in the girl's support center movement to have *"their own baggage"* (Maria), which they take with them to work. The baggage she refers to is own experiences of the topics girl's support centers work with, such as violence or mental health issues. She thinks that this does not necessarily show in the work they do, but that it affects the state of the workplace. We theorize that these experiences contribute to deep personal convictions that make the work with girl's support centers feel more meaningful and important, as well as increase the identification with the organization and its target group. This could be applied to the subscales *positive meaning* and *meaning-making through work* in the Work and Meaning Inventory by Steger, Dik and Duffy (2012). The last subscale, *greater good motivation*, is more obvious and directly spoken

about by the participants, but reading between the lines, there seems to be a deeply personal aspect to their motivation. It is thus not only making the world a better place or making a difference for others that is the goal, but also somehow making sense of oneself (*meaning-making through work*) and fulfilling one's personal life purpose (*positive meaning*), when deciding to work in the girl's support center movement.

4.4. Autonomy, Overwork and Wellbeing in Girl's Support Centers

Freedom of choice in work tasks is recurrently brought up as a positive contributor to employee wellbeing. As the board's operational involvement in daily work is limited, and the employees often have more experience from the girl's support centers than their employer does, the employee often has a lot of freedom in terms of what to work with and how to conduct work tasks. Many feel as though they have a lot of trust from the board, which is appreciated. One participant says that *"even though the board may not have the tools to be an employer, I think they have a lot of trust in us employees and allow us to have quite a lot of creative freedom."* (Maria). Freedom and flexibility in terms of work tasks and focus, as well as in terms of work hours and work location, is highly valued by participants. One of the participants says that *"I can do things a bit outside of the scope sometimes and I like that"* (Astrid), and another one that *"it is nice that you can structure your work the way it suits you"* (Nina). One participant describes this freedom as being so extensive that she "*could go to Thailand for a month and no one would know*" (Maria). She sees this both as an advantage and disadvantage. Another participant highlights that at times when the board has actually provided more structure, and taken on a more controlling role, she experienced it as negative and stress inducing (Elise).

However, as the employer often lacks insight into the daily work of employees, it lacks thorough understanding of the work situation of employees and thus cannot provide adequate support when it is needed. Employees also experience uncertainty in their role due to this lack of structure and extensive freedom. One participant states that *"sometimes I experience that there are no clear guidelines of how to do things. It requires you to figure some things out for yourself."* (Nina). Another one says the following:

> *When it is unclear what is expected of me or what the outcome will be I tend to*
> *feel my worst. […] You stand alone with something and feel like 'I am doing*

55

this for the first time and I did not have the opportunity to talk to anyone'. [...]
That insecurity is a recurrent thing. (Sophie)

One participant, who says she hasn't experienced long-term stress in a long time, connects this mainly to the fact that the structures at the support center have been improved, one example being that they have regular check-in meetings with employees (Frida). These insights indicate that there seems to be a drawback to the freedom which many participants consider to be problematic. There is a general need for structure that is not fulfilled when autonomy is too high.

At centers where there is an operational manager, it appears that the stress levels are lower due to the manager being able to supply the employees with additional structure and support. One participant mentions how she took on way too many projects and tasks when she did not have a manager who restrained her (Agnetha). She is certain that she would have burned out if she would have kept going in the same way as before, but instead, her manager helped her prioritize and put up boundaries for her role. This helped her manage her stress, but simultaneously took the fun out of the work.

Some researchers have found that autonomy contributes to higher levels of engagement, which in turn lowers the risk of burnout (Vander Elst et al. 2016). Others claim that freedom can lead employees to give more of themselves at work (Bains, 2007 cited in Fleming & Sturdy, 2009). In accordance with the autonomy paradox, it seems that in the girl's support centers, the high level of perceived autonomy may be a contributing factor to overwork amongst employees. Applying the autonomy paradox in this context, it seems as though the perceived autonomy leads to norms of self-exploitation, and that these norms and attitudes amongst employees in turn lead to sustaining work intensification in the movement. Indeed, one participant did experience a decline in stress when she was granted less autonomy. However, this made the work feel less meaningful and because of this she eventually decided to leave the field. This is perhaps not very surprising, considering the previous research which shows how lack of autonomy leads to feelings of meaninglessness (Bailey & Madden, 2017).

4.5. Handling Stress in Girl's Support Centers

Based on the interviews, four main coping strategies for stress used by employees in girl's support centers have been identified. These four strategies are mental dissociation, seeking social support, independently dealing with stress and leaving the field.

4.5.1. Mental Dissociation

When asked about what they do when experiencing stress, some employees state that they shut off mentally and become less present at work. One participant says that *"you kind of just shut down a bit when you're in periods like that. You go to work and do your job, but you may not be very present"* (Maria). One employee describes the feeling as being *"empathy tired"* (Hannah) due to the constant exposure to violence and other emotionally charged topics encountered at work. She also expresses the need for taking an emotional break when the emotional engagement becomes overwhelming, and simply continuing to do what is necessary for the job but without putting any feelings into it. Several participants talk about how they distance themselves from the support seekers and nature of the work task, in order to avoid getting too emotionally involved and to prevent feelings of personal responsibility for the support seekers. One participant expresses that she believes her ability to feel good in her job stems from her ability to detach from feelings of mental obligation towards the support seekers:

> *I can really separate it, and I think it is necessary in order to feel good in this work environment, to be able to not bring it home and start thinking and pondering. I think a lot relates to the fact that I do not feel responsible for the support seekers. I cannot take responsibility for their feelings and the changes in their life, but I can support and help.* (Astrid)

The strong emotional attachment to the organization and its target group, along with the emotionally charged nature of the work, seems to contribute to the need for mentally shutting off and limiting the feeling of responsibility. In addition to Sonnentag and Fritz's (2015) findings that show the importance of psychological detachment from work during non-work hours, it seems as though some of the participants cope by psychologically detaching also at work. This finding is notable, considering that many participants struggle with disengaging from work during non-work hours. There seems to be an additional layer to psychological

detachment in girl's support centers, that relates to detachment from specific parts of the job and not work altogether.

