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Beyond Burnout: A systematic literature review on the Mesosystem's
 Role in Resilience Among Child Protection Professionals.

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Abstract

Child protection work is recognised as an exceptionally stressful and highly demanding field that is both emotionally and physically draining. Resilience is often understood as individually based, but this common belief is evolving. Resilience is increasingly recognized as a result of a dynamic interplay between a person and their environment, aligning with a more ecologically-based perspective. This study addresses the high turnover rate and burnout experienced by child protection professionals, attributed to the intense and stressful nature of the job. In particular, this study aimed to expand the knowledge of the mesosystems factor's role in the development of resilience by focusing on the experiences of child protection professionals. The central research question investigates the specific mesosystem factors that foster resilience and protect against burnout among these professionals. The research question used is as follows: What mesosystem factors contribute to the development of resilience against burnout among child protection professionals?

This study employed a systematic literature review, following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, to synthesise existing knowledge about mesosystem factors' influence on resilience among child protection professionals. Key databases were searched with specific keywords related to child protection professionals, resilience, and mesosystem factors. The search was restricted to peer-reviewed articles published post-1990 and in English.

This review revealed mesosystem factors significantly impacting resilience. These mesosystem factors include community-, management-, and organisational support, workplace climate, and the quality of supervisory relationships. These factors are pivotal in reducing the effects of job stress and burnout, possibly reducing turnover rates among child protection professionals. To enhance support for child protection professionals, policies should foster partnerships with community and religious organisations to provide emotional and social support, thereby strengthening resilience. Improving workplace climate through supportive environments is essential. Ensuring access to both internal and external supervision is crucial for providing necessary support, significantly impacting resilience. Positive management relationships should be encouraged, with managers trained to address signs of burnout and provide ongoing support. Future research should further explore these dynamics through longitudinal studies and interventions directed at strengthening mesosystem support structures within child protection work.

Samenvatting

Kinderbeschermingswerk wordt gezien als een buitengewoon stressvol en veeleisend beroep, welke zowel emotioneel als fysiek uitputtend is. Veerkracht wordt veelal als individueel beschouwd, maar deze opvatting verandert. Steeds vaker wordt veerkracht gezien als resultaat van een dynamische wisselwerking tussen een persoon en zijn omgeving. Dit is in lijn met een ecologisch gebaseerde visie. Dit onderzoek richt zich op het hoge verloop en burn-out onder professionals in de kinderbevoering, welke toegeschreven worden aan de intense en stressvolle aard van het werk.

Deze scriptie had als doel kennis uit te breiden over de rol van mesosysteem factoren in de ontwikkeling van veerkracht. Dit door te focussen op ervaringen van professionals in de kinderbevoering. De centrale onderzoeksvraag onderzoekt de specifieke mesosysteem factoren die veerkracht bevorderen en bevoering bieden tegen burn-out bij deze professionals. De gebruikte onderzoeksvraag luidt als volgt: Welke mesosysteem factoren dragen bij aan de ontwikkeling van veerkracht tegen burn-out bij professionals in de kinderbevoering?

Bij dit onderzoek is gebruik gemaakt van een systematische literatuurstudie, welke de PRISMA 2020 richtlijnen volgt. Databanken zijn doorzocht met specifieke trefwoorden, gerelateerd aan professionals in de kinderbevoering, veerkracht en mesosysteem factoren. De zoektocht is beperkt tot peer-reviewed artikelen gepubliceerd ná 1990 en geschreven in het Engels.

Dit onderzoek achterhaalde verscheidene mesosysteem factoren die significante impact hebben op veerkracht. Onder deze factoren vallen: gemeenschaps- management-, en organisatorische ondersteuning, werkklimaat en de kwaliteit van supervisors. Deze factoren verminderen de effecten van werkstress en zijn in staat burn-out te verminderen, waardoor mogelijk het verloop onder kinderbevoeringsprofessionals verlaagd wordt. Beleid zou gericht moeten zijn op het versterken van gemeenschappen en religieuze organisaties om emotionele en sociale steun te bieden, welke de veerkracht vergroot. Werkklimaat vergroten door middel van sociale omgevingen is essentieel. Toegang tot interne en externe supervisie is cruciaal voor het bieden van de juiste support om de veerkracht te doen vergroten. Positieve managementrelaties moeten worden aangemoedigd om de signalen van burnout te kunnen herkennen en steun te kunnen bieden. Toekomstig onderzoek zou deze niveaus verder moeten verkennen, door middel van longitudinale studies en interventies gericht op het versterken van ondersteunende mesosysteem factoren binnen het kinderbevoeringswerk.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Child protection work is recognised as an exceptionally stressful and highly demanding field that is both emotionally and physically draining. In this context, both individual and organisational factors have been connected to the development of burnout and resilience among its professionals (Baugerud et al., 2018; McFadden et al., 2014). In comparison to other service sectors, the child protection practice field suffers from a greater turnover rate due to the stressful and intense nature of the job (Nissly et al., 2005; Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006). Concerning children served by the child protection system, professional turnover can result in traumatic loss if the worker they rely on quits their job (Curry, 2019). Moreover, child protection work can result in burnout for some social workers, since it is a very stressful profession (McFadden et al., 2014). Within two years of engagement in the field, half of the child protection workers across Western Europe depart from their positions (Frost et al., 2017). This alarming turnover rate underscores the critical need for a thorough examination of the social ecological factors that contribute to resilience among child protection workers.

