

Mental Health and work-life Balance among Workers in Social Services

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Abstract:

Objective: This study investigates the relationship between burnout, overtime work, and psychological resilience in social workers in social care centres. The wellbeing of individuals in helping professions, notably social workers in care services, decreased by 15% last two years. Mental health declined by 23.4%, and 36.2% of workers reported increased mental stress.

Methods: A quantitative cross-sectional study was conducted in 2024 on a sample of 156 social workers. Data were collected using validated instruments assessing burnout, mental stress, resilience, and life satisfaction. Statistical analysis was performed to examine the correlations between burnout levels, overtime hours, and resilience factors, using p-values to assess significance.

Results: Burnout was found to be at 30% among social workers, with a direct correlation to overtime hours, averaging 5-8 hours per week during the pandemic. Workers with higher resilience showed better self-confidence, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities. Resilience was strongly linked to self-acceptance, self-esteem, empathy, and social security. Additionally, the pandemic negatively impacted autonomy ($p=0.024$), self-acceptance ($p=0.016$), and purpose in life ($p=0.037$), as measured by life satisfaction scales. Burnout symptoms were reported by 20% of social workers and 11.5% of caregivers, with caregivers showing a higher burnout rate (33.4%) compared to social workers (31.3%).

Discussion: The findings highlight the critical role of psychological resilience in managing the emotional demands of social work during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Higher resilience is associated with improved coping mechanisms and professional growth, while low resilience correlates with increased burnout and difficulties in client management. Workload, financial status, and lack of rest were key predictors of life dissatisfaction, emphasizing the need for systemic interventions to support workers' mental health and reduce burnout.

Conclusion: The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated burnout and reduced wellbeing among social workers and caregivers. Enhancing psychological resilience through targeted interventions may help mitigate these effects and improve their capacity to adapt to future stressors. Addressing workload management and providing mental health support are crucial for sustaining professional efficacy in social care services.

Introduction

The pressures faced by social care workers during the pandemic have highlighted long-standing issues related to mental health and work-life balance in this profession. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, social care workers were prone to experiencing high levels of stress and burnout due to the emotionally taxing nature of their jobs. A study by the British Association of Social Workers (2018) reported that over 60% of social care workers felt stressed or overworked regularly, while 43% considered leaving the profession due to burnout and poor work-life balance.

The pandemic only intensified these challenges. A survey conducted in 2021 across Europe showed that 70% of social care workers experienced increased workloads during the pandemic, with 45% working extended hours or additional shifts to cover staff shortages or meet the heightened demand for care services (Eurofound, 2021). This increase in workload

has been linked to a rise in mental health issues among care workers, with 41% reporting symptoms of anxiety and 34% experiencing depression at some point during the pandemic (Eurofound, 2021). These statistics underscore the importance of addressing the mental health challenges faced by workers in this sector.

The increasing workload in the social care sector manifests not only on a physical level but also significantly affects the psychological wellbeing of employees (Valachova et al., 2024). Social workers face growing challenges, including a rising number of clients, heightened expectations from families and society, and the need to handle increasingly complex cases (Zenelaga et al., 2024). Burnout syndrome is becoming more prevalent in these professions and is emerging as a crucial factor impacting the quality of services provided.

In fact, research shows that the burnout rate among social care workers is steadily rising, with studies indicating that up to 45% of social

workers experience moderate to severe levels of burnout at some point in their careers (Parker & Slaughter, 2020). The emotional exhaustion associated with this syndrome leads to reduced job satisfaction and impaired capacity to empathize with clients, often resulting in a decline in the quality of care. In addition, burnout affects workers' physical health, increasing the likelihood of chronic conditions such as hypertension, fatigue, and cardiovascular issues.

Theoretical framework

Burnout remains a critical concern, as it directly affects both the personal health of social care professionals and the quality of care provided to clients. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized burnout as an occupational phenomenon characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy. In the context of social care, burnout can lead to emotional detachment from clients, decreased job satisfaction, and a higher risk of errors in care delivery.