4.5.2. Seeking Social Support

Many participants' first answer to the question of what they do when they are feeling stressed, is that they talk to their manager (if they have one), or their colleagues:

> *I think colleagues are so damn important when it comes to what we work with and engage in. Even though my colleagues [at the women's support center] don't always know exactly what I am doing at the girl's support center, at least one of them does everything in their power to help and support me.* (Fredrika)

Our findings confirm the findings of Collins (2008), that social support is seen as one of the most important coping strategies when experiencing workplace stress, and that this support can be both emotional and practical. Emotional support is however more dominant in our findings than practical support. Colleagues are used to bounce ideas with, discuss and seek confirmation amongst. They may also help practically with unburdening of work tasks, unless their own workload is also overbearing - which does not seem to be an uncommon scenario. One participant finds it ironic that one of the recurring topics in their team meetings is to check if anyone needs any help with unburdening of work tasks (Elise). The irony lies in the fact that if she has a lot to do, so do her colleagues. So even though they can function as an emotional support, the practical support seems to be heavily limited due to the fact that all employees are subject to an overbearing workload. The difficulty of not being able to delegate tasks to others is mentioned in several interviews.

A source of social support (in addition to managers and colleagues) that many participants deem helpful, important and according to some even a necessity, is talking to an external advisor. This is usually some sort of psychologist, who will advise the employees on any matter they are struggling with in their work. This could be practical issues, such as how to mediate an internal conflict or how to handle a difficult support line case. It could also be more general issues, such as experiencing work-related stress, feeling defeated in the pursuit of societal change, or feelings of frustration towards the issues the target group faces in the world today. One participant who finds the external advisor very helpful says that during her latest meeting with the advisor, she *"mostly complained about society being shit and that no*

one helps our target group and that it feels so shitty" (Eva). The advisor seems to be an important outlet to ventilate and express negative emotions such as frustration, disappointment and resignation.

Some participants find additional social support elsewhere, for example from volunteers, even though they simultaneously show unwillingness to burden them with work tasks. In the cases where the board is perceived as well-functioning and supportive, the board (or certain parts of the board) is also utilized for support. This is especially prevalent in support centers where the employee does not have any colleagues. Finally, family members are also used as a source of emotional support. However, although some frequently talk to their family and friends in order to gain perspective and support regarding work problems, others completely refrain from talking about work in their personal relationships. Refraining from talking to family and friends about work is either motivated by a perceived lack of understanding from those outside of the girl's support center movement, or an unwillingness to fuse their professional and private lives. The latter can be seen as another example of psychological detachment.

4.5.3. Independently Dealing with Stress

Some employees do not turn to people around them for help to the same extent as others do. When asked who she turns to when she is feeling stressed, one participant answered *"myself"* (Birgitta). There seems to be three main ways that participants independently deal with stress: work harder and more, take a temporary break to focus on needs outside of work or accept the current emotional state.

In regards to working harder temporarily to finish tasks and hence lower the workload, or avoid the workload piling up, one participant says that she *"would rather work a bit of overtime and finish things off and then feel less stressed. And then I can compensate for it later [in time]"* (Elise). On the contrary, another participant tries to focus only on working her hours and giving herself time off and doing things that are unrelated to work, such as exercising, to cope with stress. However, when it comes to abnormally stressful periods, she usually ends up working a lot of overtime anyway:

There have been periods when I have had around 90 hours of overtime. When are you supposed to compensate for that? [...] We need the organization to run, otherwise the tasks pile up and that messes it up. (Hannah)

Others are more strict with keeping their boundaries, and instead deal with stress by choosing to take a break from work, take an afternoon off or go to the gym and exercise in order to come back with new energy the next day. One participant focuses on identifying and fulfilling her own needs, and claims that *"if I were to feel stress at work then I would just say that 'I need to talk about this thing' or 'I need to go home to rest'"* (Frida). Alternatively, some also take a step back to stay in their emotions, accept the situation and reflect upon their experience, which is exemplified by the following participant: *"I am also pretty good at letting myself be sad. I am quite tolerant of my own feelings"* (Fredrika).

To conclude, all of the employees seem to have found some sort of personal strategy to deal with the stress and negative emotions that they encounter at work. These strategies seem to focus mostly on being attentive to one's need at that moment, whether that entails taking a break, putting in some extra work or taking a moment to reflect.

4.5.4. Leaving the Field

There are instances of employees leaving the field due to stress and lack of wellbeing at work. There are also those who choose to stay in their jobs, but at the same time say that they will only last so long with the stress levels that are prevalent in their current work. One participant says the following:

A thought that has struck me a couple of times is that I don't think I will have the energy mentally to keep this job forever, until I retire. But that has also scared me, or the thought crossed my mind: 'Will I think any other work is important?' (Fredrika)

It is interesting that despite feeling passionate about one's job and, as many expressed, having one's 'dream job', it is in some cases not enough to compensate for the intense workload and suboptimal work situation that is experienced at the support centers. Most participants mention being torn between the good and the bad of their work, and whilst the majority seem

to be happy to stay, there are a few that feel as though it will not be worth staying in the long run.

4.6. Summary of Analysis

In our study, the experience of stress and wellbeing amongst participants is ambiguous. The participants largely present contradicting answers in regards to what contributes to their wellbeing, and that positive influences are often simultaneously potential stressors. In line with McClure and Moore (2021) most of the participants experience stress at work, at least periodically. We have identified several factors that influence stress and wellbeing amongst employees, some of which are briefly summarized below.

Limitless and unpredictable work tasks with a high degree of variety is one of the stressors. Another factor is financial stress, which has a negative influence on the wellbeing of the participants, both in terms of their own job insecurity but also as stress relating to the survival of the movement. This is in line with earlier research that confirms that job insecurity has a negative influence on wellbeing (Vander Elst et al. 2012). When it comes to the work environment, there is an acceptance of shortcomings in working conditions due to the positive experiences of meaning and purpose, which is in line with research from both Berkelaar and Buzzanell (2015) and Dupret and Pultz (2021). Some participants also display signs of prioritizing the organization and girl's support center movement over one's personal needs.