1.2 Resilience

Resilience is characterised by one's capacity to sustain well-being and adapt constructively to adversity or risk (Bonanno, 2004). The American Psychological Association (2014) defines resilience as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress." Resilience is often understood as individually based, but this common belief is evolving. Resilience is more and more seen as a result of a dynamic interplay between a person and their environment, aligning with a more ecologically-based perspective (Luthar et al., 2000). This view recognises the coherence between personal and situational elements that results in resilience. Factors influencing resilience include a variety of biological, psychological, social, and cultural elements that interplay to shape an individual's reaction to stressful situations (Southwick et al., 2014). Resilience is always changing and constantly influenced by people's environment (Ungar, 2012).

1.3 Burnout

Maslach (1993) defines burnout as a psychological syndrome resulting from prolonged response to interpersonal stressors on the job. This condition is characterised by three key dimensions; an overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment

from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment. Burnout symptoms differ from person to person and change depending on the stage of burnout (Doulougeri et al., 2016). According to Doulougeri et al. the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is most used to measure job burnout. The MBI uses three subscales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and professional accomplishment, each with a seven-point Likertscale to measure the level of (Brady et al., 2020)

While burnout may manifest across various occupational groups, child protection workers are especially susceptible to it as a consequence of their working conditions (Anderson, 2000). Burnout may precipitate outcomes including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and a range of health issues (e.g., Alarcon, 2011; Maslach, 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2008). Burnout is delineated in the ICD-11 as a syndrome emerging from prolonged occupational stress that remains unaddressed effectively. It manifests in three distinct dimensions: i) sensations of diminished energy or fatigue; ii) enhanced psychological detachment from one's employment or experiences of negativity or scepticism towards one's occupation; iii) decreased effectiveness in one's professional capacity (World Health Organization, 2019).

Viewed from an organisational standpoint, burnout can lead to diminished job performance, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and creativity, along with increased turnover and healthcare expenditures (Halbesleben, 2006).

1.4 Socio-ecological factors of Bronfenbrenner

In the domain of social science, socio-ecological models are valued for their recognition of the bidirectional influence between individual behaviour and the surrounding social context (McLeroy et al., 1988). The goal of socio-ecological models is to clarify the way in which different social and ecological aspects influence the characteristics of interpersonal interactions within various groups (Moscovice et al., 2020).

Bronfenbrenner developed a model that segregates environmental influences into micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems, each reflecting different levels and types of influences on behaviour (McLeroy et al., 1988). McLeroy et al. (1988) state that the microsystem refers to face-to-face influences in specific settings, such as informal social networks or work groups.

The mesosystem refers to the liaison of various settings in which a child protection worker is involved, such as family and peer groups. The mesosystem can be seen as a system of microsystems. The exosystem refers to forces within the larger social system in which the individual is submerged, for instance, employee shortages or a high workload. The

macrosystem refers to policy, cultural beliefs, and values that influence the micro- and macrosystems. These may include specific laws and regulations for child protection workers.

1.5 Mesosystem

One approach for conceptualising the mesosystem is to imagine it as the structure of a house, wherein the diverse microsystems represent individual rooms within this house (Calkins, 2018). Newman and Newman (2020) define the mesosystem as encompassing the interconnectedness between multiple environments in which an individual actively engages. Derived from the Greek term ‘mesos,’ meaning middle or intermediary, the mesosystem serves as a nexus where different microsystems connect and interact, thereby exerting mutual influence on the individual’s development (Drew, 2022). A mesosystem forms a superior system that incorporates various dynamics of relationships (Dishion et al., 2018). The mesosystem encompasses the familial and communal environments encircling an individual.

Within this mesosystem, interpersonal dynamics involve various family units and members of the community (Buser et al., 2020). In addition, the mesosystem is characterised by the interconnections between multiple environments or individuals in which an individual is actively involved (Araújo & Davids, 2009). Engagement with workplace-related factors within the mesosystem can influence an individual's approach to managing workplace demands, potentially affecting employee turnover rates (Marsh, 2020).

1.6 Aim and research question

This thesis aimed to expand the knowledge of the mesosystems factor’s role in the development of resilience in child protection professionals by focusing on the experiences of these child protection professionals. The aim of this thesis was to synthesise the existing knowledge on how child protection professionals experience the role of mesosystem factors in contributing to resilience. A systematic literature review was conducted to analyse and synthesise the existing knowledge on this topic.

Since resilience is increasingly viewed as a dynamic interplay between a person and their environment, this literature review focused on the elements of the mesosystem of child protection workers. The mesosystem is characterised by the interconnections between multiple environments or individuals, actively involving an individual and encompassing social, group, network, peer, leadership, community, and/or work factors. (Araújo & Davids, 2009; Buser et al., 2020; Gardner & Coglisier, 2009; Greene & Watkins, 1998).