Social care workers, in particular, have reported heightened levels of stress, burnout, and mental exhaustion, with studies showing a 23.4% decline in mental health and a 36.2% increase in mental tension among workers in social service institutions (Gaziková, 2023). The mental health challenges faced by these professionals are exacerbated by heavy workloads, long hours, and the emotional demands of caring for vulnerable clients. A 2022 study on 143 social care workers found that 30% experienced high levels of burnout, with a direct correlation to the additional 5-8 hours of overtime per week required during the pandemic.

Work-life balance is a particularly pressing issue in the social care sector, where workers often face challenges in balancing their professional responsibilities with their personal lives. Long hours, shift work, and the emotional intensity of the job contribute to work-life imbalance, which can have detrimental effects on both mental health and job performance. For example, 20% of social workers and 11.5% of caregivers reported experiencing burnout symptoms on a daily basis, while caregivers demonstrated a higher burnout rate (33.4%) compared to social workers (31.3%) (Gaziková, 2023). Additionally, the

lack of sufficient rest, high client-to-worker ratios, and frequent overtime further aggravate the situation, leading to diminished job satisfaction and increased mental health issues.

The link between work-life imbalance and burnout is well-documented. A 2020 meta-analysis found that workers in high-stress professions, such as social care, who lack sufficient time for rest and recovery are 50% more likely to experience burnout compared to those with better work-life balance (Parker & Slaughter, 2020). This imbalance is particularly pronounced in social care services, where staff shortages, night shifts, and emotionally demanding interactions with clients make it difficult for workers to disconnect from their professional responsibilities. Moreover, financial pressures add to the stress, as many workers in this field receive low wages despite the critical nature of their work. In fact, studies show that social care workers often earn significantly less than the national average, further contributing to job dissatisfaction and mental health struggles (Social Care Workforce Report, 2022).

Psychological resilience has emerged as a key factor in mitigating the effects of stress and burnout among social care workers. Research indicates that individuals with higher resilience levels are better equipped to handle work-related stress, adapt to challenging situations, and maintain a sense of professional purpose. In a 2022 study, social workers with greater resilience demonstrated higher levels of self-confidence, adaptability, and emotional regulation, which helped them manage the demands of their job more effectively (Gaziková, 2023). Key predictors of resilience include self-acceptance, self-esteem, and the ability to reflect on experiences and learn from them. Building these traits can be crucial in helping workers in the social care sector navigate the emotional and psychological demands of their profession. There is relationship between burnout at a European country level and a variety of national economic, governmental and cultural indicators (Butzm, Mrazova et al., 2024).

Methodology

The main research objective is to analyse and identify workload factors that affect employees in social welfare services in the area of mental

and physical health using a standardized Work-life balance questionnaire, which was participated by 156 social workers. The research objective of this study is scale development and validation of the work-life balance scale using the three constructs of Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL), Personal Life Interference with Work (PLIW), and Work Personal Life Enhancement (WPLE). WLB Constructs Hayman (2005) developed a psychometric instrument to measure WLB in organizations. A 15-item scale had been adapted from a 19-item scale originally developed by Fisher-McAuley et al. (2003) that was designed to capture employee perceptions on WLB. The 15-item scale measured Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL), Personal Life Interference with Work (PLIW), and not including Work Personal Life Enhancement (WPLE) as three constructs of WLB.

Results

For workers in social services, work-life balance (WLB) refers to the degree to which their professional responsibilities and personal life demands interact and affect one another. WLB can be categorized into **work interference with personal life (WIPL)**, where job demands encroach upon personal time and well-being, and **personal life interference with work (PLIW)**, where personal or family obligations affect work performance. This study aimed to explore the longitudinal associations between WIPL, PLIW, and work ability outcomes specifically within the social services sector. Pearson Chi-Square test was used for distributions and ANOVA test was used for mean the experience with social service quality was measured with an index, ranging from 1 to 5. Higher score indicates better experience with social services ($p \leq 0.05$).