Feelings of meaningfulness and identification with the organization and its purpose is highlighted in all interviews. The meaningfulness derived from work clearly has positive implications for employee wellbeing. In line with what Bellah et al. (1985) labels calling, as a way to view work, there is a large emphasis on passion and meaning amongst the participants. Participants display both meaning *in* and *at* work in accordance with Pratt and Ashforth (2003 cited in Fischer, 2014). They also display normative and affective commitment as well as strong identification with their work. These factors seem to contribute to their experienced wellbeing, but the relationship between commitment and wellbeing is not unproblematic, as they simultaneously lead to willingness to accept worse working conditions as well as infringements on their personal life. This is consistent with findings from Berkelaar

and Buzzanell (2015) as well as Dupret and Pultz (2021). All in all, this makes participants see their work as both a blessing and a curse.

Having autonomy seems to lead to stress and overwork, in line with what Dupret and Pultz (2021) suggests, but is also highly appreciated by the participants. In the situations where the participants have experienced a lack of autonomy it has also had a negative impact on their feelings of meaningfulness. This is consistent with research from Bailey and Madden (2017), which indicates how lack of autonomy leads to feelings of meaninglessness.

Lastly, four coping strategies were identified in regards to handling stress amongst the participants: mental dissociation, social support, independently dealing with it and leaving the field. Many of the participants seem to struggle with mentally detaching from work in their free time since they are so emotionally involved, which Sonnentag and Fritz (2015) suggest may be hindering in terms of stress recovery. There seems to be a paradoxical view on working within the movement long-term, whereas many express hesitation towards their ability to cope with the stressful working situation in the long run, although they simultaneously feel like no other line of work would be as important and meaningful.

5. Discussion

This chapter provides a deeper reflection upon the findings that we found to be most noteworthy in our analysis. These include the effects of meaningfulness on stress and wellbeing, the effect of autonomy on stress and wellbeing and the influence of autonomy on meaningfulness. We further develop our argument by presenting a framework that illustrates these connections between meaningfulness, autonomy, stress and wellbeing. To conclude, we discuss the implications this framework may have for the broader understanding of work-related wellbeing.

5.1. The Effect of Meaningfulness on Stress and Wellbeing

The most pronounced contributor to employee wellbeing identified across all interviews in this study is the sense of meaning that employees experience as they work towards and in congruence with the goals and the purpose of the organization. All participants state that they feel like their work is meaningful, and an overwhelming majority says that they thoroughly enjoy their work, including their work tasks and colleagues. Although meaningfulness seems to be a key contributor to experiencing wellbeing at work, drawing lines between work and private life appears to be difficult for those who find their work meaningful and who identify with their organizations. Dupret and Pultz (2021) identified a paradox between meaning and stress, which seems to be prevalent in girl's support centers as well. Employee wellbeing seems to be improved by the motivation, joy and fulfillment found in doing meaningful work, which is consistent with previous scholars' findings (Madden, Bailey & Kerr, 2015; Michaelson et al. 2014; Trépanier et al. 2015).

Nevertheless, meaningfulness simultaneously creates problems related to the inability to psychologically detach from work, which may prevent stress recovery (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) and contribute to work's infringement on the personal spheres of life (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015; Dupret & Pultz, 2021). Meaningfulness also seems to contribute to magnifying certain aspects of stress, as otherwise commonplace work-related dilemmas become emotionally or morally charged in work that is perceived as meaningful. When something is experienced as meaningful, it furthermore becomes difficult for employees to set boundaries during times of increased workload. In alignment with previous research (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), we find that the organization is occasionally prioritized

over the self, and that the moral obligation that the employees feel towards their work makes them compromise with their personal needs.

A specific example of how aspects of stress can be magnified by experiencing one's work as meaningful, is the effect of meaningfulness on stress derived from job insecurity. This thesis finds that organizational commitment contributes to the intensity of the stress caused by job insecurity. Employees seem to be worried not only about their own financial situation, but also the survival of the girl's support center, which implies an emotional devotion to the organization. Furthermore, the identification with the organization seems to make an occupational change emotionally charged, which is consistent with Bunderson and Thompson's (2009) finding that quitting a job that one feels called to turns into a personal failure rather than an otherwise insignificant occupational choice. We therefore theorize that the organizational commitment and identification with work leads to job insecurity being perceived as a threat with bigger consequences than it would be for a job that the employee does not identify with. Simply put, there is more to lose when you associate your work with your personal self.

All in all, we find that meaningfulness is both a blessing and a curse in the sense that it contributes to magnifying certain experiences of stress whilst simultaneously being a driving force for enjoyment, fulfillment and wellbeing.

5.2. The Effect of Autonomy on Stress and Wellbeing

Our findings confirm that the autonomy paradox is relevant and applicable in the context of girl's support centers. However, the paradox alone does not seem to fully capture the complexities of autonomous work in girl's support centers. As the employer in girl's support centers usually consist of volunteers, employees are indeed granted or even required to work autonomously to a large extent. The employees in our study experience stress due to the large freedom and lack of boundaries in their work, and in accordance with the autonomy paradox, the high levels of autonomy tend to lead to overwork in terms of hours and effort. Our findings are consistent with Bain's (2007 cited in Fleming & Sturdy, 2009) claim that perceived freedom leads to increased productivity and employees giving more of themselves at work. Employees in girl's support centers do, just like the autonomy paradox suggests,

tend to overwork, self-exploit and sustain work intensification when they perceive themselves as autonomous in their work.

However, what strikes as even more pronounced in our study is the profound appreciation of autonomy amongst the participants. Previous research provides some supporting evidence for the positive effect of autonomy on engagement (Vander Elst et al. 2016) and the negative effect of lack of autonomy on feelings of meaningfulness (Bailey & Madden, 2017). Despite its challenges, the experiences of autonomy and freedom in the work at girl's support centers are largely positive: being able to adapt work tasks and focus areas to one's own interests, convictions and matters of the heart is highly appreciated. It seems as though the employees derive both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing from the autonomy they have, as it gives them both the flexibility to tailor their work in the short term in accordance with their mood and interests, and also the opportunity to tailor their work in the long term towards projects with causes they find especially meaningful.

