

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
800-521-0600

UMI<sup>®</sup>



## **NOTE TO USERS**

**This reproduction is the best copy available.**

UMI<sup>®</sup>



McGILL UNIVERSITY

STRESS AS A REACTION TO RACISM

A Thesis Submitted to

The School of Social Work  
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for

The Master's Degree in Social Work

by

Bertlyn Elvira Joseph

Montreal, August 16, 1999



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*

*Our file* *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-55114-8

Canada

## Abstract

Stress as a reaction to racism.

---

Stress is inherent in our daily lives and it is debilitating to our mental health. My assumption is that racism and stress are intertwined. The purpose of this research is to explore the narratives of Black social service workers who are working in mainstream social service agencies. I will explore whether, and how, they experience racism and how their experiences might result in a range of stressors in the workplace. This paper is based on the premise that the amount of stress Black social workers are subjected to is directly related to the social and structural forces within the agencies, in terms of racism, sexism and domination.

In particular, I am arguing that it is stressful for Black social workers to work in an agency that perpetuates and condones racism and this may bring about added tension to the working environment. By focusing on everyday forms of racism and its' impact on the mental health of Black social workers, the analysis will also reflect my experiences of personal and institutional racism, the effects of internalized racism and coping strategies aimed at retaining a mental stability and competency on the job. Exploratory interviews were conducted with six social workers, five of whom were front-line workers and one manager, in three social services agencies in Canada, to examine their experiences of racism, their responses and coping strategies which they have adopted to deal with the day-to-day stressors in their jobs. In addition, an examination of current

policies, practices and procedures will be interpreted within the organizational structure of the agencies.



## Abrégé

La contrainte causée par le racisme.

---

La pression raciale fait partie de la vie quotidienne et elle affaiblit notre santé mentale. Le racisme et la contrainte morale sont étroitement reliés. Cette recherche a pour but d'examiner les récits de travailleurs sociaux noirs qui travaillent au sein d'agences de services sociaux. Nous explorerons leur expérience du racisme et verrons comment le racisme peut provoquer une série de réponses négatives en milieu de travail. Cette thèse a pour objectif de démontrer que le stress, le sexisme et la domination auxquels les travailleurs sociaux noirs sont assujettis sont directement liés au pouvoir social et structural qui existent dans le milieu des agences de services sociaux.

Mon raisonnement est qu'il est particulièrement stressant pour les travailleurs sociaux noirs d'avoir à travailler dans une agence qui encourage et perpétue le racisme et de ce fait augmente la tension en milieu de travail.

Cette analyse reflétera mon expérience du racisme personnel et institutionnel . Elle dénoncera aussi les effets du racisme approuvé et révélera les stratégies adoptées afin d'y faire face et nous permettre de maintenir notre stabilité mentale et demeurer compétents au travail.

Nous nous concentrerons sur le racisme quotidien sous toutes ses formes et sur son effet sur la santé mentale des travailleurs sociaux noirs.

Nous avons eu des entrevues préliminaires avec six travailleurs sociaux, oeuvrant dans trois agences de services sociaux, dont cinq sont des travailleurs

de premier rang et l'autre chef de service. Le but des rencontres était d'examiner leur expérience du racisme, leur réaction et les stratégies adoptées pour faire face au stress quotidien au travail. De plus, une étude des politiques, pratiques et procédures courantes à l'intérieur de la structure organisationnelle des agences sera faite.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank several people for their support, encouragement and contributions to this research project. Peter Leonard, my research advisor, for his relentless support, guidance and insight, from the inception of this research.

Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard (Assistant Professor, Maritime School of Social Work) for her generosity in helping with the editing of this research.

Most of all, thanks to my parents Lucita and Arthur Joseph for their loving support and encouragement throughout the course of my studies.

Jane Rittian Scrubb, my 85 year old grandmother, for all of her support throughout the course of my studies. Thanks also to my aunt Micah Hypolite for encouraging me through the years.

A very special thanks to Frank Collins for all the long-distance support, encouragement and friendship over the years.

Special thanks to the six respondents who took time out from their busy schedules to share their experiences with me.

Martine Nagy, for her patience with the typing, proof-reading and the translation of the abstract.

Many thanks to my colleagues for their support: Phebeth Dawkins, John Brathwaite and Stella Gaudeloupe. Also, special thanks to my friends for energizing me in writing this research (Debi Dixon, Fern Davis, Christine Atukoit-Malinga and Lois Stenberg).

A special thanks to Beethoven Asante for his assistance and support in preparing this thesis and to Kim Kurtz for his continued support.

Ghislaine Leclerc for all her help in printing and re-printing my work.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii-v
Acknowledgments .....	vi
Table of contents .....	vii-viii
<i>Chapter 1 - Introduction</i> .....	1
Deciding on this topic for research - A personal note .....	10
Objectives and organization of thesis .....	10
<i>Chapter 2 - Literature review</i>	
Introduction .....	12
Various definitions of burnout .....	15
Personal factors .....	16
Organizational factors .....	18
Summary .....	21
Solutions to burnout .....	22
<i>Chapter 3 - A critique of burnout literature</i>	
Introduction .....	26
Summary .....	27
<i>Chapter 4 - Methodology</i>	
Introduction .....	30
Selection of agencies .....	31
Description of programs .....	31
Agency A & B : Health and Social Services Agencies .....	31
Agency C : Child Welfare Agency .....	32
Permission to interview .....	32
Data collection and analysis .....	35
<i>Chapter 5 - Experiences of racism and stress</i>	
Findings .....	36
Demographic background data of participants .....	36
Reflection on the process of interviewing .....	36
Subtlety, uncertainty and the denial of racism	
Introduction .....	43

Institutional racism: a form of exclusion	
Introduction .....	50
Examples of “good colonial subjects” and “bad colonial subjects”	
Introduction .....	55
Discrepancies between policies and practices	
Introduction .....	59
Daily stressors on the job and coping mechanisms	
Introduction .....	62

*Chapter 6 - Conclusion*

Implications for social work practice .....	70
Implications for future research .....	71
Recommendations .....	72
Conclusion .....	73
Summary .....	76

*Appendices*

A. Consent form .....	78-79
B. Interview guide .....	80
C. Poem <i>Still I Rise</i> .....	81
References .....	82-85

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

In 1979, I migrated from the Caribbean to Montreal, Canada. I left my family and friends behind to live with relatives in pursuit of better opportunities and a good education. I was told that Canada was the land of opportunities and that all I needed to do was to follow my dreams. However, when I arrived in the summer of 1979 I experienced severe cultural shock and the adjustment to my new environment was very difficult. I was consumed by a sense of loss, loneliness and sadness at being away from my siblings and my parents. The transition was an overwhelming undertaking for me. Prior to my migration to Canada, I had a preconceived notion of what life in Canada was all about - good education = better opportunities = better job. However, I quickly learned that I had to adapt to my new environment and the process of acculturation was very challenging. First, I had to acquire the language in order to complete my secondary education Diploma. This required me to integrate and adapt to the institutional structure of my new country.

At first, I anticipated a rosy future because of the rhetoric I heard about Canada as a multi-cultural society. However, within the Canadian context, multi-culturalism is supposedly linked to the idea of acceptance and tolerance towards other cultures. With this assumption, I was convinced that I would have equal opportunities and access in obtaining employment, promotions and entry into educational institutions. However, instead the multi-culturalism discourse seems

to project an illusionary analysis in which the complexity of peoples' cultures and daily experiences are continuously devalued and trivialized.

Rizvi (1995), as cited by Sefa Dei (1996), noted that "the state's approach to multi-culturalism adopts a superficial definition and treatment of culture, as reflected in the celebratory practices of the "Saris", Samosas and steel-bands syndrome" (Donald and Rattansi, 1992, 2). Rizvi also went on to state that *the* "initial movement to multi-culturalism into the classroom did not address the lived experiences of people of color; rather, such a move focused on the more simplistic "getting to know you" move of consuming and observing "ethnic foods, dancing and dress". (p. 58)

Similarly, I was naive to believe that I would be able to achieve full acceptance as an equal in a multi-cultural society. However, I learned from personal experiences that racism is not only based on my so-called "differences", but includes my everyday experiences of exclusion, profound alienation and rage. For example, I vividly remember seeking an apartment to rent. I had called and made an appointment to visit a vacant apartment with a prospective landlord. However, upon my arrival the landlord informed me that the apartment was no longer available, that it had been rented a few moments prior to my arrival. I was disappointed. Upon my return home, I called again for the same apartment in order to verify my suspicion and it was confirmed. I was told that the apartment was still vacant. I was enraged, but along with the intensity of my anger I felt powerless and I cried. At that moment I realized that I and other Blacks, are subject to the same stressful and frustrating experiences in the

course of our daily social interactions. Likewise, I had heard stories of racial discrimination experienced by many Blacks when they tried to find apartments but I did not understand the depth of their pain, frustration and sense of exclusion until I had experienced the same disappointment.

Essed (1990) brings an interesting perspective to discussions of everyday racism by pointing out that "most whites today, consciously or unconsciously, have a tendency to cover up and deny their own racism ... If we consider the ways in which an individual experiences racism personally, we must address a question that has rarely been touched upon before, namely: How can Blacks prove, both to themselves and to others, their sense that racism exists even when it is not being overtly expressed? ..... As we shall see, everyday reality teaches us that many instances of racial and ethnic discrimination are difficult to "prove". Yet the experience and consequences of racism are no less real or far-reaching because the racism occurs in hidden and seemingly impalpable form. On the contrary, the effects of everyday racism may be even more damaging in the long run than those of blatant discrimination" (pp. 1-2).

Educational institutions are no exceptions to this invisible barrier. At the time I applied to the Master's program in Social Work I was surprised that in a class of about 75 students we were only three Black students. This concerned me as there is a disproportionate amount of Black children in reception centres and in substitute care. Moreover, there is a dire need for Black social workers. In Montreal, a study conducted by Ville Marie Social Services in 1986 reported that "youth protection services were provided to 5,7% of the total clientele



population of ethnic origin, but 50,9% of total child placement were Caribbean children.” In a more recent study conducted by Batshaw Youth and Family Centres and McGill School of Social Work (1992), they reported that “Black children were overrepresented by 400% in the social services system and by 150% in foster care.” (pp. 8 & 14)

I had to constantly remind myself to exercise patience to cope with the every day forms of racism and this drew a lot of energy from me. Unfortunately, Black social workers must cope with racism in both our practices and in our day-to-day lives.

In 1990, I was hired (and currently employed) at a child-protection agency as a youth care worker. My job description includes the following: participation in observing and analyzing the behaviors of youths, evaluating their needs and abilities, coordinating and animating activities by applying educational techniques utilizing activities of daily living. However, the main objective is to re-integrate the youth back into the community, within their families.