The study sample consisted of workers from both long-term and short-term care services, with a predominant representation of female employees, particularly in long-term care, where 64% were women, compared to 36% in short-term care. The long-term care group tended to be older, with a median age of 58 years and a mean of 56.2 years (± 13.4), whereas short-term care workers had a median age of 52 years and a mean of 51.3 years (± 11.2).

In terms of experience, a greater proportion of long-term care workers had more practical experience, with 35% having 5-9 years of experience and 18% with over 9 years, compared to 21% and 10%, respectively, in short-term care. Additionally, only 5% of short-term care workers had up to 5 years of experience, compared to 17% in long-term care.

The distribution of job roles showed that 47% of long-term care workers were caregivers, with 17% in administration and 12% in managerial roles. In short-term care, 22% were caregivers, 10% worked in administration, and only 4% held managerial positions.

Both groups had similar overall experience in social services, with a median of 4 years and a mean of 4.0 years for long-term care workers, and a nearly identical result for short-term care workers.

Regarding work-life balance, long-term care workers reported higher levels of **work interference with personal life (WIPL)**, with a mean score of **4.49 (± 1.4)**, compared to **3.48 (± 0.8)** for short-term care workers. On the other hand, **personal life interference with work (PLIW)** was more pronounced among short-term care workers, who scored **4.18 (± 0.4)**, compared to **3.67 (± 0.8)** for those in long-term care (table 1).

In the context of social service workers, work-life balance (WLB) is achieved when the demands of their job are compatible with those from other life domains, such as family or leisure time. A “balanced” state occurs when the demands from one domain do not adversely impact activities in other areas. In this study, WLB was divided into two distinct dimensions: **‘work interference with personal life’ (WIPL)** and **‘personal life interference with work’ (PLIW)**, which were treated as separate predictors. The primary objective of this approach was to investigate which type of role-related balance—whether work or personal life—has a specific influence on various work ability outcomes among social service workers.

The results of our study indicate that work-life balance is a significant concern for workers in social services, with many reporting that their personal lives are negatively affected by work. A notable **36%** of participants agreed that their **personal life suffers due to work**, showing

a positive correlation ($p = 0.261$). Similarly, **34%** agreed that **work makes their personal life difficult** ($p = 0.258$). A higher percentage, **58%**, agreed that they **neglect personal needs because of work** ($p = 0.144$), and **61%** indicated that they **postpone personal life due to work** ($p = 0.038$), reflecting a significant impact

of work on their ability to manage personal commitments. **52%** missed engaging in personal life activities due to work ($p = 0.049$), while **69%** had **trouble fulfilling both work-related and non-work tasks** ($p = 0.039$), indicating significant interference between work and personal responsibilities.

Table 1 The characteristics of the sample

		Long-term care	Short-term care
Gender	Female	64%	36%
Age	Md, Mean (\pm SD)	58, 56.2 (13.4)	52, 51.3 (11.2)
Practical experiences	Up to 5 years	17%	5%
	5-9 years	35%	21%
	More than 9 years	18%	10%
Position at work, n (%)	Care givers	47%	22%
	Administration	17%	10%
	Manager	12%	4%
Experience of social services	Md, Mean (\pm SD)	4.0, 4.0 (0.8)	4.0, 3.9 (0.9)
Work-life balance	WIPL, Mean (\pm SD) ^b	4.49 (1.4)	3.48 (0.8)
	PLIW, Mean (\pm SD) ^b	3.67 (0.8)	4.18 (0.4)

Table 2 WILP Scale Results

Statements	Quality of working environment and relations	Financial situation	working conditions overload	Number of care receivers
Mental suffer of social caring	0.024	0.037	0.018	0.154
Physical pain and exhaustion	0.115	0.148	0.062	0.041
Lack of needs satisfaction	0.126	0.033	0.042	0.031
Lack of work life balance	0.050	0.047	0.125	0.089
Lack of personal life out of work	0.105	0.132	0.142	0.135
Lack of variety of free time activities	0.145	0.016	0.036	1.05
I am dissatisfied with the amount of time I have for non-work activities.	0.096	0.045	0.027	0.039
current work ability with respect to the mental demands of your work	3.57 (0.108)	3.37 (0.112)	3.47 (0.106)	4.18 (0.204)
current work ability with respect to the physical demands of your work	4.39 (1.04)	4.19 (0.94)	4.23 (1.04)	3.48 (0.088)
current work ability with respect to the physical demands of your work	3.47 (0.209)	3.71 (0.213)	3.84 (0.209)	4.48 (0.323)

When asked about **satisfaction with the amount of time for non-work activities**, 48.3% expressed dissatisfaction, while 57.4% found it challenging to balance their non-work time.