5.3. The Influence of Autonomy on Meaningfulness

In our study, it is shown that autonomy contributes to feelings of purpose, and lack of autonomy significantly decreases the experience of meaningfulness at work. It seems as though autonomy does increase stress amongst employees, but that this is preferred over the lack of meaningfulness experienced when autonomy is low. Based on our findings which show that meaningfulness is facilitated by autonomy at work in girl's support centers, in combination with the findings of Bailey and Madden (2017) which show how lack of autonomy leads to feelings of meaninglessness, we theorize that meaningfulness is directly influenced by the level of autonomy at work.

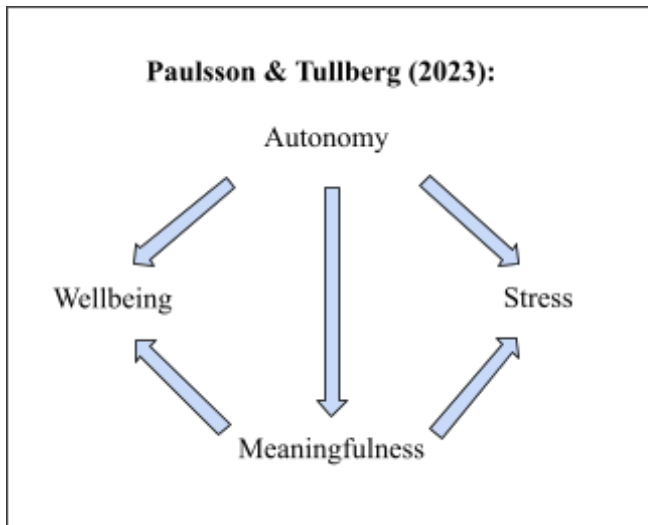## 5.4. A Framework for Meaningfulness and Autonomy

Figure 1. A Framework for Meaningfulness and Autonomy

Our findings show that autonomy interacts with meaningfulness, and both autonomy and meaningfulness contributes to wellbeing and stress simultaneously. To illustrate these connections, we created a framework for meaningfulness and autonomy, which is illustrated above (see *Figure 1*). The framework suggests, as illustrated by the arrow in the middle, that experiences of autonomy have an influence on experiences of meaningfulness. Furthermore, the arrows pointing from autonomy towards wellbeing and stress indicate that experiencing autonomy can lead to both increased levels of wellbeing and increased levels of stress. The last two arrows, those that point from meaningfulness towards wellbeing and stress, show how experiences of meaningfulness can lead to both increased levels of wellbeing and increased levels of stress.

5.5. Implications for the Understanding of Work-Related Wellbeing

The framework for meaningfulness and autonomy (see *Figure 1*) indicates that stress cannot be assumed to have a linear relationship with wellbeing. Just like Fischer (2014), we argue that wellbeing is more than just the absence of stress at work. In fact, we think that wellbeing is much broader and all-encompassing than that: stress and wellbeing can co-exist, and does seem to do so for most of the employees in the girl's support centers. Many of the participants in this study perceives stress to have a negative influence on their wellbeing, but we find that this is not always the case. Although we do not claim that stress in itself is a positive contributor to employee wellbeing, we argue - with grounding in our findings as well as in

previous findings from other scholars (Madden, Bailey & Kerr, 2015; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Michaelson et al. 2014; Trépanier et al. 2015) - that meaningfulness can be. Feelings of meaning appear to, at least to some extent, be intertwined with experiences of stress. Whilst too much stress and overwork is problematic for employee wellbeing, a certain dose of it may be required in the pursuit of feelings of meaningfulness.

Employee wellbeing is predictive of being able to better handle negative aspects of work (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017), and we argue that the benefits in terms of wellbeing derived from meaningful work makes it easier to handle the stress that comes with it. Judd, Breen and Dorozenko (2017) found that stress and burnout are experienced not when negatives are prevalent, but rather when negatives outweigh positives. We believe that enabling meaningful work, for example by giving employees some level of autonomy, provides them with a reason to endure and cope with a stressful and suboptimal work environment, because it contributes more to their wellbeing at work than it takes away from it. Our study indicates that when it comes to employee wellbeing, meaning trumps overwork. Despite feelings of stress and pressure, the participants strongly emphasize their love and passion for what they do and a majority of them cannot see themselves working with anything else. What still remains problematic, despite these expressions of meaningfulness as trumping overwork, is that when looking at the perception of the stress that the participants feel in the long term, there remains a hesitation amongst some participants as to if they will be able to cope with the work-related stress in a sustainable way in the long run.

Our understanding is that the relationship between autonomy, stress and wellbeing in meaningful work is in practice more complex than what previously research suggests. We find that whilst experiencing autonomy and meaningfulness at work could entail having to endure some level of stress, autonomy and meaningfulness contribute significantly to wellbeing. This does however in no way imply that the stress cannot or should not be at least partially prevented, managed and coped with by organizations. On the contrary, our study uncovers multiple ways in which stress can be coped with successfully in girl's support centers, where social support from colleagues, the board and external advisors is deemed most influential. Instead of demonizing stress, we suggest broadening the interpretation of wellbeing and focusing on maximizing its positive contributors whilst minimizing the

negative ones. In order to do this in organizations like girl's support centers, we believe that focusing on autonomy and feelings of meaningfulness is key.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, we summarize our key findings and conclusions in relation to our research question: "How do employees in girl's support centers, who perceive their work as meaningful, experience stress and wellbeing in their jobs?". We also present our studys' theoretical contributions and practical implications, as well as reflect on the limitations of our study and make suggestions for future research.