A few months after I was hired, I faced the grim reality that there were no Black social workers to represent the Black clients in our care. I feel that a Black worker, being from a similar cultural background, would be more sensitive to the issues faced by Black clients. I may speculate that the agency was prone to the color-blind approach and felt that there should be a universality of treatment for all clients. This realization filled me with anger and rage. The idea that a child welfare agency was so blatant in its hiring practices was alarming to me. On the one hand I was confronting what I considered white supremacy in contrast to a

mission statement which states "To respect the values and beliefs of those we serve in this community which has many races, cultures and religions." The contrast was alarming to me. Because of the many contradictions in this agency, I feel that I have been forced to construct ways to challenge the racism and white supremacy thinking within the agency.

I draw some attention to the issue by sharing my experiences. Sefa Dei (1996) noted that "lived, personal experience is central to the formulation of any social knowledge". Matsuda (1989), as cited by Sefa Dei (1996), discusses "the importance and relevance of seeing the world as experienced by the oppressed if we are to achieve effective political action and change". (p. 63) Further, my personal experience as a Black youth care worker who works with young people is summed up by bell hooks (1995) who states that "sharing rage connects those of us who are older and more experienced with younger Black and non-Black folks who are seeking ways to be self-actualized, self-determined, who are eager to participate in anti-racist struggles" (p. 25).

The metaphor of a "good colonial subject" and "bad colonial subject" will be used in this thesis in examining issues of power and certainty. In a paper about the power and certainty of therapists, Amundson et al. (1993) state that "without questioning the certainties embedded in our expertise, we may foster a "colonial discourse", an apparatus of power whose "strategic function is the creation of a space for a subject people". They go on to say that when this happens, "our expertise and specified knowledge run the risk of subjugating rather than liberating" (p. 112).

During the period from 1993 to 1995, three of us, as Black staff members on the team, were having conflicts with our program manager. In general, the Black staff perceived this conflict to be based on racism and harassment, which we all endured up to a point. Although my Black co-workers perceived my supervisor's actions and attitudes to be racist, I found myself in denial. I recall trying to convince my co-workers that my supervisor was not racist. I even believed that my co-workers might be acting unprofessional while on the job. In retrospect, I saw my co-workers as, to use Amundson et. al.'s metaphor, "bad colonial subjects" and myself as a "good colonial subject". At first they complained about the supervisor's attitude and behavior towards them, but I believed it was a personality conflict between the supervisor and my co-workers.

Prior to the confrontation between my supervisor and myself, I viewed myself as a "good colonial subject". I had valued my supervisor's judgment as it related to his position of power. At the time, however, most of my Black colleagues saw our supervisor as a person who abused his power, and who had a fervent desire to control the Black staff. Nevertheless, I justified his behavior, viewing his behavior through my own lenses as a seasoned and knowledgeable supervisor. I used to try to convince some of my colleagues that our supervisor was a likable person, and had good intentions. As a "good colonial subject", I was willing to believe that his opinions and decisions were warranted. Moreover, my colleagues saw me as an outsider and traitor, who betrayed them.

Amundson et. al. point out that "good colonial subjects" "readily intertwine their destiny with that of the colonizer" (1993, p. 113). In retrospect, I suspect

that my ex-supervisor had seen me as an ally who believed in his expert knowledge, whereas my colleagues were viewed by him, and myself, as “bad colonial subjects”. I had suspected that my ex-supervisor viewed my colleagues as resistant, as they refused to “be sucked into his web”. Unfortunately, they became a problem for my ex-supervisor. Consequently, he tried to silence some of my colleagues with reprimands.

Not until I came to realize the grim reality that I was in denial, was I then able to go through the process of decolonization, in order to see clearly and to confront the blatant racism in my workplace. I then began to observe my supervisor’s interactions with me more closely. Shortly thereafter, I realized that I was subjected to similar forms of harassment and intimidation. Subsequently, I started to challenge his authority and as a result, he attempted to subdue me by handing out a reprimand. I could not believe that someone who laughed and talked with us could be so superficial and cruel to the point of working underhandedly to reprimand and suspend Black staff. At this point, the wool was removed from my eyes and I began to see what my ex-supervisor was doing to us. His agenda was twofold. First, he was trying to get us fired and/or trying to silence us collectively. In addition, he was trying to divide us, thereby breaking our collective voice and strength. Given the fact that systemic racism permeates in all social institutions, it seems to give the dominant group permission to oppress others, especially people of color. I maintain that the agency ignores the subtlety of everyday racism of the majority and disregards the interconnections between structural forces and personal behavior (Dominelli, 1997).

I am a part-time youth care worker in a secured unit. At the time, we were a team of twelve, with 50% of the educators originating from the Caribbean and 50% being Caucasian. Team meetings were held weekly, on Wednesdays. However, part-timers were scheduled to attend the meetings only once a month. I vividly remember attending one particular Wednesday meeting. Prior to the meeting, one of my Caucasian co-workers had drawn my attention to the new parking signs on the street, which I had not noticed when parking my car. She then accompanied me in my search for a new parking space. We were gone for approximately 15 minutes. Upon our return to the unit, our supervisor who inquired on our whereabouts greeted us at the door, since we were late for the meeting. I explained that we had gone to find a parking space. Subsequently, I was subjected to weekly, unscheduled "supervision". I found this supervision to be a form of oppressive bureaucratic control. I informed my supervisor that I would prefer scheduled supervision, thereby allowing me to prepare myself if I had any treatment issues to discuss with him. Based on past experience, I felt that this expression of my preference led him to feel challenged by my position. A few weeks later, I was called to his office where he delivered a written reprimand. I was consumed with rage!

The aforementioned letter contained the rationale for the reprimand, in which my supervisor claimed that I had left the premises, on agency time, to carry out personal errands (as opposed to the reality of my leaving on a Wednesday, in the company of a Caucasian co-worker, to move my car) and my refusal to be subjected to unscheduled supervision. Before this meeting, I called

my co-worker to inform her of my reprimand and she was shocked, expecting to receive one as well since she had accompanied me to move the car. A few weeks passed but she never received a reprimand - according to her, she only received a "pep talk". In a written response to my supervisor, I expressed my dissatisfaction with the reprimand and requested that it be withdrawn from my personnel file. He categorically refused. In addition, I had copies of my letter sent to his supervisor, the labor union and senior management. Approximately three weeks later, his manager hand-delivered a letter to me that stated that I had defamed my supervisor's character. The letter also requested that I prepare a written apology to my supervisor, with copies to be sent to the union as well as senior management.

I filed a grievance with the union. The union went further and met with the Director of the senior management group to discuss my supervisor's manager's request for a written apology from me. The Director did not see the need, apparently, for me to prepare such a letter.

As a result of this incident, my practice was closely monitored, accompanied by increased routinization of supervision. The level of surveillance of my work made me feel self-conscious and powerless. In other words, the evaluation of my entire practice rested in the hands of supervisor who had already demonstrated his racism toward Black youthcare workers.

Due to this experience, I was filled with indignation. However, I chose to use this anger and rage constructively. I made the conscientious decision not to be complicit anymore. I was convinced of the type of change which was

required. This would only be possible through collaborative efforts on the part of all Black youth care workers on the team, coming together to discuss issues with which we were confronted. I confessed to my co-workers that I had initially not believed in the existence or racism in the agency and apologized for any pain which I might have inflicted on them. In the process of sharing our experiences, we came to realize that we were all subjected to certain degrees of harassment and racism. We acknowledged the severity of the problem facing the Black youth care workers and we subsequently agreed to write a joint letter to the Director of the agency to express our concerns, complaints and ensuing lack of satisfaction with our supervisor's behavior. We understood that our strategies and tactics must take into account the seriousness of our situation while holding some promise of promoting fundamental change. However, we were willing and ready to take this issue to the Human Rights Commission if the Director did not respond within four weeks. Someone was assigned to deal with our concerns. In other words, our supervisor changed his attitude and behavior towards us. Although he is no longer my supervisor, I am convinced that he will continue his racist practices elsewhere.

## **Deciding on this topic for research - A personal note**

This research topic came about as a result of my experiences of racism and discrimination. Both my personal and work experiences have influenced me in undertaking a thesis involving the exploration of the stories of Black social workers' experiences of racism, and the coping strategies which they have adopted to deal with the day-to-day stressors in their jobs in mainstream social service agencies.

As a West Indian Black woman, I have experienced racism in all forms: cultural, institutional and personal levels in my day-to-day life. Too often, people (mostly white Anglo-Saxon) would make racially derogating remarks or stereotypes: *why don't you go back to where you came from?! or you Black people are all alike*. I have endured and continue to endure such painful statements from mainstream culture. In Canada, we would like to believe that Canadians are more tolerant, and are not racist. Whenever I encountered the aforementioned remarks or statements, I often asked myself if visible minorities will ever be fully accepted and respected in the spirit of cultural diversity in Canadian society.

## **Objectives and organization of thesis**

This exploratory research was designed to meet two main objectives. The first was to get an in-depth understanding of whether, and how, Black social workers experience racism in mainstream social service agencies. The second objective was to assess their coping strategies, and how they have adopted them to deal with the day-to-day stressors in their jobs.



This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first provides an overview of the research. The second reviews and discusses the literature on occupational stress and burnout amongst social workers. The third is a critique of burnout literature, while the fourth focuses on the methodology undertaken for conducting the research. The fifth, in great part, is the summary of results from interviews with five front-line social service workers and one manager. Finally, the sixth is a discussion of the findings and their implications for social work practice and research.

## **CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

Since Freudenberger (1974) introduced the term burn-out, many authors have written and identified the helping professions (such as social work, nursing, teaching, psychiatry, etc.) as the sources of burn-out (Maslach and Pines 1979, Cherniss 1980, Maslach 1982). Karger (1981) agrees that "burn-out is most often reported in child protection services" (p. 276). Also, Karger went on to say that "although many researchers on burn-out are oriented differently, they all agreed in seeing the problem as "one of the agency and the individual, rather than as a larger societal problem" (p. 273).

A majority of the literature on burnout omits causal links and/or relationships to social problems such as racism, sexism, classism, etc. having a potential impact on visible minorities, thus creating a lot of stress on individual social workers within the workplace.

Furthermore, some authors have proposed various ways of dealing with burn-out such as stress management, inoculation therapy, cognitive readjustment, etc., which arguably shows an individualistic, pathologizing orientation which avoids examining structural forces.

Martin, U. and Schinke, S. write: "Job satisfaction and potential burnout are integral elements of social service organizations, particularly those organizations in which daily contact with resistant populations and recurrent crises are involved" (1998, pp. 51 & 52).

The object of this chapter is to critically review literature regarding burnout amongst social workers in the human services, but specifically for the purpose of this research, it will focus on social workers in social service agencies.