Considering burnout is commonly reported among child protection workers, it is of high relevance to find factors contributing to resilience. As resilience increases, the incidence of

burnout is observed to decrease (Guo et al., 2017). This negative correlation underscores the pivotal role of resilience in diminishing burnout among child protection professionals. Therefore, this research could provide meaningful insights into improving the well-being and retention of child protection workers, thereby enhancing the quality of care for at-risk children.

The research question guiding this study is as follows:

What mesosystem factors contribute to the development of resilience against burnout among child protection professionals?

1.7 Structure overview

This master's thesis is divided into four distinct chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the thesis. The second chapter delineates the methodology employed throughout this research, detailing the specific procedures followed during the systematic literature review. The third chapter discusses the selection of studies and the characteristics of the findings. This is followed by the fourth chapter, which synthesises these findings. The concluding chapter, chapter five, presents the discussion that evaluates the strengths and limitations of the systematic literature review, explores its implications, and suggests directions for future research in this field.

2. Methodology

A systematic literature review was conducted. Systematic literature reviews serve as a methodology for synthesising extensive amounts of information, thereby facilitating the identification of effective strategies and solutions (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). This review followed the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews. The PRISMA 2020 statement offers revised guidelines for reporting systematic reviews, incorporating recent advancements in methodologies for identifying, selecting, evaluating, and synthesising studies (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement is primarily intended for systematic reviews assessing the impacts of health interventions, regardless of the design of the studies included (Page et al., 2021). Page et al. (2021) state that it is vitally important to employ the PRISMA 2020 protocol in the planning and execution of systematic reviews to ensure adherence to all recommended guidelines.

2.1 Information sources

Peer-reviewed articles addressing the influence of mesosystem factors on the resilience of child protection workers were identified through electronic searches of the following databases: ERIC, APA PsycINFO, and SocINDEX. The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) constitutes a federally supported, comprehensive information network, established with the objective of facilitating immediate access to a wide range of educational literature (Robbins, 2001). APA PsycInfo is one of the most significant databases in the field of behavioural and social sciences, produced by the American Psychological Association (*John S. Bailey Library: APA PsycInfo Guide: Overview*, n.d.). SocINDEX covers roughly 3,000 journals and offers cover-to-cover indexing for high-priority journals (Tyler et al., 2017).

2.2 Eligibility criteria

2.2.1 Search strategy

Three constructs were determined from the research question. These constructs are as follows: 'child protection professionals', 'resilience', and 'mesosystem factors'. For each construct, keywords have been established. These keywords were employed to identify relevant literature that would aid in addressing the research question. The results were narrowed down using the following Boolean operators: 'AND' and "OR". For 'child protection professionals', the following keywords were selected in the search: "child protection worker" OR "child protection" OR "child workers" OR "child development

workers''. For the construct 'resilience', the following keywords were selected in the search: 'resilience' OR 'resiliency' OR 'resilient' OR 'coping' OR 'adjustment' OR 'thriving' OR 'hardiness' OR 'flexibility'. Lastly, for the construct 'mesosystem factors', the following keywords were selected in the search: 'social factors' OR 'group factors' OR 'social system' OR 'mesosystem' OR 'social networks' OR 'communities' OR 'social groups' OR 'leadership' OR 'management' OR 'peer groups' OR 'community' OR 'social environment'. The precise search query utilised within databases is as follows:

Based on these search terms, the articles were included or excluded from the research based on different inclusion and exclusion criteria. An eligibility and quality assessment were conducted.

2.2.2 Search limits

To exclude irrelevant articles, several search constraints were established. The first search limit was the year of publication; only articles published in 1990 or later were considered. Preliminary manual research indicated that only a few articles were written before 1990. The second limitation was the language used in the articles; only articles written in English were considered. The third limitation implies that only peer-reviewed articles were to be selected for this review. This criterion was implemented to ensure the credibility and academic level of the sources, as peer review serves as a quality control mechanism in scholarly publishing.

2.2.3 Inclusion criteria

In addition to the search limits, several inclusion and exclusion criteria were created: i) articles investigating the relationship between mesosystem factors and resilience among child protection workers were included; ii) articles included must feature a definition of resilience; iii) articles must contain adequate methodological details regarding the procedures, data collection, and analytical processes to ensure the integrity of the analysis.

2.2.4 Eligibility and quality assessment

Several procedural steps were undertaken prior to the final selection of articles. Initially, all retrieved studies were organised and managed using Excel. Following the application of the designated keywords and search limits, the databases yielded a total of 916 articles. A total of 137 duplicate articles were manually eliminated, resulting in 779 articles available for screening. This screening process involved a review of the titles and abstracts to evaluate each article's relevance to the study. An article was deemed relevant if it contributed

knowledge pertinent to the research questions. Of these, 735 articles were excluded. The remaining 44 articles were thoroughly read. A total of 23 articles were eliminated due to the lack of definitions of resilience in the articles. Additionally, 11 articles were removed due to a lack of investigation between resilience and mesosystem factors. Lastly, three articles were excluded because they did not have adequate methodological details. Consequently, the final selection comprised seven studies. The meticulous steps involved in the screening and selection processes are detailed in the 2020 PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1). Throughout the selection and data collection phases, no automation tools were employed.