6.1. Key findings

This thesis finds that meaningful work has multiple implications for stress and wellbeing amongst employees. The autonomy paradox can be observed in girl's support centers, as employees seem to work harder because of the autonomy they perceive themselves to have in their work. This leads to overwork, but it is also something that stimulates feelings of meaning in employees. Lack of autonomy seems to lead to decreased stress, but simultaneously decreases feelings of meaning, joy and fulfillment. Therefore, we suggest that experiences of autonomy have an influence on meaning, and can increase both stress and wellbeing simultaneously. Experiences of meaningfulness are also suggested to potentially increase both stress and wellbeing. Meaningfulness is clearly prevalent in the work at girl's support centers, and is suggested as the main motivator to keep pursuing work in the girl's support center movement despite perceiving the work situation as challenging and stressful. It does however simultaneously magnify the effect of certain stressors, one example being job insecurity. These findings are summarized in a framework for meaningfulness and autonomy (see *Figure 1*). To conclude, most employees in girl's support centers perceive themselves as, at least to some extent, stressed, but also happy and grateful for their jobs. The work and work situation is described as fulfilling and meaningful, but at the same time imperfect.

6.2. Theoretical Contribution

We have previously highlighted the importance of more research relating to employees in purpose driven organizations, who do indirectly emotionally charged work, identify with the organizational purpose on a personal level and are often granted extensive freedom in their work. We have also highlighted the complexity of the role of purpose and calling when it comes to stress and wellbeing at work in purpose driven organizations, and stated that further research is needed to fully understand these dynamics. Even though we have by no means

solved the complexity or created a comprehensive understanding of this, we have contributed to a deeper understanding of these dynamics. With our study, we have started to fill these gaps and provided novel perspectives on the topic of stress and wellbeing in meaningful work, and more specifically shone light on the sparingly researched girl's support center movement.

We have confirmed several findings from previous research, such as that employees who do purposeful work or who experience a calling to their work accept worse working conditions (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015; Dupret & Pultz, 2021); that the autonomy paradox holds true in this context; and that psychological detachment is important in managing work-related stress (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Moreover, we have added new dimensions to the field of research on work-related wellbeing by combining the concepts of autonomy and meaning and describing their interaction as well as their influence on wellbeing and stress. Our main contributions consist of a framework for meaningfulness and autonomy (see *Figure 1*), which highlights the complexity of the relationship between autonomy, meaningfulness, stress and wellbeing.

6.3. Practical Implications

This thesis gives girl's support centers and other purpose driven, volunteer-based organizations rich insights into the work situation of their employees. It gives indications as to what the causes and coping strategies are when it comes to work-related stress, as well as what factors seem to be important for employee wellbeing. We argue that the dynamics displayed in girl's support centers are not exclusive to these organizations, but can be recognized also in other non-profit organizations as well as certain public organizations and socially oriented private organizations. This means that we believe our study makes a contribution beyond the context of the girl's support center movement.

Some concrete insights relate to the social dynamics at work, where colleagues, managers and advisors are important resources for coping with stress. There is a problematic nature to having a volunteer-based employer, whereas lack of competence, lack of commitment and the prevalence of conflicts seem to be the most common problems from employees' perspectives. Communication and transparency is highlighted as success factors for the employee-employer relationship, which is consistent with previous research (Anderson &

Keillher, 2009). This seems to be especially important when it comes to the financial situation of the organization, considering it is a common stressor in relation to job insecurity. Furthermore, autonomy, freedom and trust is important to employees and seems to facilitate feelings of meaningfulness at work. Lack of boundaries can however contribute to overwork and stress, which means that the board has to be mindful in respect to neither letting employees completely free and risking that they get burned out, nor curb their motivation and sense of meaning by limiting autonomy too much.

Just like Nash and Stevenson (2004) suggest, we agree that maximizing all aspects to wellbeing is neither sustainable nor desirable. Seeking balance may be the key to success. In our participants' case, we suggest that the goal should not be to eliminate all stress at work, as it seems to be intertwined with meaning and wellbeing. Instead, attempting to decrease the stress in periods of high workload as well as providing employees with access to tools and strategies for coping with it should be prioritized.

6.4. Limitations

The limitations of this study have been thoroughly presented in the methodology chapter, but as we deem reflexivity to be crucial in this type of work, it will be further elaborated on here. One of the main limitations to our study is that it is difficult to generalize, and assuming that it is applicable in other contexts may be precarious. Even though one can draw upon this material to gain insight into the topic of stress and wellbeing in purpose driven organizations, our work is by no means an absolute truth. The findings could vary depending on several factors such as chosen organizations, participants and the interpretations made by us as researchers. Additionally, this study and its literature review relies on a homogenous, western perspective. It is reasonable to question if the same conclusions would be drawn in a different cultural and geographical setting.

Meaning, stress, wellbeing as well as other feelings towards one's job can vary from day to day. As the interviews were conducted at a single point in time this could also be assumed to have influence on the findings. We tried to overcome this by asking about past experiences and asking participants to provide us with examples of different situations, but it can nevertheless not be ignored that their answers could be tainted by nuances in their mood and thoughts on the specific day of the interview.

As the literature review was not systematic nor exhaustive, there is a potential overemphasis on certain findings from previous research. The benefit of narrowing the choice of literature is that it becomes easier to make more specific and concrete contributions, but we acknowledge that it comes with the risk of overreaching certain aspects. It should furthermore be noted that the literature that has been used as a theoretical basis for this thesis also has its limitations, and those limitations may affect the reliability of our conclusions as well.

Finally, we would like to touch upon the potential limitations of illustrating findings in a framework as can be seen in *Figure 1*. Trying to summarize complex relationships and dynamics between different concepts inevitably leads to oversimplifications, which threatens to decrease the theoretical validity of the findings. In our example, one such dynamic that has been overlooked is the relationship between stress and wellbeing, that we due to the limited format chose not to incorporate in the illustration. We have attempted to mitigate this potential oversimplification by in writing elaborating on the relationship between stress and wellbeing in the last section of the discussion (see *5.5. Implications for the Understanding of Work-Related Wellbeing*). Nevertheless, this is a tangible limitation that should be considered.

6.5. Future Research

Future research should be dedicated to the stress and wellbeing aspects in meaningful work. The emotional and psychosocial aspects, such as being indirectly exposed to violence on a daily basis, experiencing constant job insecurity and having a volunteer-based employer, has to be researched further in order to provide a more comprehensive analysis of how stress and wellbeing is impacted in these types of organizations. We argue that there are still gaps in the research on how to best manage meaningful work, and how to mitigate its negative effects on wellbeing whilst simultaneously maximizing the positive ones. Another topic we would like to see future research explore is what degree of autonomy is optimal in order to balance stress and meaningfulness in a purpose driven organization.