In terms of work ability, workers rated their **current work ability with respect to mental demands** as 4.0 (0.8) and 3.9 (0.9). Similarly, for the **physical demands of their work**, respondents rated their ability as 4.49 (1.4) and 3.48 (0.8), with some variations between individuals. There was a moderate rating of 3.67 (0.8) and 4.18 (0.4) for **work ability concerning the physical demands of their job**, reflecting some difficulties in managing the physical aspects of their roles.

Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL)

The concept of WLB is often drawn from individual's multiple life roles and from the recognition that non-work demands may carry over into the work, and adversely influence the individual in several ways.

The study explored various factors affecting social service workers, focusing on how aspects such as working conditions, financial situation, and the number of care receivers correlate with mental and physical well-being, work-life balance, and overall work ability.

Mental suffering among social care workers showed a weak correlation with the quality of the working environment (0.024), financial situation (0.037), and working conditions overload (0.018). However, the number of care receivers demonstrated a more notable influence, with a moderate correlation of 0.154, suggesting that an increased number of care recipients exacerbates mental suffering.

Physical pain and exhaustion correlated moderately with the quality of the working environment (0.115) and financial situation (0.148), while working conditions overload (0.062) and the number of care receivers (0.041) showed weaker correlations. This indicates that financial and workplace support may play more substantial roles in reducing physical strain than workload intensity or care receiver numbers.

The **lack of needs satisfaction** was more influenced by the quality of the working environment (0.126) compared to financial situation (0.033), working conditions overload (0.042), or

number of care receivers (0.031), emphasizing the importance of a supportive work environment in fulfilling workers' personal needs.

When examining **lack of work-life balance**, working conditions overload (0.125) and the number of care receivers (0.089) had stronger correlations compared to the quality of the working environment (0.050) and poor financial situation (0.047). IT means social workers has to take more shifts and work longer.

The **lack of personal life outside of work** was moderately impacted by all factors, with working conditions overload (0.142), financial situation (0.132), number of care receivers (0.135), and the quality of the working environment (0.105) showing similar degrees of correlation. This indicates that multiple dimensions of work, including workload, financial stability, and workplace dynamics, contribute to the erosion of personal life.

The **lack of variety in free-time activities** was strongly influenced by the number of care receivers (1.05), suggesting that handling a high number of care recipients leaves little room for diverse leisure activities. The quality of the working environment also had a moderate correlation (0.145), while financial situation (0.016) and working conditions overload (0.036) played less significant roles.

Dissatisfaction with time for non-work activities showed a moderate correlation with the quality of the working environment (0.096), but financial situation (0.045), working conditions overload (0.027), and number of care receivers (0.039) had lower impacts, highlighting that a better work environment might improve satisfaction with personal time.

In terms of **work ability with respect to mental demands**, the number of care receivers (4.18) had the strongest correlation, suggesting a significant impact of workload on mental capacity. The quality of the working environment (3.57), working conditions overload (3.47), and financial situation (3.37) also played a role but to a lesser extent. Regarding **work ability with respect to physical demands**, the quality of the working environment (4.39) and financial situation (4.19) had higher correlations; while working conditions overload (4.23) and the number of care receivers (3.48) had less impact. This

suggests that physical work ability is more reliant on support systems within the work environment and financial stability than on workload intensity.

Personal Life Interference with Work (PLIW)

The results regarding **Personal Life Interference with Work (PLIW)** demonstrate varying degrees of impact that personal life challenges have on work performance across several factors.