2.3 Data analysis

Initially, all studies were screened for their eligibility by applying the inclusion criteria. The studies meeting the inclusion criteria were further examined based on: i) their research design, which involved an examination of the structural framework of the studies; ii) the methodology of measurement utilised (including, but not limited to surveys, self-reports, and clinical interviews); iii) the sampling strategy employed in the research; iv) the demographic characteristics of the study participants, covering aspects like age, gender, and ethnicity; v) the year and duration of the study; vi) the type of mesosystem factors determined by the study.

A comprehensive overview capturing all relevant descriptive information for each article was compiled (table 1). Additionally, a meta-analysis was conducted to quantitatively synthesise the findings across the selected studies, providing a systematic evaluation of the extent to which mesosystem factors influence resilience and potentially precipitate burnout among child protection workers.

Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

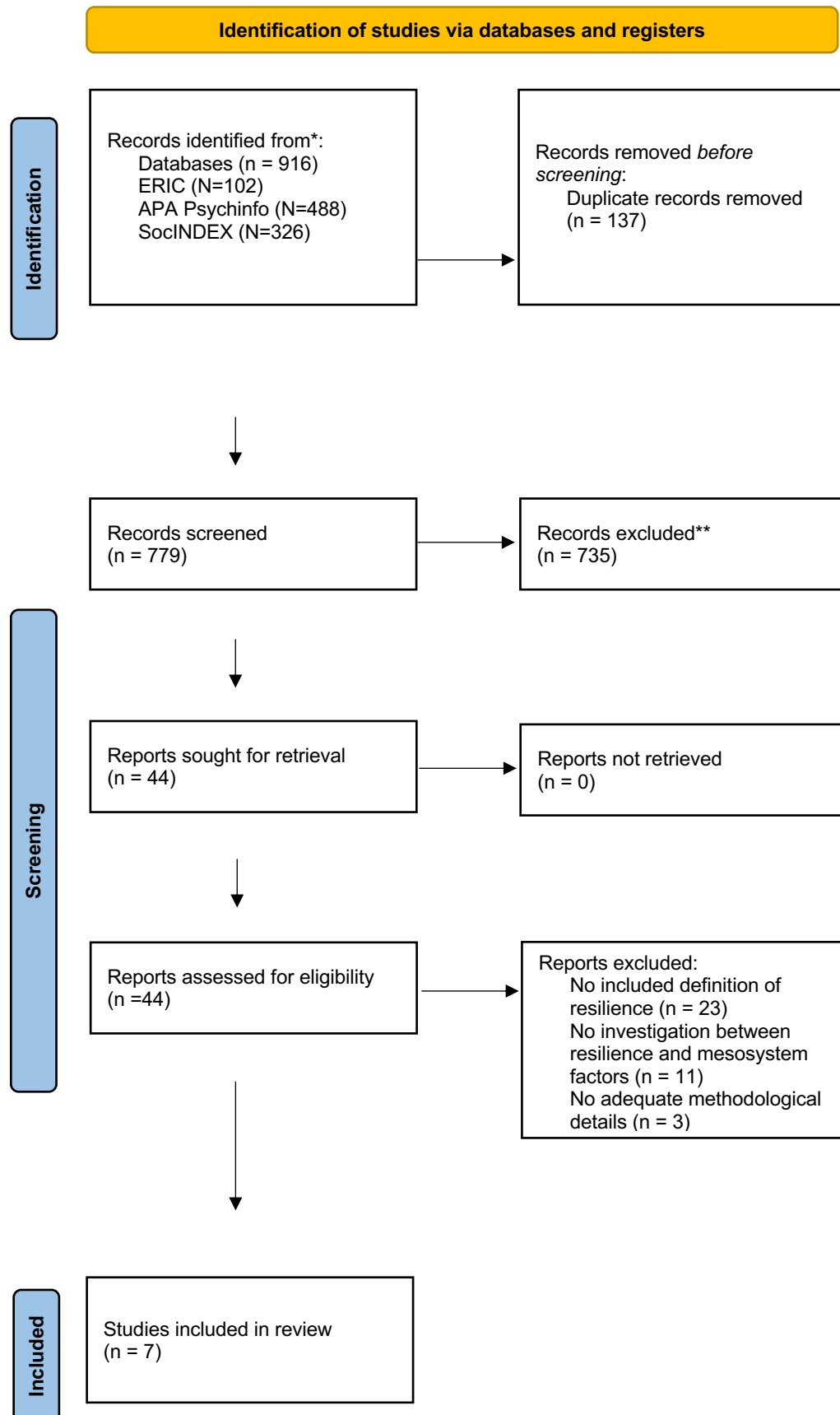


Table 1: *Overview of Study Characteristics and Examined Mesosystem Factors*

Author(s), year of publicatio n	Age of group (mean age)	Gender of group	Country of study	Sample size (n=)	Study design	Year of study	Applied instruments	Sampling strategy	Examined factors
Ausbrooks (2010)	28 – 65 (42)	78% female 22% male	United States, Texas	N = 50	Exploratory, qualitative design.		Focus groups and individual interviews	Stratified sampling	Working climate, peer support, Support system, Staff relationships.
Frost et al. (2017)			Italy, United Kingdom and Sweden	N = 37	Qualitative research design through in-depth semi-structured interviews	November 2012 – February 2013	Qualitative interviews analysed through interpretative thematic analysis		Work management, Supervision, Team help, Team atmosphere, Internal supervision, External supervision, Team manager support, Working