During the course of our research, we found many other topics that would be interesting as well as important to further explore, but that we deemed as lying outside of the scope of this thesis. One example of this is related to job insecurity, as we theorize that higher organizational commitment and identification with work leads to job insecurity being perceived as a bigger threat. Job insecurity has, by other researchers (Vander Elst et al.,

2012), been found to decrease organizational commitment, and it would be interesting to further research how employee commitment and the threat of job insecurity interact. Another example regards hierarchy and democracy in volunteer driven organizations. We found that some level of hierarchy seems to have positive effects on employee wellbeing, but we wonder if that is always the case. If hierarchy was found to have more benefits than drawbacks, how could that be implemented in an environment where informal social relationships dominate and democracy as well as organizational flatness is deemed important? These are questions that we unfortunately did not have the capacity to explore further, but that we would be eager to see future researchers delve deeper into.

Finally, we also suggest for future researchers to conduct quantitative research with a similar research question to the one in this thesis. This would be useful in order to confirm whether or not our findings may constitute a basis for drawing more generalized conclusions. This could contribute to increasing the areas of use for our research, in the case that our findings would be confirmed as applicable in other contexts.

7. Reference List

Alvesson, M., & Sköldberg, K. (2018). Reflexive methodology: new vistas for qualitative research, 3rd edn, Los Angeles: Sage

Anchor, S., Reece, A., Rosen Kellerman, G., & Robichaux, A. (2018). 9 Out of 10 People Are Willing To Earn Less Money to Do More Meaningful Work", *Harvard Business Review*, Available online: https://hbr.org/2018/11/9-out-of-10-people-are-willing-to-earn-less-money -to-do-more-meaningful-work [Accessed 2 May 2023]

Anderson, D., & Kelliher, C. (2009). Flexible working and engagement: the importance of choice, *Strategic HR Review,* vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 13-18

Bailey, C., & Madden, A. (2017). Times reclaimed: temporality and the experience of meaningful work, *Work, Employment & Society,* vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 3-18

Beardwell, J., & Thompson, A. (2017). Human Resource Management: A Contemporary Approach, 8th edn, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited

Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., and Tipton, S. (1985). Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life. Berkeley: University of California Press

Berkelaar, B. L., & Buzzanell, P. M. (2015). Bait and switch or double-edged sword? The (sometimes) failed promises of calling, *Human Relations,* vol. 68, no. 1, pp. 157-178

Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2011). Business Research Methods, 3rd edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Bunderson, J. S., & Thompson, J. A. (2009). The Call of the Wild: Zookeepers, Callings, and the Double-Edged Sword of Deeply Meaningful Work, *Administrative Science Quarterly,* vol. 54, no. 1, pp. 32-57

Collins, S. (2008). Statutory Social Workers: Stress, Job Satisfaction, Coping, Social Support and Individual Differences, *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 38, pp. 1173-1193

Cooper, C. L., & Marshall, J. (2013). Occupational Sources of Stress: A Review of the Literature Relating to Coronary Heart Disease and Mental Ill Health, in Cooper, C. L. (ed.),

From Stress to Wellbeing Volume 1: The Theory and Research on Occupational Stress and Wellbeing, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 3-23

Cox, T., Griffiths, A., & Rial-González, E. (2000). Research on work-related stress [pdf]. European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Available at: https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/report-research-work-related-stress [Accessed: 14 March 2023]

Dhingra, N., Samo, A., Schaninger, B., & Schrimper, M., (2021). Help your employees find purpose - or watch them leave, McKinsey, Available online: https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/help-your-employees-find-purpose-or-watch-them-leave#/ [Accessed 2 May 2023]

Dik, B. J., & Duffy, R. D. (2009). Calling and Vocation at Work: Definitions and Prospects for Research and Practice, *The Counseling Psychologist*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 424-450

Dik, B. J., Eldridge, B. M., Steger, M. F., & Duffy, R. D. (2012). Development and Validation of the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ) and Brief Calling Scale (BCS), *Journal of Career Assessment,* vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 242,263

Dupret, K., & Pultz, S. (2021). Hard/heart worker: work intensification in purpose-driven organizations, *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 488-508

Dutton, J. E., Dukerich, J. M., & Harquail, C. V. (1994). Organizational Images and Member Identification, *Administrative Science Quarterly,* vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 239-263

Edwards, M. (2005). Organizational Identification: A Conceptual and Operational Review, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 207-230

Fernet, C., Chanal, J., & Guay, F. (2017). What fuels the fire: Job- or task-specific motivation (or both)? On the hierarchical and multidimensional nature of teacher motivation in relation to job burnout, *Work Stress*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 145-163

Fernet, C., Trépanier, S.-G., Austin, S., & Levesque-Côté, J. (2016). Committed, inspiring, and healthy teachers: How do school environment and motivational factors facilitate optimal functioning at career start? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol.59, no. pp. 481–491

Fischer, C. D. (2014). Conceptualizing and Measuring Wellbeing at Work, in Chen, P. Y. and Cooper C. L. (eds), *Work and Wellbeing – Wellbeing – A Complete Reference Guide Vol 3*, New Jersey: John Wiley Sons Inc. pp. 9-34

Fleming, P., & Sturdy, A. (2009). "Just be yourself!" Towards neo-normative control in organisations?, *Employee Relations*, vol. 31, no. 6, pp. 569-583

Folkhälsomyndigheten. (2022a). Statistik psykisk hälsa: yngre vuxna 16–29 år, trans. J Paulsson, Available at: https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/livsvillkor-levnadsvanor/psykisk-halsa-och-suicidprev ention/statistik-psykisk-halsa/statistik-om-ungas-psykiska-halsa/ [Accessed: 21 March 2023]

Folkhälsomyndigheten. (2022b). Statistik psykisk hälsa: yngre vuxna 16–29 år, trans. J Paulsson, Available at: https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/livsvillkor-levnadsvanor/psykisk-halsa-och-suicidprev ention/statistik-psykisk-halsa/statistik-psykisk-halsa-vuxna--30-44-ar/ [Accessed: 21 March 2023]