As noted by a number of writers, the concept burn-out has been seen as comprising of various physical, emotional, behavioral and interpersonal symptoms. In addition, Kahill (1988), in her study reviewed the empirical evidence on symptoms of professional burn-out. She concludes that "there is substantial evidence that burnout is associated with poor physical health in general. Also, among emotional symptoms, depression is most consistently linked to burn-out. Moreover, behavioral symptoms most clearly related to burn-out include turnover and possibly other non-productive work behaviors" (p. 292). Kahill went on to say that "this profusion may be related to the general imprecision and lack of conceptual clarity of the burn-out field, but it may also reflect psychological reality, namely that burn-out may be a generalized psychological distress reaction that is necessarily experienced somewhat differently by each individual and may have no clearly delineated symptomatology" (p. 283).

Nevertheless, Arthur (1990), cited by Brown and O'Brian (1998), reports that "there is general agreement that burn-out is a progressive syndrome that results directly from involvement in a helping relationship over an extended period of time" (p. 383).

As well, several studies have examined the relationship of burn-out in human service organizations to potential causes and consequences (Kahill,

1988, Koeske & Koeske, 1989, Perlman & Hartman, 1982) as cited by Um & Harrison, 1998, p. 100.

The dominant discourse which has emerged seems to have pathologized the individual as the cause of stress; for example, Freudenberger (1974) identified three types of workers that are prone to burn-out. Nevertheless, later explanations on burn-out recognized individual symptoms, but also seeing the workplace as causing burn-out. In addition, both Cherniss (1980) and Karger (1981) agree that burn-out lies in both individual and organizational sources of stress.

It appears, then, that there are inconsistencies and conflicting perspectives amongst the studies on burn-out among social workers. I suspect that this inconsistency stems, in part, from the fact that, although there are plethora of literature existing on burn-out, studies have not been developed exclusively in relation to social work practice (Freudenberger, 1974, Maslach and Pines, 1979, Cherniss, 1980, Maslach, 1982).

By reviewing available literature on this subject, I hope to gain some insight on the impact of occupational stress in the social services professions. For the past eight to nine years I have been working in child care services and I am consistently working under significantly high levels of stress, on the verge of burn-out. I am cognizant that this milieu is inherently stressful. For this reason, it is of great importance to me to explore the social support systems which are available at the organizational level, which could help me to minimize these high levels of stress. Also, by examining this issue, it will offer some choices with

respect to my response to everyday stressors of the job and, perhaps, avoid the danger of impending burnout.

### **Various definitions of burn-out**

When researching burn-out, one soon discovers that a concise definition of "burn-out" is not easily obtained. Similarly, one finds that it is impossible to find a single perspective on burn-out. Rather, one finds several perspectives, each with its own ideology. These ideologies govern even the most basic issues, such as the actual definition of burnout. I will proceed, therefore, by considering a range of definitions in reviewing the literature, thereby obtaining an overall sense of the variation of the definitions of burn-out used in understanding the problem among social workers.

Freudenberger (1974) defined burn-out as "to fail, wear out, become exhausted because of excessive demands on energy, strength and resources."

Maslach and Jackson (1982), however, defined "burnout" as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment."

Similarly, Pines and Aronson (1981) added that (burn-out) is simply a "physical, emotional and mental exhaustion", as cited by Kahill (1988).

On the other hand, Pines and Kafry (1981), as cited by Karger (1981), subsume the concept of burnout with the conceptual framework of tedium. Tedium is defined as a "general experience of physical, emotional and attitudinal exhaustion." This idea of tedium combines the notion of a psychology of stress

within the context of work environment, job satisfaction, drawing on the previous work on burn-out (p. 271).

In summary, Collings & Murray (1996) state that "burn-out is a particularly serious feature of stress and one which can clearly impair the human service worker's effectiveness when it occurs" (p. 377).

### **Personal factors**

As stated earlier, much of the research carried out in this area has concentrated on the causes of stress. The dominant discourse which has emerged has pathologized the cause of stress as lying in the individual worker. Thompson et al (1996) noted that "the cause of stress is seen to be located in the individual's personality or perception" while Cooper (1981) claims that burnout is a function of "the dynamic between the individual and his or her organization" (p. 653).

Michael Daley (1979), as cited by Karger (1981), states that "objects, emotions or personal interactions that produce tensions in the individual all fall under the general heading of the causes of job related stress". He therefore concludes that "clearly the response of burnout to job related stress is a highly individual phenomenon" (pp. 271 & 272).

Furthermore, Freudenberger (1975), as cited by Karger (1981), brings an interesting perspective to the discussion on burnout. Freudenberger acknowledges that "burnout is an individual phenomenon and identified three types of workers prone to burnout". The first personality type is that of the dedicated worker. He states that, "the dedicated worker is one who is committed

but takes on too much work too intensely". The second personality type is that of the over-committed worker whose outside life is unsatisfactory and the third type is the authoritarian burnout. This latter is ... "the type of individual who so needs to be in control that no one else can do any job as well as he/she can" (p. 271).

Daley (1979) points out that certain types of individuals are drawn to work in specific fields on the basis of their perception of the likelihood of obtaining satisfaction from their jobs. However, we must recognize that social workers spend less time with their clients and more time in transportation, paper work and administrative tasks. One might argue, therefore, that due to limited contact with clients, a false sense of reality is created between the idealized concept of the worker's helping role and what actually occurs on a day-to-day basis in practice.

Daley states that "this discrepancy is not uncommon for young professionals and has been termed 'reality shock'." He goes on to say that 'reality shock' creates stress that may lead to burnout and turnover, since workers don't get the anticipated rewards from working with clients. Also, another factor in burnout is work overload. Daley maintains that "new workers, lacking a wide variety of skills and the inability to handle difficult tasks often results in frustrations" (pp. 446 & 447).

Edelwich and Brodsky (1980) argue along the same lines as Daley. They point out five sequential aspects of burnout. They describe a progression in steps "1 - enthusiasm: when workers have high hopes and the desire which brings a person to work in a helping profession; 2 - stagnation: when workers lose the momentum of hope and desire which brings a person into the helping

profession; 3 - frustration: workers' constant complaints of bureaucratic red-tape and limitations of the job situation; 4 - apathy: when a person is chronically frustrated at the job, yet needs the job to survive; 5 - intervention: is a response to or in anticipation of enthusiasm, stagnation, frustration and apathy, which breaks the cycle. It may mean leaving the field or changing jobs within the field, modifying one's job description and restructuring one's relations with clients, peers and supervisors" (pp. 28 & 29).

I can, from my own experience, relate to high levels of stress on the job. I find working in the child-care services very demanding and challenging. Also, I can identify with Edelwich and Brodsky's (1980) five stages of burnout. When I started this job, I was enthusiastic and I was convinced that I would be able to make a difference in a client's life. After the first year, I realized the limitations of my job description. At times, I became frustrated and overwhelmed by feelings of disempowerment, not being able to help clients and an inability to change agency policies. I felt that I had to tolerate these negative feelings because I needed this job to survive and meet my financial obligations, including my tuition fees.

### **Organizational factors**

In this section, I will focus on the organizational discourse on burnout. Daley (1979) noted that research has identified factors associated with burnout, some producing it, others inhibiting it. He also points out contextual factors inherent in the nature of the child welfare worker's job which include characteristics of the job, role conflict, needs satisfaction, the nature of the client



and working conditions. Daley went on to say that "these factors help to explain child welfare's high burnout relative to other social casework settings" (p. 445).

Pines and Kafry (1978), as cited by Daley (1979), "investigated job characteristics relative to burnout and occupational tedium. These included variety, autonomy, success, significance and feedback. Of these, only the amount of feedback showed a significant correlation to tedium, a concept similar to burnout. These findings indicate that workers who received little feedback tend to burn out faster" (pp. 445 & 446).

Nevertheless, there are various themes within the literature. Um and Harrison (1998) point out that "role stressors, such as role conflict and role ambiguity in social work settings appear to have much greater impact on job strain than do role stressors in any other occupation" (p. 101).

Similarly, a study of role strain and burnout in child-protective service workers was conducted by Harrison (1980) who found that "role conflict, role ambiguity and low degrees of satisfaction with promotional opportunities and with the work itself are indeed prevalent among the child-protective service social workers studied" (p. 41).

In addition, Daley (1979) points out that "role conflict is a particularly strong stimulus to burnout for workers who must deal with persons both inside and outside of the agency. Inside the agency, the worker's behavior is governed by professional protocols, yet workers get into conflict because their clients neither understand the protocol nor understand the values on which it is based" (p. 446).

LeCroy and Rank (1987) noted that *the* "relationship between burnout and job satisfaction has received considerable attention" (Harrison, 1980, Jayaratne and Chess, 1983, 1984)(p. 24). A study of child welfare, community mental health and family service workers was conducted by Jayaratne and Chess (1984), which found that:

"child welfare workers report higher levels of stress than their colleagues in community mental health and family service agencies. Also, in three facets of the job - role conflict, value conflict, and challenge - the child welfare workers reported significantly poorer scores than their colleagues. Although child welfare workers had the smallest average number of cases, these workers considered their caseloads to be too high. This may be related to the nature of the problems they are dealing with.

Finally, within the specific dimensions of job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and intent to change jobs, some differences appear among groups. The best predictor for job satisfaction for all three settings is promotional opportunities" (p. 452).

A study of how clinical social workers experience burnout and job dissatisfaction in their workplace was conducted by Um and Harrison (1998) who found that "one influential source of job stress in the social work field, namely, role conflict, is perceived by clinical social workers." Failure to live up to unrealistic or conflicting expectations fostered by various professional roles in social work organizational settings appears to be stressful to clinical social workers.

Um and Harrison maintained that “social support, especially support from co-workers, was identified as playing an important role in ameliorating the effect of burnout on the final outcome variable, job satisfaction” (p. 112).

Nevertheless, Brabson, Jones, and Jayaratne (1989, 1991), Jayaratne and Chess, 1981, Maslach and Jackson, 1981, McNealy, 1989) acknowledged that “much of the literature of recent vintage, dealing with the stresses and strains encountered by human service professionals in the workplace, has focused on the white worker.” (Brabson et al., 1991, p. 78)

On the other hand, Martin and Schinke (1998) point out that “verbal reinforcers and punishments delivered by supervisors have a significant effect on employee satisfaction and burnout levels” (p. 60). Whereas, Koeske and Koeske (1989) suggest that praise and a socially supportive work environment “may forestall social worker burnout in social service settings - such interventions may be important for providing emotional relief and reducing social worker turnover” (p. 247). Daley (1979) concurs that “work relationships are another important factor. Availability of time-outs, peer and supervisory support, and sharing of cases all reduce the likelihood of burnout” (p. 448).

### **Summary**

Much of the research suggests that if an agency wishes to create a positive working environment, which will in turn increase job satisfaction among their workers, it should address certain factors: promotion, role conflict, role ambiguity, etc. In addition, it should provide a climate where supervisors provide support to workers by identifying, clarifying, and managing conflicting roles

through discussion during supervision. None of the research that I have reviewed takes account of the experience of racism as a factor in burnout.