								relationships (friends), Peer support.
McFadden (2018)		86,67% female 13,33% male	Northern Ireland	N = 30	Qualitative research design through semi- structured interviews	Semi-structured face-to-face interviews	1. Non- probability snowball sampling 2. Purposive sampling	Relationship with manager, Supportive supervision, Team support/supportive colleagues, Peer support, Supportive relationships.
McFadden et al. (2018)	22-58 (36)	86% female 14% male	Northern Irish	N = 162	Cross-sectional survey	1. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) 2. RS14 Resilience Scale	Stratified random sampling	Organisational support Manager relationship Co-worker relationships

McFadden et al. (2017)	86% female 14% male	Northern Ireland	N = 162	Cross-sectional online survey questionnaire design		3. Area of Work Life Scale (AWLS)	1. Cluster sampling 2. Stratified random sampling	Community support, Interventions at work, Management environment.
Truter and Fouché (2020)	100% female	Southern Africa	N = 10	Qualitative exploratory approach with a phenomenological design	2015	3. Area of Work Life Scale (AWLS)	1. Face-to-face interview 2. Telephonic interviews Convenience sampling combined with self-selection sampling	Supportive care systems, Family support, Prayer group / Bible study group (religious), Colleague support,

Supportive management/ supervisors, Personal relationships, External colleagues and supervisors, Friends support Social support

Xu et al. (2023)

85,81% female
14,19% male

Southern China

N = 620

Cross-sectional survey

July 2020

1. Professional Quality of Life scale
2. Brief Resilience Scale
3. Duke-UNC Functional Social Support Questionnaire

Purposive sampling

3. Results

The resilience of child protection professionals is significantly influenced by various mesosystem factors that include community support, working climate, management support, organisational support, supportive relationships, and supervision. This chapter explores these elements in depth, drawing from empirical findings across multiple studies.

3.1 Community support

Two of the included studies, conducted by McFadden et al. (2017) and Truter and Fouché (2020) found that some sort of community support can strengthen resilience in child protection professionals. Community support and religious groups are associated with increasing resilience in child protection professionals.

McFadden et al. (2017) conducted research among 162 child protection professionals in Northern Ireland. The study aimed to use path analysis modelling to examine the relationships between resilience, organisational variables, and burnout among child protection professionals. Even though sense of community scores were not significantly associated with burnout subscales, research of McFadden et al. (2017) found a positive effect between resilience among child protection professionals and community support. Resilience was identified as directly predictive of the three burnout subscales used. Community support is related to the quality of social relationships, and are all considered as factors relating to burnout or job engagement (Maslach and Leiter, 2008).

3.1.1 Religious groups

Truter and Fouché (2020) conducted research among child protection professionals in Southern Africa, aiming to contribute to the information on resilience among child protection professionals in Southern Africa. More than half of all participants in the study by Truter and Fouché (2020) ascribed their resilience to their religious practices, beliefs, and sanctuaries. Their research shows that Bible study groups and prayer groups can support child protection professionals in carrying the burden. A participant in this research states that church groups and activities support her through prayer. Another participant states: *“...Everything is going to be fine and I read my bible ... Because I’m a Christian, so, I find most of the strength that I find I get from God. I just ask God; okay I don’t know what to do in this situation so please guide me.”*

3.2 Workplace climate

Ausbrooks (2010) conducted research among child protection supervisors. This study aimed to find the influence of organisational factors on resilience in child protection

supervisors. Ausbrooks's (2010) article suggests that an organisation's climate plays a significant role in fostering resilience in child protection professionals. The participants' ability to utilise available resources to withstand the stressors inherent to the agency indicates that the organisational environment significantly influences resilience development.

Frost et al. (2017) conducted research among child protection professionals in three countries. The researchers utilised qualitative interviews to find key resilience factors among child protection professionals. Research by Frost et al. (2017) found the working atmosphere to be a factor for resilience in child protection professionals. Their research found the team itself to be an important organisational factor.

3.2.1 Working relationships

McFadden (2018) conducted research among stayers and leavers of child protection social work in Northern Ireland. All stayers from the research of McFadden (2018) among child protection social workers in Northern Ireland stated that being part of a good team sustained them. However, a third of the leavers voiced concern about not investing in new relationships due to the volume of workers leaving the field. It was identified as critically important because, for both those who left and those who stayed, supportive relationships were proven to be fundamental for child protection professionals in fostering a greater sense of resilience.

Despite the working climate being reported as negative, supervisors have relied on their relationships with staff as a buffer against agency stressors, thereby enhancing their resilience development (Ausbrooks 2010). Research by Frost et al. (2017) examined the team itself as a resilient factor. The child protection professionals of this research discussed five particularly significant factors including the team, team manager, and supervision.