Folkhälsomyndigheten. (2023). Stress efter ålder, kön och år, andel (procent), trans. J Paulsson, Available at: http://fohm-app.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/Folkhalsodata/pxweb/sv/A_Folkhalsodata/A_Folkh alsodata__A_Mo8__Halsoutfall__02Pyskhals__02.05psystress/psystressaald.px/table/tableVi ewLayout1/ [Accessed: 21 March 2023]

Frankl, V. (2015). Livet måste ha mening, trans. J Paulsson, 3rd ed, Stockholm: Natur & Kultur

Försäkringskassan. (2022). Stressrelaterade sjukskrivningar ökar igen efter pandemin, trans. J Paulsson, Available at: https://www.forsakringskassan.se/nyhetsarkiv/nyheter-press/2022-10-24-stressrelaterade-sjuk skrivningar-okar-igen-efter-pandemin#:~:text=Den%20senaste%20statistiken%20visar%20at

t,p%C3%A5g%C3%A5ende%20sjukfall%20utg%C3%B6rs%20av%20kvinnor   [Accessed: 14 March 2023]

Gallagher, M. W., Lopez, S. J., & Preacher, K. J. (2009). The Hierarchical Structure of Well-Being, *Journal of Personality*, vol. 77, no. 4, pp. 1025-1050

Judd, M. J., Breen, L. J., Dorozenko, K. P., (2017). Workplace stress, burnout and coping: a qualitative study of the experiences of Australian disability support workers, *Health and Social Care in the Community*, volume 25, no. 3, 1109-1117

King, L. A., Hicks, J. A., Krull, J. L., & Del Gaiso, A. K. (2006). Positive Affect and the Experience of Meaning in Life, *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology,* vol. 90, no. 1, pp. 179-196

Larsson, M., Pettersson, C., & Eriksson, C. (2016). Systerskap för att främja tjejers hälsa - En studie av Tjejzonens storasysterverksamhet 2011-2015, trans. J Paulsson. Working paper, Örebro universitet, Available online: https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1043822/FULLTEXT01.pdf [Accessed 10 April 2023]

Levi, L. (1992). Psychosocial, occupational, environmental, and health concepts; research results; and applications, in Keita, G.P. and Sauter, S.L. (eds), *Work and well-being: An agenda for the 1990s*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, pp. 199–210

Lips-Wiersma, M., & Morris, L. (2009). Discriminating between 'Meaningful Work' and the 'Management of Meaning', *Journal of Business Ethics,* vol. 88, no. 3, pp. 491–511

Madden, A., Bailey, C., & Kerr, R. C. J. (2015). 'For this I was made': conflict and calling in the role of a woman priest, *Work, Employment & Society,* vol. 29, no. 5, pp. 866-874

Maslach, C. (2017). Finding solutions to the problem of burnout, *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice & Research*, vol. 69, no. 2, pp. 143-152

May, D. R, Gilson, R. L., & Harter, L. M. (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,* vol. 77, no. 1, pp. 11-37

McClure, A., & Moore, M. (2021). Stress and Peer Support among Nonprofit Workers, *Journal of Applied Social Sciences*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 151–156

Michaelson, C., Pratt, M. G., Grant, A. M., & Dunn, C. P. (2014). Meaningful Work: Connecting Business Ethics and Organization Studies, *Journal of Business Ethics,* vol. 121, no.1, pp. 77-90

Nash, L., & Stevenson, H. (2004). Success That Lasts, *Harvard Business Review,* vol. 82, no. 2, pp. 102-109

Nationellt Centrum för Kvinnofrid. (2022). Kvinnojourernas verksamhet, trans. J Paulsson, Available online: https://www.nck.uu.se/kunskapsbanken/amnesguider/kommunernas-kvinnofridsarbete/kvinno jourernas-verksamhet/ [Accessed 27 April 2023]

Olinske, J. L., & Hellman, C. M. (2017). Leadership in the human service nonprofit organization: The influence of the board of directors on executive director well-being and burnout, *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 95–105

Prasad, P. (2018). Crafting Qualitative Research: Beyond Positivist Traditions, 2nd edn, New York: Routledge

Rennstam, J., & Wästerfors, D. (2018). Analyze! Crafting Your Data in Qualitative Research, Lund: Studentlitteratur

Riksorganisationen för kvinnojourer och tjejjourer i Sverige. (2016). Roks: Young women's shelters, Available as a booklet from: https://www.roks.se/ [Accessed 14 March 2023]

Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. H. (2008). Know Thyself and Become What You Are: A Eudaimonic Approach to Psychological Well-Being, *Journal of Happiness Studies,* vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 13-39

Saeidi, R., Izanloo, A., & Izanlou, S. (2020). A Study of the Relationship between Job Satisfaction and Burnout among Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Staff, *Iranian Journal of Neonatology*, vol 11, no 1, pp. 67-70

Saunders, R. (2004). Passion and Commitment Under Stress: Human Resource Issues in Canada's Non-profit Sector - A Synthesis Report, *Canadian Policy Research Networks Research Series on Human Resources in the Non-profit Sector,* vol. 5

Schabram, K., & Heng, Y. T. (2022). How Other- and Self-Compassion Reduce Burnout Through Resource Replenishment, *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 65, no. 2, pp. 453-478

Schneider, B., Hall, D.T., & Nygren, H.T. (1971). Self Image and Job Characteristics as Correlates of Changing Organizational Identification, *Human Relations*, vol. 24, no. 5, pp. 397–416

Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment, New York: Free Press

Shakespeare-Finch, J., & Obst, P. L. (2011). The Development of the 2-Way Social Support Scale: A Measure of Giving and Receiving Emotional and Instrumental Support, *Journal of Personality Assessment,* vol. 93, no. 5, pp. 483-490

Sonnentag, S., & Fritz, C. (2015) Recovery from job stress : The stressor-detachment model as an integrative framework, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 72–103