### **Solutions to burnout**

Although prevention is the best intervention, burnout is still prevalent among workers in child welfare agencies. Few would deny that social work is a stressful occupation. Besides, many stressors are inherent in the nature of the job of child welfare workers and less amenable to change. Furthermore, the recommendations resulting from the burnout literature suggests that stress management training would help workers to improve their coping mechanisms. Daley (1979) brings an interesting perspective to discussion on preventing burnout - workers should learn stress management techniques that include "... deep breathing, transcendental meditation, yoga, or physical exercises." Daley goes on to conclude, "if workers learn to manage stress, the probability of burnout will be reduced" (p. 376).

With this premise, the responsibility is placed on the worker to improve their coping mechanisms to deal with burnout. The assumption is that if workers learn stress- management techniques and are able to manage their stress, burnout will be lessened. This appears to suggest that burnout is due to the workers' inability to manage stress, rather than the overwhelming demands of the institution. "Burnout thus becomes a subjective problem rather than an organizational problem" (Karger, 1981)(p. 273).

A number of researchers have argued that if occupational stress management programs are to be effective, they should be aimed at three levels;

the organizational level, the group level, and the individual level (DeFrank and Cooper, 1987).

Although efforts can be made to improve the individual's coping resources in dealing with stressors inherent in the job, they are only a small part of the solution, since organizational factors are cited as one of the frequent sources of stress. For this reason, research suggests that organizational policies should be reviewed or restructured to create more positive working environment which could decrease burnout or turnover. Jayaratne's and Chess' (1984) burnout model confirmed "that the absence of certain integral job facets (promotional opportunities, financial rewards) is associated with staff burnout" (p. 452). Therefore, at the organizational level, administrators or supervisors should promote incentives for the workers, by creating supervisory positions in order to increase job satisfaction.

Daley (1979) brings an interesting perspective to discussion on organizational strategies to prevent burnout, stressing the importance of "the traditional career ladder for a worker who has developed expertise in direct service is to move up in the organizational hierarchy, to supervision or administration" (p. 449).

Also, professional development is cited as a major factor in improving the competence and effectiveness of social workers, but also has the advantage of temporarily removing some workers from the day-to-day stresses of the job. It is thus important that "organizations offer frequent conferences and seminars, and encourage employees to attend such events at other agencies - attendance at

professional conferences can provide both intellectual stimulation and temporary breaks from the job, activities which Freudemberger (1975) maintains provide that intellectual stimulation which may reduce staff burnout levels” (p. 60). Martin and Schinke (1998) argue that “in-service training on burnout needs to be offered to administrators and line workers, to help them comprehend and cope with burnout symptoms. Also, supervisors should be trained and encouraged to recognize and commend employee efforts and accomplishments” (Ibid).

A study of clinical social workers’ experiences of burnout and job dissatisfaction in their workplaces was conducted by Um and Harrison (1998). The findings revealed a number of implications for worker training and ongoing supervision.

“Newly recruited workers can be given an orientation to possible role stressors, such as role conflict inherent in the clinical social work setting. For the worker, this type of information might be helpful in determining how to cope with role stressors inherent in their jobs and in preparing themselves for working in the field. For the supervisor, “information on individual workers’ possible reactions to role stressors and dissatisfaction factors may assist in assessing in-service training and supervision needs for new workers” (pp. 112 & 113).

In summary, although stress management programs seem to be the viable solution to stress reduction, some studies suggest that “actions to reduce stress should address both individuals and organizational sources of stress” (Bradley and Sutherland, 1995). In addition, Um and Harrison (1998) point out that

“agency-level group coping skills that are initiated by agencies may be helpful in identifying, clarifying and managing conflicting roles through discussion with supervisors” (Ibid).

It is imperative for social workers to participate in stress management training in order to help them to improve their coping mechanisms. Also, employees need to create a social support network among their colleagues. In addition to this, supervisors need to promote sensitization around the issue of stress among employees by providing a stress-free climate within which supervision takes place. Supervisors must possess adequate training in order to ensure that the employees receive the best supervision possible. Supervision meetings should be geared towards reinforcing social workers' value to the organization, which in turn helps to alleviate high levels of stress (Collings & Murray, 1996).

Finally, universities should incorporate courses on burnout in the process of professional training, so that the students could become aware of organizational pressures, such as workload, role conflict and role ambiguity. Also, workshops on occupational stress and/or burnout, sponsored by the professional associations, could offer social workers and graduating social work students knowledge and awareness and the opportunity to develop support groups within the professional association. Although these strategies can be used after burnout has occurred, they can also be used as a means of prevention. The early use of these techniques would make the job experience less emotionally stressful from the onset.

## **CHAPTER 3 - A CRITIQUE OF BURNOUT LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

Since the term “burnout” was coined by Freudenberger in 1974, it has received a lot of public attention. Subsequently, there are plethora of literature on burnout. It has been studied, examined, researched and discussed by social scientists (Freudenberger, 1975, Maslach, 1976, Chemiss, 1980a, Maslach, 1980).

Moreover, Collings and Murray (1996) noted that “A good deal of literature focuses on human service occupations and documents how specific aspects of work in the human service field can induce stress amongst workers in those fields” (p. 376).

Some authors have tried to come up with ideas on what causes burnout to occur, while others have made recommendations on how to deal with it. However, a review of the burnout literature from 1974 to 1980 was carried out and it was found that only a small percentage of the publications involved systematic data collection (Maslach, 1982a).

“Thus, while there was much speculation (and even dogmatic statements) about what burnout is and what should be done about it, there was very little hard evidence to test the truth of these assertions” (Maslach, 1987, pp. 95 & 96).

However, in recent years more published articles on burnout are based on systematically collected data. Also, Maslach (1987) points out that “As later studies replicate, extend, and build upon the findings of the earlier ones, we will



gain a greater understanding of burnout and be able to develop more comprehensive models of the burnout phenomenon" (p. 96).

### **Summary**

The majority of the burnout literature has a traditional Eurocentric perspective, not acknowledging how racism, sexism and classism could create added stress on Black social workers within the workplace. David (1996) recognizes that "It needs no empirical proof beyond reflection on divisions within the social structure to acknowledge that we live in an unequal society. Dominant beliefs embedded within preferred characteristics of gender, race and class play in defining individual experience." (pp. 21 & 22)

Karger (1981) points out that "while the examinations of burnout differ in their orientations, they appear alike in their assumptions .... It is the framing of the research questions and the assumptions underlying them that comprise the limitations and boundaries of the conclusion." (p. 272)

Also, the research on burnout presents a restrictive view of the burning out of workers from a subjective context. While other research documents personal and professional burnout, some research does not take into consideration the societal contribution to burnout.

In addition, Karger (1981) states that "the research of Pines, Maslach and Freudenberger reports burnout as a professional problem rather than a social phenomenon with it's roots in the social view of the activity of production." Karger went on to say that the research of Daley, Pines, Maslach and others assumes that stress is endemic to social work. "It is from these sets of 'givens'

that the boundaries of the research are established.” (Ibid) Moreover, the literature has serious limitations because it ignores the elements of domination and oppression which might be at the root of burnout amongst Black social workers.

Therefore, an integrative approach to burnout must examine the traditional understanding of burnout literature by its descriptive analysis of the problem. Of equal importance, an Africentric perspective should be integrated into the burnout literature. By bringing an Africentric<sup>1</sup> lens to the examination of burnout, those who engage in any research would have the capacity to understand burnout from an Africentric perspective.

Brabson et al. (1991) recognize that “in a recent study of social workers of African-American descent, the writers found that these workers often felt burned-out and perceived discriminatory practices against them in their workplace. However, they remained on the job, appeared relatively happy with their work, and expressed positive feelings of personal accomplishment. On the other hand, the findings did suggest that their work performance was probably hampered by feelings of anxiety, depression, irritability, and mental and physical health problems.” (Brabson, Jones & Jayaratne, 1988)(p. 78)

Although some of the burnout symptoms listed above are mentioned in the literature, I may speculate that when Blacks experience racial discrimination and unfair treatment they might experience some of the symptoms, which could

---

<sup>1</sup> Africentric is a term derived directly from African, describing a way of doing things or viewing the world from an African perspective.

mimic the symptoms of burnout. Also, Blacks might have different symptoms in comparison to the dominant group.

Unfortunately, most of the burnout literature has been examined through white lenses. There have hardly been any efforts made to document burnout from an Africentric perspective. As a result, the studies are biased by the limitations of the research results, which have often drawn from Eurocentric, methodologically flawed studies which failed to take into consideration Blacks' position in society. This non-inclusion of racism, sexism or classism in the burnout research is one example of the subtle form of racism within the research realm. Based on the interviews with experts (Jet, November 25, 1996), reports confirmed that "Blacks who experience discrimination may find that their health could be at risk. Experts noted that discrimination is a major detriment to Black Americans' health because it creates stress which leads to a number of health problems, which include high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, kidney failure and depression." (p. 13)

On the other hand, if the study was a politically motivated issue such as poverty, teenage pregnancy, youth unemployment, etc., Blacks would be incorporated into the research and writings regarding Black families. For this reason, Black researchers need to challenge studies which misrepresent or exclude Blacks from any studies that make generalized assumptions about their samples or results.

## CHAPTER 4 - METHODOLOGY

*It is by now commonplace to assert that people make sense of their own life experience by narrating them* Mitchell, (1980, 1981).

### Introduction

This research uses qualitative methods to explore the narratives and experiences of Black social workers who are working in various social service settings. Tutty and Grinnell (1996) define qualitative research: "Qualitative research is the study of people in their natural environments as they go about their daily lives. It tries to understand how people live, how they talk and behave, and what captivates and distresses them ... more importantly, it strives to understand the meaning people's words and behaviors have for them." (p. 36) A qualitative approach was chosen, using a semi-structured, in-depth interview style, in order to understand each participant's unique experience from the social worker's point of view, and in relation to their natural work environment. Also, what I might learn from the participants would, I hoped, be helpful to other Black social workers in similar situations. It might also, I thought, contribute to making changes in policies within the workplace.

Given the fact that a large majority of Black social workers are working in a variety of social service settings, which are predominantly white, I am interested in whether and how they experience racism and how much experience might result in a range of stresses in their workplace.

### ***Selection of sample agencies***

Since most Black social workers are working in mainstream social service settings, I wanted the opportunity to interview Black social workers in various social service agencies. Consequently, I interviewed social workers from three agencies and so was able to pinpoint the experiences of Black social workers in different social service settings.

### ***Description of programs***

In order to preserve anonymity and confidentiality, according to an agreement entered into with each social worker, neither the agency nor the workers will be identified. The three agencies and the participants from each agency will be referred to as Agency A through C and will be identified as such throughout this discussion. In addition, participants' names will be altered and will be replaced by the first six letters of the alphabet (A, B, C, D, E, F) followed by a number (i.e. A<sub>2</sub> is the second participant I interviewed from the same agency). The three social service agencies covered a variety of work settings, two were health and social service agencies, whereas the other organization was a child welfare agency.