McFadden et al. (2018) utilised research data from McFadden et al. (2017), exploring relationships between resilience, organisational variables, and burnout among 162 child protection professionals from Northern Ireland. McFadden et al. (2018) argue that co-worker relationships are important for retaining staff. Truter and Fouché (2020) found an identified source of resilience embedded in collegiality. A participant stated: *‘People within the structure look after one another .. they are constantly looking out for the best interest of their staff .. so the whole spirit of the organisation is positive because we must look after each other, no one else is going to look out for us ...*

3.2.2 Management relationships

An effective manager oversees team activities, acknowledges employees' contributions, and supports them during conflicts. For workers, it is crucial that managers prioritise the safety of both children and employees (Frost et al., 2017). Managers can significantly contribute to creating an atmosphere of trust within the workplace. Truter and Fouché (2020) found relationships with responsive supervisors to be a form of support for child protection professionals, which has a positive impact on their resilience. Additionally, McFadden et al. (2018) found a positive relationship with managers to be a positive influence on resilience. Surveys revealed 87% of all respondents felt their relationships with managers met their expectations, only 13% stated this as a mismatch. McFadden et al. (2017) validate this by finding evidence of the management environment contributing to employees' resilience and reducing their vulnerability to burnout. Frost et al. (2017) found the importance of a team manager as a factor for resilience, even though each country of their research looked at team manager relationships in another way. McFadden (2018) found manager support to be an important factor. Being understood and recognised by managers was perceived as crucial. One of the participants of research by Mcfadden (2018) stated there was poor and limited management support in her first year of practice. This had an enormous consequence for her team, which became unsteady, with high levels of absenteeism. Eventually she left the child protection field.

3.2.3 Peer support

McFadden (2018) conducted research among child protection social work leavers and stayers in Northern Ireland. She found peer support to be of critical importance for stayers as well as leavers in the child protection field. McFadden states that reliance on positive relationships with peers is key to feeling more resilient among child protection professionals. Nearly a third of stayers in this research expressed job enjoyment and highlighted working in stable teams with well founded peer and team support.

In the study conducted by Frost et al. (2017), it emerged that a participant experienced peer support as a positive force. This positive force could lead to a higher level of resilience among child protection professionals. One of the participants stated: *'Why I think I'm still here today is that kind of feeling of support... peer to peer stuff... people having an awareness of you or king of having recognition of what work you are doing and where you are at emotionally.'*

3.3 Organisational support

McFadden et al. (2018) conducted research to identify the factors that foster resilience among child protection professionals in the context of challenging economic, political, and social environments. Organisational contexts were examined from the perspective of job engagement or burnout to measure their perceived impact. Organisational factors were found to be critical as a factor in fostering resilience in child protection professionals. Self-reported resilience is also found to mediate the relationship between organisational factors and burnout. The paper addresses contextual concerns related to organisational factors influencing social workers. The paper concludes by advocating for organisational interventions to enhance resilience among employees.

3.3.1 Interventions at work

McFadden et al. (2018) call for organisational interventions to support resilience in child protection professionals. The researchers advocate for targeted organisational interventions to strengthen resilience among professionals facing adverse socio-economic and political climates. McFadden et al. (2018) state that such strategic support is essential for sustaining workforce effectiveness and well-being. McFadden et al. (2017) also recognise the importance of interventions to improve resilience among child protection professionals. McFadden et al. (2017) advocate for interventions aimed at improving workplace health and well-being to enhance workers' resilience.

3.4 Supportive relationships

In research by Truter and Fouché (2020), all participants recognised sources of support rooted in personal relationships or in relationships on the working floor. Spending time with family and/or friends was described by a participant as keeping them sane. In terms of supportive relationships with friends and family, Truter and Fouché (2020) found that these relationships helped participants resolve issues and feel 'normal', enhancing their resilience. One of the participants in their research stated: *'... on weekend I don't do anything related to work...I either spend time with my family or my friend an ja...they uhm I don't know what can I say, they just kept me sane...they just keep me sane and ja I'm just happy when I'm home.'*

These supportive relationships contributed to the resilience of these child protection professionals in southern Africa. McFadden (2018) identified supportive relationships as crucial for fostering a sense of resilience among child protection social workers. Ausbrooks (2010) discovered that establishing a support system was particularly crucial for

supervisors in child protection in smaller or rural areas due to their frequent isolation from peers.

3.4.1 Social support

Xu et al. (2023) conducted research investigating secondary traumatic stress and burnout among child protection professionals in southern China. They focused on understanding the role of resilience and social support in reducing secondary traumatic stress and burnout. The study aimed to uncover the significance of facilitating resilience to help reduce secondary traumatic stress and burnout. The researchers found social support to play a pivotal role in positively impacting resilience, which helped decrease secondary traumatic stress and burnout symptoms. Their findings highlight the importance of fostering strong social support systems for child welfare workers to increase resilience and improve well-being.