Sparks, K., & Cooper, C. L. (2013). Occupational Differences in the Work–Strain Relationship: Towards the use of Situation- Specific Models, in Cooper, C. L. (ed.), *From Stress to Wellbeing Volume 1: The Theory and Research on Occupational Stress and Wellbeing*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 315-326

Steger, M. F., Dik, B. J., & Duffy, R. D. (2012). Measuring Meaningful Work: The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI), *Journal of Career assessment,* vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 322-337

Styhre, A. (2013). How to write academic texts: a practical guide, Lund: Studentlitteratur

Trépanier, S.-G., Forest, J., Fernet, C., & Austin, S. (2015). On the psychological and motivational processes linking job characteristics to employee functioning: Insights from self-determination theory, *Work & Stress*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 286-305

Van den Broeck, A., Vansteenkiste, M., De Witte, H., & Lens, W. (2008). Explaining the relationship between job characteristics, burnout, and engagement: the role of basic psychological need satisfaction, *Work & Stress,* vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 277-294

Vander Elst, T., Cavents, C., Daneels, K., Johannik, K., Baillien, E., Van den Broeck, A., & Godderis, L. (2016). Job demands-resources predicting burnout and work engagement among Belgian home health care nurses: A cross-sectional study, *Nursing Outlook*, vol. 64, no. 6, pp. 542-556

Vander Elst, T., Sercu, M., Van den Broeck, A., Van Hoof, E., Baillien, E., & Godderis, L. (2019). Who is more susceptible to job stressors and resources? Sensory-processing sensitivity as a personal resource and vulnerability factor, *PLoS ONE*, vol. 14, no. 11, e0225103. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal. pone.0225103

Vander Elst, T., Van den Broeck, A., De Witte, H., & De Cuyper, N. (2012). The mediating role of frustration of psychological needs in the relationship between job insecurity and work-related well-being. *Work & Stress*, vol. 26. no. 3, pp. 252-271

Wajcman, J. (2015). Pressed for Time, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Waterman, A. S. (2008). Reconsidering happiness: A eudaimonist's perspective, *Journal of Positive Psychology,* vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 234-252

World Health Organization. (2019). Burn-out an "occupational phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases, Available online: https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases [Accessed 12 May 2023]

Xiaoqing, T., & Xiao, L. (2021). Role Stress, Burnout, and Workplace Support Among Newly Recruited Social Workers, *Research on Social Work Practice*, vol. 31, no. 5, pp. 529-540

Ybema, S., Yanow, D., Wels, H., & Kamsteeg, F. (2009). Organizational Ethnography: Studying the Complexities of Everyday Life, London: Sage Publications Ltd

8. Appendix

8.1. Interview Guide

A consent form was sent to you via email. Do you have any questions relating to that? Please reach out if you have any questions later.

Background questions:

- Name
- Pronoun
- Age
- Highest education

About work:

- What is your history within the girls support center movement? What has your "career" looked like? Why did you choose to work with this?
- What is your role at the center?
- Describe your work duties/tasks
- What does a normal day look like?
- How did you experience going from volunteer to employed?
- Would you consider going back to being a volunteer in the future?

Stress:

- Do you experience yourself as stressed at work?
- How often do you feel stressed at work?
- What makes you stressed at work?
- What do you do when you feel stressed at work?
- Do you walk about stress at work?
- What are your biggest stress factors?
- What are the biggest challenges you face at work? What tools do you have to handle them?
- Who do you turn to when you want to bounce ideas or want support around work tasks?

- What does your relationship to the board look like?
- If you are going to an external supervisor/counselor what role/benefit does that have in relation to stress and wellbeing at work?

Wellbeing:

- What do you think of your job?
- How do you feel at work?
- Do you have any examples of when you felt well at work? What contributed to that feeling?
- Do you have any examples of situations where you have not felt good at work? What caused this and how did you handle it?
- What is it that you like about your job? Give examples
- How do you picture your future within the support centers?
- What would it require for you to continue being an employee at a girls support center for a longer period of time?
- How do you experience other employees' wellbeing and stress at work within the industry?
- What motivates you at work?
- What is the best thing about your work?
- Do you experience your work as meaningful? In what ways?
- How do you set boundaries between work and private time?
- How much of your private self do you bring to work?

Is there anything else that you want to share on the topic that you feel like we have not touched upon?

A warm thank you for your participation!

8.2. Consent Form/Information Before Interview

First of all, a warm THANK YOU for taking the time to help us with our study.

The purpose of the interview and our thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of how employees at girls support centers experience stress and wellbeing. It is voluntary to participate and you can at any time, until 8th of May, withdraw your participation. If you do this your answers will not be used in our work. The thesis will be published and available for the general public online once we are finished. Participating in the study you and your organization will be completely anonymized.

The interview will take place through zoom, will be recorded and is estimated to take around 45 min. The only people who will have access to the recording are us, the authors, and potentially the person examining us, if requested. Interview link: https://lu-se.zoom.us/j/62974583817

If you have time, you can reflect around the questions below before the interview. Think if you can find any examples of situations connected to the questions. If there is any question that you do not feel comfortable answering it is of course completely fine to say pass and then we will move onto the next one.

Examples of questions that will be asked:

- Why did you choose to work with what you do and what is your history at the support centers?
- How do you experience stress at work and how do you handle the challenges you face? Try to think of a situation when you experience stress and reflect upon what you did, what triggered it, what tools you used to handle it etc.
- What motivates you at work? Do you experience your work as meaningful? In what way?
- Tell us about a situation when you felt good at work, what contributed to that?
- How do you experience the balance between free time and work? Think of examples of when it works well to set boundaries and when it feels more challenging.
- How do you experience that other employees within the industry feel at work?

If you think of any experience or situation connected to stress and wellbeing at work that is not covered by the questions above please feel free to share that with us too. The intention is that the questions above are to act as guides around what we will focus on, but they are in no way exhaustive or covers everything that we are interested in studying. In other words, feel free to think outside the above questions as well!

If you have any questions or thoughts before our meeting you can reach out to us by email or bring your questions to the interview. If you have any after the interview you are of course welcome to contact us as well.

Thank you and take care,
Jessica & Linnéa