### ***Agencies A & B - Health and Social Services Agencies***

These two agencies are representative of large inner city, serving mostly immigrants. The two agencies range in services, including nursing and medical care, psycho-social counseling, rehabilitation, family support, personal assistance and domestic aid, etc. The social workers work with a range of clients (including Youth Protection, refugees, refugee claimants and the elderly).

### *Agency C - Child Welfare Agency*

Child welfare agency which provides services such as psycho-social rehabilitation and social integration services, primarily related to the Youth Protection Act and Young Offenders Act. In addition to these services, the agency also provides services related to emergency placement, foster care/adoption and preventative and protective services.

#### ***Permission to interview***

Getting prospective candidates to interview was challenging and overwhelming at times. At the worst of times, it left me with a sense of hopelessness and despair to the point where I wanted to abandon the research. The sample frame for the study was obtained through the snowball technique. The sample consisted of six Black social workers in all. Five were front-line workers and one a manager, a convenience sampling. Initial contact with prospective research participants was made through a telephone conversation and they were informed of the purpose of the research study. They were also informed that an interview would follow at a later date.

The first respondent accepted to participate in the study but refused to be tape-recorded. However, during our casual conversation she stated that she had been working at her workplace for the past fifteen years and was the only Black social worker in her division, until a year ago. Also, she reported that she could not recall any instances of racism or discrimination at her workplace. Nevertheless, she did state that there was one occasion where there was an incident involving a secretary over the photocopy machine. According to her, she

was the next person in line to use the machine when a secretary went ahead of her and proceeded to use the machine. When I asked her what she did about it she responded by saying that she had reported the incident to her supervisor. Since the participant had refused to be tape-recorded, I decided to end the meeting at this point. I left the meeting feeling disappointed, though this experience confirmed my hunch that some workers might be apprehensive of participating in the study for fear of reprisal.

As a result of this experience, it took me a few days before I regained some confidence to make another contact, although I had realized that the longer I waited to make subsequent calls, the more difficult it would be for me. Immediately, I picked up the phone and proceeded to make the other calls, only to go through the same disappointed feeling once again. Three social workers whom I contacted refused to participate in the study or to be interviewed due to their busy work schedules. Also, one possible candidate did not show any interest during our telephone conversation but promised to call back and never did.

Prior to the interview, each participant was given a consent form (Appendix A). This form was to be signed before the start of the interview. Also, at the beginning of each interview, participants were reassured about confidentiality and they were informed that neither the agencies nor the individuals would be identified in the discussion in this study.

Four interviews were carried out outside of the participants workplace to ensure anonymity and to avoid any interruptions with phone calls or pagers. Due

to time constraints, one interview was carried out at the participant's office. The interviewee informed me that she had her own office and she had booked an appointment immediately following our interview. However, I gave the participant the option of deciding on the interview venue.

Each interview lasted about one hour and all of the interviewees gave permission to have the interview tape-recorded.

The interview began with an introduction of myself and an explanation of the purpose of the study. The first question asked of each participant was to tell me what a typical day is like at their workplace. The interview then followed with the remaining, pre-determined questions. At the end of the interview, there was a debriefing in which each respondent was asked how the interview had gone for them. Their responses were positive and they encouraged me to publish my work. However, after one of the interviews it was apparent that the interview had triggered some emotions and discomfort. Therefore I provided moral support, allowing the interviewee to share feelings and concerns before going back to her daily work routine.

A total of five Black social workers and one manager were interviewed for this study. Although all of the prospective participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, that their name and the agency's would not be identified in the research, gaining confidence and trust was very difficult.

The sample was diversified in terms of ancestral heritage. Three of the respondents were from Africa, another respondent was from the Caribbean, one



respondent was an Afro-Canadian, whereas the last respondent identified herself as Afro-Canadian with West Indian heritage.

### **Data collection & analysis**

Originally, I had chosen the informal conversational interview format. However, due to my experience with the first respondent (who could not recall any instances of racism or discrimination at her workplace) I subsequently reviewed the format to semi-structured, in-depth interview, which consisted of six questions (see Appendix B). My intention was to take each respondent through the same sequence and ask each respondent the same questions (Patton, 1990).

After the second interview was conducted, the research focus was refined and new questions were added to the list of questions. After completing the interviews, transcription was carried out and supplemented by field notes. The data was analyzed and coded according to categories developed in each section. Themes found by analyzing the data were selected to reflect the categories and themes formed for the discussion.

## **CHAPTER 5 - EXPERIENCES OF RACISM AND STRESS**

### **Findings**

This section summarizes the findings obtained from the interviews with participants who comprised the research sample.

#### **Demographic background data of participants**

The respondents' ages ranged from 25 to 65 years. There were two respondents in the range of 25 to 35 years, two respondents within the range of 35 to 45 years, one in the 45 to 55 years range and the final respondent was in the range of 55 to 65 years. Similarly, there was a good range with respect to length of service. Three of the respondents worked for six to ten years in their current positions. Another two worked for one to five years in their current positions. The last respondent did not wish to specify how long she had been working in her current position as a manager.

In addition, respondents possessed a variety of formal training. Two respondents possess Master's degrees in Social Work, three respondents have Bachelors in Social Work and the other respondent has a Diploma in Social Work. Furthermore, respondents differed in marital status. Four respondents were married and two were single.

#### **Reflection on the process of interviewing**

In order to better understand what the interviewing process was like for the participants and myself, I will first reflect on my extensive field notes, taken throughout the course of the research study. Although field notes are central to participant observation, nevertheless, it can be an important supplement to other

data collecting methods (Goldstein, 1994). For instance, during the interviews some of the participants communicated through non-verbal language, either blinking the eyes or shrugging their shoulders and making comments after interview. Since body language could not be captured during the interview, I chose to use the field notes to give the readers a sense of the development of the study.

During the process of some of the interviews, I got the impression that some of the participants were apprehensive and reluctant to give explicitly an account of their experiences, thoughts and feelings on racism. Others found it very painful to discuss their experiences of racism. At times some of them gave me cues implying that I have to “read between the lines”. For example, one of the participants expressed her opinion about other colleagues who integrated into the mainstream culture of the agency. She commented, *This is my opinion, some Black people help white people shit on other Black's head, I personally think that they are shitting in my head ... I don't want anyone shitting on my head. There is a lot you can get out of that. (A1).*

While the participant was sharing this piece of information with me she used the body language of gesture and blinking of the eyes to confirm her comments. I speculated that this was one of her ways of validating her statements indirectly by saying you can know what I mean or you understand what I am trying to say. Moreover, after the interview was over, I realized that some of the interviewees were more relaxed in discussing their experiences and feelings “off the record”.

In analyzing the above statements, it would imply that the Black people the participant was referring to would be considered as “good colonial subjects” within the agency. I may argue that they are the ones who are willing to sacrifice their own people for the sake of their own status and upward mobility in order to gain access into the mainstream culture of the agency and get validation from white colleagues.

Some of the participants were also concerned about the information they shared during the interview. I was asked to exclude certain parts of their comments in the research study or to disguise the situation. I reassured them that their wishes would be respected and that I would quote bits and pieces of the participants’ statements to enable the readers to get a sense of what the participants are trying to convey.

However, I understand the reasons why some of the participants would want to protect their anonymity. The fact that there has been severe cutbacks in the Health and Social Services sector would explain why some of the interviewees were guarded about their jobs. It is possible that this was one of the reasons why they were reluctant to speak publicly about their experiences of racism. As an example, one of my classmates spoke passionately about her personal experiences and how she wants to use her experiences to bring about change. However, when I asked her to participate in the interview she was skeptical on the phone and promised to call back but she never did.

Another participant, when asked if she ever experienced racism and/or discrimination at her workplace, responded in the following way: ..

*... I haven't experienced racism overtly. But I will explain a situation to you that just happened last week. This is kind of personal, so you will have to change it around because they will know it happened to me. My boss wasn't there at the time ... but I had already prepared a memo about the events that took place ... I'm just saying that was the only thing that happened in the last seven years that really affected me. It really, really affected me. I felt hurt, devalued, I felt that my feelings and emotions as a person were totally disregarded. When I talk about it I still get angry about it. I should go about the agency business as usual ... I raged and cried throughout the anger. That's how I handled the situation. Now what do you think that is? Racism? What is that?*

I tried to validate her feelings by saying it must be painful for you to recall what happened. She added:

*I am angry about the whole situation, it should have never come to this if we are dealing with human beings from a humanist perspective. This should not have happened. I discussed this with my minister and doctor. To quote my doctor, he said: "Anyone who objected to you when you explained to them, is not a sane person, therefore you can not deal with them" and my minister said, "you have to go to the ..... you have to take care of yourself." (A1)*

In essence, the participant had an emergency situation that had taken place and she wanted to attend to the situation, as opposed to keeping her scheduled appointment with one of her clients. The above quotations clearly depict the impact this experience had on the worker. I may suggest that her comments about the incident reflect the subtlety of everyday racism towards the worker. Her supervisor made the assumption that the worker could not arbitrarily make a decision to attend to the emergency situation, and disregarded the worker's feelings, showing no empathy towards her. Based on the interviewee's narrative, I was able to relate to her experiences since I am working in a mainstream social service agency as well.

It appeared that in many cases, white supervisors felt threatened when strong Black female workers were assertive and able to make decisions for themselves.

As the interviewee was describing the incident, on two occasions she wanted me to validate her experience of racism. She commented, ... *Now what do you think, is that racism, what was that?* (A1). I responded by saying that I could not confirm her comments. However, I suggested that we could talk about it at the end of the interview. She continued to describe the incident and asked for clarification around the issue of racism. She added, ..... *again, I don't know - that is the piece I'm really not sure about* (A1). I repeated my first response to her question, *I really cannot comment about your statements during the interview, maybe at the end.*

At the end of the interview, we spoke and I shared my views about the incident. We discussed the experience that sometimes when we (Blacks) are subjected to everyday racism, we tend to question our own contributions to the outcome of the situation. This is as a consequence of internalized racism which in turn affects our self-esteem and self-confidence. In summary, Frances et al. (1995) state: "although people of color are often sensitive to everyday racism, it may be so subtle that they are unaware of it." (p. 47)

At the end of another interview, it was apparent that the interview had triggered some emotional discomfort. Therefore, I provided moral support by allowing the interviewee to share her feelings and concerns before going back to

her daily work routine. I asked the interviewee how the interview had gone for her. Her response was,

*I thought the interview went well, but it is very difficult to talk about when somebody gets discriminated against. The feelings and what exactly people say to get you stirred up, to know whether you are being discriminated against or not. The questions are very good and I think it will create a lot of emotion (A1).*

Probing further for clarifications about her feelings, I asked her another question on racism based on one of her statements that racism is all about feelings. I asked her, "you said that racism is all about feelings, how do you feel right now?" She responded,

*Well, it stirred up a lot of anger in me. The fact that society discriminates because of the color of my skin. People will say things because of one's color. It is a curse because one is Black, what makes you so different that people will make jokes about you. It stirs up a lot of angry feelings (A2).*

From the data analysis, it is very clear that the interview had triggered some emotional discomfort for the participant. Obviously, experiences of racism are very painful. Sometimes, it is so painful that it penetrates to the core of your being. When the participant was sharing her experiences of racism, I identified with her pain and anger. I questioned the injustices that we (Blacks) have to endure living in a white people's world. When rage is acted out, society is quick to pathologize a Black person, but fails to accept any responsibility for the injustices imposed on Blacks. (bell hooks, 1995)

However, another interviewee became anxious at the end of the interview, after realizing that we were seen by some of the colleagues. Due to the fact that the interviewee had booked two appointments back to back, my interview had to

be conducted in a vacant office at the interviewee's workplace. There was a large glass window facing the corridor where passers-by could see through. On a few occasions, we became distracted by some of the passer-by who were either waving or curiously looking at us. Towards the end of the interview, the participant became restless and fearful of what some of the colleagues might have suspected to be happening. In concluding the interview, I asked the participant to describe the feelings at the time. The response was, *I am feeling very uncomfortable right now. I shouldn't have chosen this room, they are going to put two and two together.* (A4).