3.5 Supervision

Truter and Fouché (2020) found supportive supervision to be a factor in enhancing resilience in child protection professionals. Frost et al. (2017) found supervision to be a key finding in their research into the resilience of child protection professionals in three different countries. Some workers implicated supervision in the ‘ethics of resilience’. This study found internal and external supervision to be factors in strengthening resilience in child protection professionals.

Research by Truter and Fouché (2020) stated that some of the participants in the study also referred to supportive professional relationships outside of their immediate workspace, such as external supervision, as promoting resilience and highlighting the importance of sustaining such professional relationships for child protection professionals. One of the participants stated: *‘...I had a really good supervisor...she is hands on, she knows her job...she listens and I think she is one of the few people who can actually stand up to the management, you know...anything that you ask her she is there for you...you can ask her on the phone if she is not in the office...it make us or me feel like I matter.’*

4. Conclusion and Discussion

This chapter synthesises empirical findings from seven studies concerning the resilience of child protection professionals. It emphasises the impact of mesosystem factors, including community support, workplace climate, management and organisational support, supportive relationships, and supervision.

4.1 General interpretation of findings

This study has exposed several promotional factors for resilience in child protection professionals. These findings might have implications for future research, policymakers, and the people who are in close proximity to child protection professionals.

Community support, including engagement with religious groups, significantly strengthens the resilience of child protection professionals. McFadden et al. (2017) and Truter and Fouché (2020) both call attention to the fact that such support systems, encompassing community activities and religious affiliations, provide substantial emotional and social support, enhancing professionals' ability to cope with occupational stressors. The findings from these studies correspond with broader literature on the importance of community support as a protective factor in promoting resilience among individuals. Dolcos et al. (2021) found religious coping to result in more adaptive behaviours to promote increased resilience. This is also consistent with research by Thomas and Savoy (2014), who suggested religious coping strategies to improve resilience. Emotional support plays a crucial role in promoting overall well-being and fostering healthy relationships. Emotional support relates to providing comfort, understanding, and empathy to individuals in times of need (Edwin, 2004). Lack of community support contributes to employee burnout (Ausbrook 2010). It is of great relevance to enhance community support, to strengthen resilience in child protection professionals and decrease burnout among these professionals.

The working climate within child protection agencies plays a crucial role in fostering resilience. Ausbrooks (2010) and Frost et al. (2017) found that a supportive organisational climate allows professionals to better utilise available resources and manage stress effectively. Relationships within the workplace, particularly with peers and management, are crucial. McFadden (2018) underscores the value of team and management support in maintaining workforce stability and resilience. Positive management and constructive peer interactions are key resilience factors. Lack of peer support contributes to employee burnout and turnover in child protection professionals. Ausbrook (2010). Preferably, the management environment contributes to employees' resilience, decreasing their vulnerability to burnout (McFadden et al., 2017). Truter and Fouché (2020), McFadden et al. (2017), and McFadden

et al. (2018) all observe that positive relationships with supervisors and colleagues help reduce burnout and enhance the capacity to handle professional challenges. Research by Baykal (2018) showed that a resilient leader creates resilient individuals within the organisation. Official inquiries in England point out the importance of supervision in child protection, tying it to management performance (Frost et al., 2017). Burns (2011) also found a positive relationship between peer and supervisory relationships, and intent to stay in the workforce. McFadden et al. (2014) also found managerial support to play a crucial role in helping employees stay in their workforce. Also Jordan's (2006) relational resilience framework underscores these findings. This framework argues that when individuals have positive relationships with managers and peers, they are more likely to stay in their roles.

McFadden et al. (2018) advocate for targeted organisational interventions to strengthen resilience among professionals facing adverse socio-economic and political climates. Such strategic support is essential for sustaining workforce effectiveness and well-being. Organisational-level interventions might include supervisory support (McFadden, 2015), mentoring programs, counselling, and organisational consultancy (Schaufelli, 2009)

Organisational factors have been found to impact individual functioning and their capacity to reduce, mitigate, and prevent burnout (Wooten et al., 2011). Baugerud et al. (2014) found organisational factors to be a possible factor impacting the development of burnout in child protection workers. Baugerud et al. (2014) state that it seems that organisational factors play an important role in supporting workers in this field. Research by Lingard et al. (2006) showed perceived organisational support as the main effect on burnout. These results align with the findings found in this research.

Personal and professional relationships play a significant role in building resilience in child protection professionals. Truter and Fouché (2020) and McFadden (2018) note that support from family, friends, and colleagues is vital for maintaining psychological health and professional persistence. Xu et al. (2023) further emphasise the importance of social support systems in mitigating secondary traumatic stress and burnout among child protection workers through resilience. This is consistent with research by Tusaie and Fredrickson (2004), who identified social support as a significant element in resilience. Research by Baugerud et al. (2014) shows the relational component to have a role in creating the problems leading to burnout. Blum (1998) found strong relationships to be key predictors of resilience. McFadden (2020) underscores these findings with research in Ireland. Supportive working relationships strengthened resilience in child protection workers.