For the statement **“My personal life takes away my energy for work”**, the most notable correlation was with the **financial situation (0.087)**, followed by the **number of care receivers (0.113)**, while the correlation with **working conditions overload (0.017)** and the **quality of the working environment and relations (0.024)** was lower.

For **“I am too tired to be effective at work”**, the correlations were more evenly distributed. The strongest correlation was with **working conditions overload (0.052)**, followed by the **financial situation (0.041)**, the **number of care receivers (0.037)**, and the **quality of the working environment and relations (0.025)**.

When respondents indicated that **“My work suffers because of my personal life problems”**, the **number of care receivers** had a significant correlation (**0.095**), while the **working conditions overload (0.046)** and **financial situation (0.036)** showed moderate correlations. The **quality of working environment and relations**

had a lower correlation (**0.026**).

Lastly, for the statement **“It is difficult to work because of personal matters”**, the highest correlation was with **working conditions overload (0.125)**, followed by the **number of care receivers (0.114)**. The **financial situation (0.027)** and **quality of working environment and relations (0.030)** had the smallest correlations.

These findings suggest that personal life issues, especially those related to financial situation and number of care receivers, can influence fatigue and energy levels, ultimately affecting work performance.

Discussion

The findings from this study resonate with existing literature that emphasizes the significance of work-life balance (WLB) in influencing employee well-being, particularly in high-stress environments such as social services. Research Subramaniam et al. (2018) outlines how role conflict between work and personal life can lead to diminished job satisfaction and increased stress levels. The current study supports these conclusions, demonstrating that personal life challenges significantly interfere with work performance.

Additionally, the high percentage of workers reporting that their personal lives affect their energy and effectiveness at work aligns with findings by Frone (2003), who identified that interference from personal life can exacerbate

Table 3 PLIW scale results

Statements	Quality of working environment and relations	Financial situation	working conditions overload	Number of care receivers
My personal life takes away my energy for work	0.024	0.087	0.017	0.113
I am too tired to be effective at work	0.025	0.041	0.052	0.037
My work suffers because of my personal life problems	0.026	0.036	0.046	0.095
It is difficult to work because of personal matters	0.030	0.027	0.125	0.114

feelings of fatigue and reduce productivity. The correlation of financial stress with work-related challenges further underscores the interconnectiveness of economic stability and job performance, as highlighted in previous research by Padyab et al. (2016).

Furthermore, the specific differences in WIPL and PLIW between long-term and short-term care workers offer insights into how job roles can dictate the nature of work-life conflicts. Research by Radková (2020) suggests that the context of work can influence how workers perceive their responsibilities, which may explain why short-term care workers experienced higher PLIW. This could be attributed to the transient nature of short-term care roles, which may demand greater emotional investment without the same level of job security or relationship-building found in long-term care roles. Buzalová, Radková, L. Cintulová (2021) have contributed to the discourse on work-life balance in the social services sector, emphasizing the importance of supportive work environments and effective coping strategies to be able to overcome crises even during pandemic period.

The reported exhaustion and dissatisfaction with time for non-work activities (62% agreement) highlight a critical area for intervention. Studies by McNall et al. (2010) show that organizations that prioritize employee well-being through flexible scheduling, supervision and support programs see improved outcomes in both job satisfaction and employee retention. Implementing strategies such as wellness programs or enhancing communication about workload management could mitigate some of the negative effects reported by workers in this study. Ludvigh Cintulová (2022a) stated that the social system significantly impacts the ability of workers to achieve work-life balance because it encompasses various structural, cultural, and policy-related factors that influence individuals' working conditions and personal lives. The existence of flexible work arrangements, parental leave policies, and support for part-time work can greatly affect employees' ability to balance their professional and personal responsibilities. A supportive social system promotes policies that facilitate work-life integration. Societal attitudes towards work and family life play a cru-

cial role in shaping expectations for employees (Pavlikova et al., 2023b). In cultures where long working hours are valued, individuals may feel pressured to prioritize work over personal life, thereby affecting their work-life balance (Ludvigh Cintulová, 2022b),

In conclusion, the results indicate that personal life challenges significantly interfere with work for social service workers, particularly in areas related to energy, effectiveness, and overall satisfaction. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of WLB in high-stress environments, suggesting that addressing financial and workload-related issues may enhance the well-being of social service professionals. Future research should explore longitudinal studies to evaluate the impact of specific interventions on improving work-life balance and overall job satisfaction in this sector.