At this point, the interviewee was paged and left in a hurry for his next appointment. After the interview, it was apparent that the interviewee was overwhelmed by the fact that we had been seen by some of the colleagues. Therefore, I provided some moral support, allowing him to share his feelings before going back to his daily routine.

As stated in the methodology, data was analyzed by organizing the contents of interviews according to categories developed from each interview. Responses to each category were grouped together and sorted into general themes, from which these five themes have emerged:

1. Subtlety, uncertainty and the denial of racism,
2. Institutional racism: a form of exclusion,
3. Good colonial subjects and bad colonial subjects,
4. Discrepancies between policies and practices,
5. Daily stressors of the job and coping mechanisms.



## **Subtlety, uncertainty and the denial of racism**

The accounts of the participants are not only significant because of the similarities, but they also help to understand their experiences in mainstream social service agencies. Their experiences are insightful in explaining the subtlety of everyday racism which is embedded within the structure and functioning of the organization.

Everyday racism as defined by Frances et al. (1995). "Everyday racism involves the many and sometimes small ways in which racism is experienced by people of color in their interactions with the dominant white group. It expresses itself in glances, gestures, forms of speech, and physical movements. Sometimes it is not even consciously experienced by its perpetrators, but it is immediately and painfully felt by its' victims - the empty seat next to a person of color, which is the last to be occupied in a crowded bus; the slight movement away from a person of color in an elevator, the over-attention to the Black customer in the shop, the inability to make direct eye contact with a person of color; the racist jokes told at a meeting, and the ubiquitous question "where did you come from?" From a research perspective, these incidents are difficult to quantify because they are only revealed in the thoughts, feelings and articulations of victims." (p. 47)

After re-reading the interviews transcripts over and over again, one of my conclusions was that, initially each of the participants had pointed out, in their own way, that they had no personal experiences of racism in their workplace. Subsequently, making that statement, they went on to describe situations that

had taken place at work. I may speculate that in Canada we are taught to believe that racism does not exist, and to internalize racism as somehow being our own fault. As a result of this, we are unaware of the subtleties of everyday racism. When the manager was questioned regarding her experience of racism, she commented:

*Oh boy. I can't even think of one specific experience. I will tell you that my general perception is much more subtle .....long pause I was in a group interview. I was interviewing the worker and we asked her a couple of questions related to ethnicity in particular to Black cultures. It was a particular question we have on the interview list and she (interviewee) starts talking and she was focusing on me, talking only to me, maybe it's my guts! I was thinking in my head, I'm not the one who asked you the question, why are you staring at me. These five bodies in the room, why aren't you staring at the white people, like somehow your answer to me is going to make or break you. That irritated me. I don't think it was an issue of racism.... I was saying in my head, all these white people sitting around this table have responsibilities to know, what you are saying to me one way or another. It does mean because I have a Black face, I'm more interesting than any of them. What struck me, is when I was telling my colleagues in the room what I was thinking and feeling in relation to the way she focused on me, some of the managers did not have a sense of what the issue could be. It was like she was giving you all permission to get off the hook, because you did not need to know the issues related to Black people..... Then at one point, one of the managers said don't you think when she asked the question she asked you because you would have the answer. But, I said why should I have the answer .... you have the responsibility to be as sensitive, even more sensitive than I do. Why should I be more responsible or accountable for having the answer to that question than you do, so it's let you off the hook, so that was a kind of introduction to racism .... I think it is still alive and well. Even though you allowed yourself to believe that there are great strides made, I still think that there are ignorant people in the world. That kind of re-awakened me that these are good people and have good intentions, but they are still ignorant. They still have their ideas and thoughts. The fact that all these people carry power, you still have to be vigilant, even though you like these people, you have to stay wake. They kind of re-emphasized that to me - and that was a big eye-opener .... the message I wanted to send to them is that you have more*

*responsibility to be more aware than I do, because you are not from the same culture (A3).*

Probing further, I said, "I got the impression that they are making the assumption that you are the expert." She added:

*Yeah, because my skin is Black, I should know the answer to this question .... you are supposed to be teaching this white person the color of your skin doesn't matter. We all think that ethnicity and racism are important, and we are all part of this question. Not me, how did I become the token? I think that they were perfectly incensed and they all walked away. They got my message. (A3)*

I then asked her, "What was their response?" She said,

*It was kind of apologetic. If that was ten years ago, I had said that, everybody would have said, what is your problem, you are so angry. But now, that they were more aware or intelligent enough, that they were apologetic. I said it doesn't mean anything to me, but at least I know that they can't dismiss me. (A3)*

The above quotations clearly depict the subtlety of everyday racism. One can see that the Black manager was defined as the "expert" in the interview by the interviewee, while her white colleagues, in dealing with all the responses from the questions which specifically dealt with ethnicity and/or culture in the interview, were not expected to have any expertise. I suspect that in a way, the white manager did not feel obligated to respond to the interviewee's question, maybe because the Black manager might have the right answer.

Fleras (1996) brings an interesting perspective to the discussion on racism. He states that "Canadian racism is often depicted as polite and subdued. Racism in Canada is rarely perpetuated by raving lunatics who engage in beatings, lynchings, or graffiti. Rather, racism among Canadians is unobtrusive, often implicit and embedded in words or actions. Derogatory references about

minorities continue to be expressed, but they are usually restricted to remarks to friends in private locales. With higher education, individuals become more adept at compartmentalizing and concealing racist attitudes, lest they blurt out statements at odds with career plans or a sophisticated self-image." (Fleras 1996) "This subtlety makes it difficult to confront, let alone eradicate the expression of polite racism" (p. 75).

In essence, covert discrimination is hard to prove. It is hard to put your finger on, but sometimes victims can get a "sixth sense" when they are experiencing racism. (Essed, 1991)

Another participant was asked if she had any personal experience of racism at her workplace. She responded: long pause ... *I haven't experienced racism overtly* (A1). She went on to explain a situation that happened to her. This situation was reported on pages 39 and 40. In short, the participant had an emergency to attend to and she had made arrangements (such as rescheduling an appointment) in order to attend to the emergency. Moreover, she had left the memo for her supervisor since she was not at the office. However, when the participant was about to leave, her supervisor arrived and she informed her supervisor of her plans. However, her supervisor decided that she was going to take care of the emergency. At the request of the participant, certain details of the encounter have been omitted.

Another participant admits that she was never subjected to racism personally, but she was informed by a student social worker about a racist act directed towards Black clients in the agency. She describes this:

*To be honest with you, the times I have been really hurt is when it did not concern me..... I got hurt a lot when I heard afterwards how people who came for assistance had been discriminated against. Of course I do identify with these people. Discrimination is based either on color or culture. If I were in the same situation, I would have been discriminated against in the same way. That's when I really get hurt. I would say I cannot believe this took place and it's too late ..... Recently, what came to my attention, some social workers, I think they were students, were appalled by some racist approach. I was told two years later. I had the shock of my life (A6).*

Probing further, I asked her how she felt when she realized that a worker had discriminated against a client. She added:

*I felt overwhelmed. I felt sad. I said, my God, humanity hasn't learnt yet all these years ..... you have the feeling that we are back to square one. What does it take to make people understand, but I guess this is something we will be going on in the sense that it's an issue of power and control (A6).*

Sometimes, we would like to believe that Canada is a tolerant society, where people of color are accepted and treated fairly. The reality, however, is painful or shocking at times.

Also, a participant shared her views on racism. She explains:

*I think that I am racist. I like myself, I speak my language, and I like my customs. In the summer, I wear African clothes. One day, my boss's boss said that I am was being provocative because I dressed in African clothes. Then my boss said to her, if you are going to talk about the way she works, then it's ok. But, I'm her boss, that's the way she dresses. She is an African and she can dress the way she feels comfortable, it's her culture. IF there is a dress code for all of the employees, then she will dress in the same clothes. I don't think that the way she dresses should be discussed any further. (A5)*

Although this wasn't directed to the worker personally, it gives a sense of the supervisor's attitude towards the worker. This example illustrates how a white supervisor might be uncomfortable with a Black worker dressing in her

traditional clothes. Western society tends to react negatively when some immigrants choose to carry out many traditional habits and practices. Often, immigrants might be subjected to unpleasant comments or slurs. Some employers might discriminate covertly against immigrants who choose to wear their traditional clothes at work. (Jones, 1997)

Furthermore, a participant described her experience of racism with one of her clients and at her workplace. She commented:

*..... sometimes with white families they see the need to have a white social worker instead of a Black social worker, because they might think that you don't understand them. I felt discriminated against as it sometimes goes both ways. .... I worked with a very wealthy white family whose daughter was dating a Black youngster .... the parents made it very clear that they did not want to work with a Black social worker .... I felt that because I was Black they did not want to work with me .... sometimes racism is very subtle, like it is not overt, but you do feel that people discriminate against you. When my position was posted, they wanted a Black worker. There was also white workers who had a lot of experience, who felt that they worked with Black families over a long period of time. However, the position was opened only to a Black worker .... The white workers felt that they were discriminated against, to get me into this position, getting the position that was created for a Black social worker. I was isolated for a long time. I was just by myself. If I was a white social worker, I would have been part of the mainstream and fit in. (A2)*

When asked if she felt isolated by her colleagues, she added: *This was my feeling, they were resentful because I got the position. I felt that they resented me in some ways, because one of their colleagues was going to get the permanent position (A2).*

I then asked how she dealt with the resentment. She responded:

*I had to deal with it on my own. When you get discriminated against, when someone call you nigger, sometimes you have to sit back and say that people might be ignorant because those people*

*don't know what they are saying or doing. .... I just dealt with it in my own way. I don't think that my supervisor would have understood me at that point, or what I was feeling ..... I get a funny feeling when people are around, but I cannot pinpoint what's going on. I tend to remove myself from situations and do my job and hope that things will change (A2).*

Essed (1990) pointed out that "It is difficult to determine "objectively" the nature of everyday interactions between whites and Blacks ... A variety of studies have shown that those who are discriminated against appear to have more insight into discrimination mechanisms than those who discriminate .... Blacks have a certain amount of expertise about racism through extensive experience with whites. The latter, conversely, are often hardly aware of the racism in their own attitudes and behavior" (p. 34).