Effective supervision is the foundation of resilience for child protection professionals. Frost et al. (2017) and Truter and Fouché (2020) identify both internal and external supervision as critical in fostering a resilient workforce. This aligns with Baugerud et al. (2014), who found supervision particularly important in social work to act as a potential buffer against developing burnout. Lingard et al. (2006) found effects for supervision; however, the effect did not differ from its source. This research found both internal and external supervision to play a role in fostering resilience. McFadden (2020) also found supportive supervision to enhance resilience in child protection workers in Ireland.

Concluding, resilience among child protection professionals is multifaceted and deeply attached to the quality of both their professional and personal support systems. These findings advocate for a holistic approach to enhancing resilience through strategic interventions at individual, organisational, and community levels.

4.2 Strengths and limitations

This systematic literature review, guided by the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, engages a comprehensive methodological approach to guarantee a structured and transparent framework, thereby supporting the reliability and replicability of its findings. Several inclusion and exclusion criteria, along with an eligibility and quality assessment, were applied to ensure that only relevant and high-quality studies were included in the analysis. The integration of qualitative methods increases the depth of providing a distinct understanding of how mesosystem factors impact resilience among child protection professionals.

This review is subject to several limitations, each of which could have implications for the comprehensiveness and relevance of its findings and further research.

Firstly, the scope of this review is restricted to studies published from 1990 onwards, exclusively in English. This limitation may lead to the exclusion of significant research published in other languages or before 1990, which might offer valuable insights into resilience factors for child protection professionals. As a result, this narrow focus limits the range of perspectives that could have provided more depth to this review.

Secondly, a reliance on specific databases and predetermined keyword criteria may lead to selection bias, as studies that aren't indexed in the selected databases or those that do not precisely match the keywords may have been overlooked. This approach potentially excludes relevant research, restricting the thoroughness and diversity of the literature included.

These limitations highlight the importance of interpreting the findings within the boundaries of the review's methodology and scope, and they suggest a need for future research that addresses these gaps.

4.3 Recommendations for further research, policy and practice

4.3.1 Recommendations for further research

These recommendations aim to guide future research in the direction of investigating the complex relationships between mesosystem factors and resilience while providing crucial strategies for enhancing the well-being of child protection professionals.

To capture a broader range of perspectives, future research should include studies published in languages other than English. This could provide valuable insights from diverse cultural contexts, which can improve the understanding of the role of mesosystem factors affecting resilience in child protection professionals. To track the development of resilience over time in child protection professionals, there is a need for longitudinal studies. These studies would enable researchers to identify long-term trends and the impact of mesosystem factors on resilience in child protection professionals.

Future studies should evaluate specific interventions designed to increase resilience, especially those focused on strengthening management support, peer relationships, and community networks. When evaluated, these interventions will inform policymakers which practices are most beneficial. Using mixed-methods approaches, which combine quantitative and qualitative data, could deepen the understanding of how mesosystem factors interact to influence resilience in child protection professionals. Additional surveys, interviews, and focus groups could provide different perspectives. Further research is needed to examine the dynamics between burnout and resilience and how mesosystem factors may mitigate the adverse symptoms of burnout. Identifying these dynamics could significantly decrease the enormous turnover rates of child protection professionals.

4.3.2 Recommendations for policy

To enhance community support for child protection professionals, policies should be developed. This could include stimulating partnerships with local religious and community organisations to provide emotional and social support for child protection professionals. These partnerships have shown to strengthen resilience among child protection professionals (McFadden et al., 2017); Truter and Fouché, 2020).

Policies aimed at improving workplace climate should be implemented. This calls for creating supportive work environments where resources are available to manage job stress.

Organisations should create a culture where values actively promote resilience through training and professional development (Ausbrook, 2010; Frost et al., 2017; McFadden, 2018; McFadden et al., 2018).

Policies should be created to ensure all child protection professionals have access to both internal and external supervision. This is found to be crucial in providing necessary support and guidance, which can significantly impact resilience in child protection professionals (Frost et al., 2017; Truter and Fouché 2020).

Policies should be made to encourage positive and supportive management relationships. Managers should get training to recognise and address signs of burnout, and to provide ongoing support and appreciation to their teams (Frost et al., 2017, McFadden et al., 2017; McFadden et al., 2018; Truter and Fouché, 2020).

Assessments of staff well-being should be implemented along with interventions aimed at preventing burnout. Policies should authorise the use of tools as resilience scales to monitor and support resilience in child protection professionals (McFadden et al., 2017)

4.3.3 Recommendations for practice

To enhance resilience among child protection professionals, several strategies can be implemented in practice. Firstly, the development of peer support groups should be encouraged. Peer groups can lead to enhanced resilience (Frost et al., 2017; McFadden, 2018). These groups offer an informal setting where professionals can share experiences and strategies, resulting in strengthened resilience. Additionally, it is important to train managers and supervisors in supportive leadership practices. Managers and supervisors could recognise signs of burnout and strengthen resilience in child protection professionals (Frost et al., 2017; McFadden et al., 2018; McFadden et al., 2017; Truter and Fouché, 2020). Introducing buddy systems interventions could also enhance resilience (McCool et al., 2022). Lastly, promoting a healthy work-life balance is vital. A positive work-life balance can promote resilience (Bernuzzi et al., 2022). Implementing strategies could create a more supportive and resilient workplace for child protection professionals.

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