The connection between the historical development of senior social services in Slovakia, as discussed by Ludvigh Cintulová et al. (2022; 2023b) the burnout of social workers is multifaceted. Several factors contribute to this relationship. As the population ages, the demand for social services for seniors has risen significantly. This surge can lead to overwhelming workloads for social workers, contributing to stress and burnout. According to a study Ludvigh Cintulová et al. (2023), high caseloads and the emotional toll of caring for vulnerable populations are significant predictors of burnout in social workers. In summary, the interplay between the demands placed on social workers in the context of senior care services, resource limitations, and the emotional labor involved in their roles is significant in understanding burnout.

The connection between work-life balance (WLB) and the challenges faced by social workers in senior social care services, particularly in the context of the pandemic, as outlined in the work of Ludvigh Cintulová et al. (2024), showing that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly heightened the demands placed on social workers in senior care. As outlined in the study, many workers experienced increased caseloads and expectations, which directly impacted their ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Research indicates that when work demands exceed an individual's capacity, it leads to stress

and can result in burnout. The study on **burnout among social workers** in social care centers presents a stark picture of the mental health landscape faced by professionals who support others during these challenging times. The study reveals that burnout rates among social workers are significant, with 30% reporting symptoms linked to increased overtime work and mental stress, which have risen sharply during the pandemic (Pavlikova et al., 2023). Social workers are often tasked with helping both parents and children navigate their emotional turmoil, which can be exacerbated by the increased reliance on social media for grief processing. As social workers report significant burnout, it raises concerns about their capacity to effectively support families, especially when addressing issues of parental issues (Tkacova et al., 2023).

Conclusion

The inability to achieve a proper balance between work and personal life can adversely affect social workers' mental health, leading to higher turnover rates and reduced job performance.

Social workers often face emotional challenges due to the nature of their work, particularly in caring for vulnerable populations such as the elderly. The pandemic intensified these emotional strains, leading to difficulties in separating work from personal life. This phenomenon is known as work-life interference, where work-related stress negatively affects personal life and vice versa. Effective supervision and organizational support are critical in enabling social workers to navigate their responsibilities without compromising their personal lives. Research supports the idea that organizations that foster a supportive environment can help mitigate the adverse effects of work-related stress on employees' personal lives.

In contrast, the quality of the working environment and financial situations, while showing weaker correlations with mental suffering, still play essential roles in shaping overall job satisfaction and worker morale.

Physical pain and exhaustion were found to correlate more closely with financial situations and the quality of the working environment than with working conditions or the number of care receivers. This underscores the importance

of financial stability and supportive workplace policies in alleviating physical strain, as noted in studies emphasizing the significance of organizational support. Additionally, the correlation of a lack of needs satisfaction with the quality of the working environment highlights the necessity for a supportive atmosphere that fulfills workers' personal and professional needs.

Regarding work-life balance, the correlations indicate that working conditions overload and the number of care receivers significantly impact social workers' ability to maintain a healthy balance between professional and personal lives. This finding resonates with literature that connects high workload demands to diminished personal time and increased work-related stress. The strong correlation between the lack of variety in free-time activities and the number of care receivers suggests that heavy caseloads severely restrict leisure opportunities, further impacting mental well-being.

Overall, the study reveals that enhancing the quality of the working environment and addressing financial issues could mitigate the adverse effects of workload on social workers. This aligns with recommendations in the field advocating for better work-life balance initiatives and comprehensive support systems to improve the well-being of social care workers (Ludvigh Cintulová et al., 2024). As social care demands continue to grow, it becomes increasingly vital for organizations to implement strategies that promote not only the physical and mental health of their employees but also their overall work-life satisfaction (Hamarová et al., 2024; Kralik et al., 2024).

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