As illustrated in the above accounts of the worker experiences, this worker had to contend with more than just the daily stressors of her job as a social worker. She was also confronted with a variety of reactions from her client and her client's family which made it obvious that they did not want a Black social worker on the case. Furthermore, she had to endure an unpleasant experience at her workplace. There was also the fact that she felt isolated by her white colleagues because she got the position that was designed for a Black worker. I suspect that some of the white workers maintain this social distance from the Black worker out of resentment towards her.

Another participant tells a similar story about when one client refused to be seen by her.

*One day, I was working as an intake worker and a Caucasian client was awaiting to be attended to, so I called her name and she said I can't be seen by that? I just put her file aside and took the next*

*client and she said I can't take the next client because she is before the client. I said to her, you come with me or I will take the next client, then I call my boss and she said to her, today this is the worker who is doing the intake. If you don't want her to work with you, then you could come back another day or you can go to another community agency (A5).*

## **Institutional racism: a form of exclusion**

### **Introduction**

In this section, I will illustrate how the Black social workers I interviewed identified structural barriers which used to exclude them and other Black social workers from gaining access to managerial positions.

Frances et al. (1995) defined "Institutional racism is manifested in the policies, practices and procedures of various institutions, which may, directly or indirectly, consciously or unwittingly, promote, sustain or entrench differential advantage or privilege for people of certain races ..... it also includes organizational policies and practices that, regardless of intent, are directly or indirectly disadvantageous to racial minorities." (pp. 48 & 49)

Frances et al. (1995) acknowledge that whereas "systemic racism, although similar to institutional racism, refers more broadly to the laws, rules, norms woven into the social system that result in an unequal distribution of economic, political and social resources and rewards among various racial groups. It is the denial of access, participation, and equity to racial minorities for services such as education, employment and housing." (p. 48)

One participant expressed his dissatisfaction on the hiring practices and/or recruitment of white managers within the agency. He explains:



*I find that it is basically myself and many of my colleagues in the agency feel that we are not satisfied. When we brought it to their attention, basically they always found ways to justify their actions. (A4)*

Examples of these justifications would be that:

*..... the jobs were posted and it's up to any interested candidate to apply for the position. However, it is common knowledge that the agency went around scouting out the people that they wanted for these positions, like they already knew who they wanted. I would say that three, or possibly four of the five people who were chosen were singled out. They were approached to apply for these positions, whereas none of the Black workers were approached. (A4)*

Another participant described a similar story:

*There are not a lot of Black workers in management. Usually, they will say that not a lot of Black workers are applying for these positions. I don't think that they publicize the positions to the Black community, so that qualified candidates could apply. Normally, when you hear about a position, it's already gone. It is hand-picked, I am sure that some of the prominent Black people who are able to perform are always the last ones to hear when there is a position available. ... sometimes when there are one or two Black managers, they are removed after a while, because they don't have a permanent position. They are always shifted all over the agency. So, you really don't find the agency stabilizing a Black manager for a very long time. (A2)*

Black managers are under-represented within the agency's decision-making structures. The few black managers that exist are strategically put into these positions as "window dressing" so as not to give the public the impression that the agencies condone racist practices. Even though social service agencies project an image that they are equal opportunity employers, they nonetheless ignore disparities between the number of Black and white managers.

Dominelli (1997) acknowledged that "Black people's employment prospects in social work reflect institutionalized racism. They are generally employed in small numbers in the low status echelons of the labor hierarchy, particularly in residential work. Black people are largely absent from prestigious posts and the range of work. White people take this situation for granted, assuming that black people are suitable only for a limited number of jobs. (p. 89)

The above quotation is a clear illustration of institutional racism. In analyzing the statements, it is apparent that the dominant group, as usual, always have the advantage in attaining certain jobs. This contrary to the experience of Black employees who are at a disadvantage and who are excluded because of their racial group.

I might argue that it would be challenging to work in an oppressive environment, knowing that you are routinely excluded from participation in the recruitment process of hiring of managers.

The manager interviewed stated:

*I think it's going to get easier when there are more Black managers in place. ... in my particular department where I'm working, there are no other Black managers, but for me I have Black colleagues as managers but they are in other divisions, not in my particular division which is an undividing thing, but it's still doable for me. (A3)*

I maintain that the manager might be feeling alone and unsupported. Nevertheless, she might be relieved to know that there are other Black colleagues in other departments.

One of the participants expressed his opinion regarding the way in which the agency is rationalizing the representation of Black managers: He commented:

*... I don't like using this word but it is how I view it, they have the "token" Black in a high enough position and that should make the rest of us feel "you can't say that we discriminate or are racist because we have the odd Black manager, so there is your representation". What I am trying to say, I don't know how many managers there are in the whole organization, but I know that in my building, we have about 10 or 12 managers and 2 of them are Black. Prior to, let's go back three months ago, there was only one female manager ..... What I find they do, a way they use to cover their tracks ..... They would set their pre-requisites so high that the chances of a Black worker getting the position is very slim. However, the majority of the Black workers have Master's and Bachelor's degrees ... I believe that the agency is afraid, that if they let too many Blacks into the higher positions .. I think that we might be able to meet the needs of the Black clients and change the policies to meet the needs of the population we serve, more efficiently (A4).*

I might argue that the dominant group finds strategic ways to exclude Black employees from gaining access to higher positions, despite their credentials. I suspect that some of the Black employees might feel devalued when they compete with other white colleagues for management positions or even increased salaries.

In summary, it was confirmed that Black social workers are over-represented at the entry level positions, despite their qualifications and experience in various social service agencies. Henry et al. (1995) point out that "a recent study in Nova Scotia (Bambrough et al., 1992) revealed that black social work graduates from the Maritime School of Social Work found less desirable jobs than others, including limited or term positions and more part-time

jobs. Moreover, once they obtained work, they found that their opportunities for advancement were relatively limited and salary levels low.” (p. 156) Henry et al (1995) also note that “one of the most profound barriers to access and equity in human service agencies is the absence of people of color at every level, including boards of directors.” In a recent study (Murray et al, 1992), the boards of some 1200 non-profit organizations in Canada were surveyed. “It was found that these boards were predominantly composed of people with British origins (28%). The next most common group was those of ‘other Northern European origins’ (German, Dutch, Scandinavian), with 47 percent of boards having at least some representation from this group. French Canadians comprised 47 percent of the boards. People of color, however, were almost entirely absent.” (p. 156)

## Examples of “good colonial subjects” and “bad colonial subjects”

### Introduction

In this section I will explore, from the narratives of the social workers whom I interviewed, what are some of the circumstances which “push and pull” Black workers to become “good” and “bad colonial subjects”.

A participant expressed some of his colleagues’ frustration:

*.... we have Black workers who are experienced and educated, who put their blood, sweat and tears into the agency. In return, they are not getting any promotions .... It's very frustrating because you are not motivated to give your all..... then, if the Black workers voice their opinions, they are seen as being very aggressive, assertive and confrontational ..... But, yet, if a white worker, on the other hand, decides to say the exact same thing, then it is perceived totally different..... because, we are not getting the promotions which we feel we deserve, it creates added stress which turns into burnout (A4).*

In analyzing the above statements, I suggest that some of the Black workers are feeling oppressed in their current positions. Moreover, if they expressed their dissatisfaction, they are accused of being aggressive. The fact that a white worker could be perceived differently could be understood as based on the assumption that whites are superior, and more articulate than Blacks, who are seen as emotional, an assumption that could in turn result in various forms of subordinating treatment of Black workers. hooks (1995) points out that “White rage is acceptable, can be both expressed and condoned, but Black rage has no place and everyone knows it.” (p. 15)

In addition, their experiences of racism are intertwined with the manifestations of class oppression, such as lack of promotion, which could result in a lowering of morale amongst Black workers. Mack (1980), as cited by Myers

et al. (1989), writes "using the internal colonialism model to look at Black people in America speaks of the 'controlled oppressed environment' with the obvious biological base of Blackness as a stimulus towards which negative attitudes are directed, stress may be the programmed consequence." (p. 81)

Since Blacks are under-represented in managerial positions, I maintain that some workers might be pushed into the mainstream culture of the agencies, with good intentions to advocate for delivery of effective services for Black clients. However, once they gain access to those positions, they might lose sight of their objectives and become "good colonial subjects". A participant stated:

*..... they were bought through expertise. Just to give you an example. As an African, the institution can propose to me, by saying to me 'you are an African and you know Africans better, tell us whether they are lying or telling the truth'. If I believe in that expertise and if I buy into that idea that I'm valued because of this expertise, then of course I am going to go against these people and say this person is lying and this person is telling the truth. So people can be bought, really, by that kind of giving them value of expertise, and saying 'you are one of us' ..... It's really sad. It happens and you don't realize it; if you are someone of good faith and may not really realize it, and that's where racism comes into play .....*

*Well, I myself got a proposal four years ago. I was asked, 'Can you tell me whether this person is lying or telling the truth?' I said, 'wait a minute. Why are you asking me that?' They responded, 'because you come from the same place.' I asked if I was recruited because I came from that place. 'Was I recruited for I'm looking at who is telling the truth or not from that region. If I've been recruited for doing so, where are the other counterparts? .....* They are always trying to recruit people. It depends if the person is power hungry. If you are power hungry, you would buy into that because it alleviates you. If you are aware of the traps, then you can avoid them. But, I have the feeling that this dangerous, all this cultural approach. I have the feeling that sometimes the cultural approach can harm instead of helping can harm when it's used in the reverse (A6).

In analyzing the above statements, I suggest that some of the workers might assimilate into the mainstream social service agencies, if they felt validated by whites. Also, if they are promoted to do a specific job function. However, this might be out of good intentions, but the underlying message is that they could be easily bought off as “an expert” by giving them a fancy job title and status at their workplace.

Another participant added: *..... I heard people say that some Black social workers have no values and they are more white than Black. It's amazing that people will say thing's like that (A2).*

Probing further, I asked for clarification. “What do you think they mean by that statement?”

She explained:

*They think more like their white colleagues. They think that they are white. Even white workers would say to me, 'oh, that Black worker is not even Black. She just thinks that she is Black, everything she does is Canadian white related' ..... (A2)*

I then asked: “If these Black workers who act like their white colleagues, what kind of positions do they have?”

She responded: *Interestingly enough, they are the ones who tend to get the management positions. They are the ones who have assimilated into the culture of the agency (A2).*

Another participant described a profile of a “good colonial subject”:

*There was one particular worker who thought she would carry news to her white colleagues because if she was doing that, she was one of the inner circle. When promotions came around and they were handing them out, that lovely miss ..... got nothing to the point where miss ..... had ..... they are always saying poor little*

*miss so and so, we will help her. Then when we try to assimilate, maybe they will go home and talk with their mate about us. Again, we are so busy trying to be one of them because we don't feel good about ourselves ..... some of the white ones might be the most helpful, but somewhere along the line they want a price for their help, and sometimes that price would be a little piece of your soul .....(A1).*

I then asked for clarification: "When you said 'a little piece of your soul', what did you mean by that?"

She commented:

*Your dignity - they think that they have some God-given right. They will say it was nice to meet you, I opened this door for you, so I have the right to tell you don't wear your hair like that or maybe you should wear blue. Simple things like that - read between the lines ..... that's happened ..... they don't see you as an equal like them. As a Black social worker, you have to think you are just as good or better than them. Then again, it depends on what your investment is or where you are in the agency (A1).*

Probing further about under-representation of Black managers, I asked: "Do you think that there are few Black managers because of their perception of Blacks?"

She responded: *Yeah, also while there are few Black managers, they are going to chose the few Black managers to oppress other Blacks, they have to look for that profile (A1).*

The participant continued by making a comparison to a "bad colonial subject": *..... if you are a Black woman who is outspoken, do you think, in all honesty, that they are going to make you a manager? (A1)*

I tried to get a sense on how the participant feels about under-representation of Black managers. I asked: "How do you feel about the few Black managers?"



The participant commented:

*..... because Black people get so few opportunities in this quote unquote "white world", sometimes when they finally get it and invest so much in it, they have no choice but to sell their souls. I think if they realize it, maybe we could still get the position if our standards might be a little lower, but we will be more forceful and can affect more change if we do it that way, than going about in their way. Again, they will do what's necessary to guard their positions. That's my opinion. They are afraid, so they guard it, 'this is mine, I don't want anything to happen to this'. But, at what price? At what price? Sometimes you can't blame them. They might have children in private schools, BMWs to maintain, etc. It's the choice they make. We all make choices. (A1)*

The above statements depict some of the circumstances which "push and pull" some of the Black workers to become "good or bad colonial subjects". Perhaps some of the Black workers might have the strong inclination to move up the career ladder since they have the experience and credentials to attain managerial positions. However, it is general knowledge that Blacks are excluded from high status positions. Also, the few Blacks who have succeeded in gaining entry into higher positions have to work twice as hard to maintain these positions. Furthermore, Blacks are the last to be hired and the first to be fired. In the spirit of cultural diversity, the dominant group is forced to include a few Blacks managers because it is the politically correct thing to do. Despite this, it does not make life any easier for the Black managers. They might be put under pressure to assimilate into the mainstream culture, in the process sacrificing their own dignity and sometimes their cultural identity.

## Discrepancies between policies and practices

### Introduction

In this category, the participants expressed the view that there are discrepancies between policies and practices. One participant stated that:

*The agency would like you to believe that the policies are geared towards providing adequate services to the clients. The majority of the population the agency serves is from the Black community. However, the agency does not represent the population it serves.... although the agency feels that they are very culturally sensitive, it does not reflect within the work that some of the workers are doing and to me that is a big concern (A4).*

Another participant commented: *we have some policies and we need them, but applying those policies in written words to the practical things, sometimes falls short and that's frustrating to me a lot. Really, really frustrates me (A1).*

Probing further about discrepancies between policies and practices, a manager spoke about how the policies are reflected in everyday practices in the agency:

*There are policies which exist; could they be implemented and promoted better - absolutely yes. I think what happens, as part of any kind of agency process, they get on this bandwagon and they get all excited with any new project and when all the politics around that project die down, they then pick up another project and run with it. Two years ago, it was ethnic sensitivity training. You have to shake people and say this one on the back burner is still there. I have to hold you to your commitment. Could there be more commitments, making sure that all of the policies are respected and followed through on. Yeah, I think it's going to get easier when there are more Black managers in place (A3).*

Although the human service sector projects a positive outlook because some of the workers have acquired cultural competence training, the agencies

assume that it would be sufficient to sensitize the workers. However, social service agencies fall short of providing culturally sensitive practice models to people of color.

One participant pointed out:

*From what I'm hearing, we have more Black clients in the system. I was hoping that we would have at least three or four Black social workers in my division to represent the clients. Even though the Black workers might not work directly with the Black clients, but at least to know there are Black workers available (A2).*

Another participant added: *... the majority of the population they serve is from the Black community. However, I don't find that there is enough representation of Black social workers (A4).*

The manager shared some of the challenges she encountered at work to get the agency to send workers to ethnic diversity training workshops. She commented: *.... if I wasn't there, maybe they would wait until next spring or next year or not at all. That's how I look at it. I can't do all, but I can chip away at my little piece, or remind people that we have no male Black staff in here (A3).*

In summary, based on the responses, most of the social workers indicated a need for delivery of effective services to Black clients and their families. In addition, they pointed out a need for more Black social workers. Yet, social service agencies are seen by my research subjects as not too concerned about appropriate implementation of policies nor are they interested in evaluating the effectiveness of culturally sensitive practices. As a result, the traditional Eurocentric framework often results in biased or negative evaluation of Black

clients. Perhaps as long as the agencies have the policies as part of their mandate, that's all that matters to them. Enforcing the policies is secondary.

Yee (1995) points out that "As with any organizational structure, it is in the policies and programs that determine service delivery, and is where the locus of power is to be found. The decisions made in policy by management affect, determine and decide the inclusion/exclusion of equitable service delivery. In many social service agencies, the ethnic composition of those in positions of power reveal that it is exclusively the preserve of white, middle-class people." (pp. 55 & 56)

## **Daily stressors and coping mechanisms**

### **Introduction**

A closer examination of the participants' narratives about their daily stressors reveals that occupational stress comes with the nature of the job. Nevertheless, they seem to have a different perspective on what the mainstream workers get 'stressed out' about. In addition, they have relied on Black colleagues for social support to alleviate some of the pressures of the job. But, if there are no Black colleagues, they have sought out support from white colleagues. One of the participants described how her secretary has problems with her flexible working schedule and how she manages on a daily basis.

She explains:

*First, I must say I am sorry about my English.*

*My days might consist of my appointments with my clients, sometimes clients show up at the office without an appointment. In that case, they will wait until I am free. If it's an emergency, I will see them, but if it's not I will make an appointment to see them the*

*following day. I am very flexible, the African way. My secretary is having a very difficult time with my flexibility .... If I have a crisis, it's a lot of work. When I'm confronted with a problem, I don't rush to solve it. I will try to work on it. I see some of my colleagues are stressed out, running around - whereas, me I'm very cool and approach the problems one by one. I am very religious. I will work on the case and tell myself that God will help me to resolve the case. This is one reason why I am less stressed than some of my colleagues .... when I finished with one client, I move on to the next client. That's my style of working with my clients. I don't necessarily work with the administrative aspects of the agency. I have a caseload but they know how I work. If my client needs me after working hours, I will be there for my client (A5).*

Another participant explains how she manages on a day-to-day basis:

*It really depends on how you look at social work. I think the fact that I came from a different cultural context from mainstream social workers helps me to deal with the stressors of social work. We give humanitarian assistance from many traditional cultures, it's not a job you do 9 to 5. You are always working to help and this communal help is always available and people can call you at midnight at your home. I have the feeling, personally, what has helped me a lot to deal with this stress related to social work is my cultural training of how to assist people, anyone who is in need of help ..... If someone needs help or calls me or stops me in the street, outside of my workplace, I don't find that's infringing. I don't believe in all these theories of taking distance, limiting and all that is the source of most of the stress... Since, I do not abide to that rule, I have less stress in that area. (A6)*

Probing further about how her colleagues manage stress on a day-to-day basis, as compared to herself, the participant responded:

*I have the feeling, when I look at other colleagues, especially colleagues from a different cultural background ..... what I see is what annoys them most is that they have the fear of being overtaken by the needs of the people they are dealing with .... There is a lack of flexibility in the system and everybody has brought into the lack of flexibility and off course, it becomes very stressful when you have a rigid system. Fortunately, I think that one of the things that gives me less stress is, like I said before, I don't get annoyed if someone stops me in the middle of the street.*

*I don't find it's a breach of ethics or if I accompany that person, even in the evening to do any errands, because I saw that person in the street, and they need help now and there ..... I think by being already flexible, it has helped me not to be stressed on the issues of time of giving services. What kinds of service I can give? I don't ask myself all these questions. I think that has helped me too. (A6)*

In analyzing the above statements, it is apparent that the workers do not subscribe to the traditional Eurocentric model of practice. Instead, they use an African-centered perspective to work with their clients. As a result of this, they perceived stress differently as compared to mainstream workers who use a practice model which imposes limits on the kinds of services which could be provided for Black clients, thus creating more stress for the clients and themselves.

It is important to note that the narratives of the Black social workers do not always fit into the Eurocentric framework of burnout as a reaction to job stress. Maslach (1976, 1978), as cited by Daley (1979), "Maslach views burnout as a reaction to job stress that results in a detachment in the worker-client relationship that dehumanizes the client and decreases worker effectiveness. The source of this stress is the interpersonal contact between worker and client. Behaviors that characterize burnout are: 1- minimizing involvement with the client through physical distancing; 2 - making a sharp distinction between personal and professional life; 3 - going by the book and treating clients as case, not persons." (p. 444)

The manager expressed the stressful nature of the job, knowing her limits. As she explained:

*I think that working in Youth Protection is stressful because it's kind of an instructive law. I think it is supposed to be there to help clients on an ongoing basis, sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't ..... The fact that I've been able to be very definitive about separating myself when I leave work, I don't bring my work home with me or I try very hard not to. For example, I won't talk about my work with my husband at home ..... It's an overwhelming job and the stress does get to you on a day-to-day basis. It impacts on your sleep ..... I give 110% to everything I do. It does impact on everything. If I'm going home and I'm worried about something, but I won't talk about it with my husband, I will be worrying about it and it will impact, to some degree, my ability to take care of my children. (A3)*

From the data analysis it became apparent that the participants seek out support from their Black colleagues when they feel overwhelmed. However, they would seek out support from their white colleagues if they were the only Black worker at their workplace, since there is no social support system in place to help manage stress, except peer support.

Despite the fact that child protective work is very stressful, the manager tries to separate work from her personal life. She added: *I won't talk about my work with my husband at home. (A3).*

Jayaratne et al. (1986) bring an interesting perspective to the discussion on "burnout, its impact on child welfare workers and their spouses." They pointed out that "obviously, burned-out workers are very much aware of their psychological and physical strains, but they do not seem to be talking about them in depth, at least with their spouses. Whether this 'need' is taken care of at work, we do not know, but that option appears to be healthy and desirable. However, what the lack of communication may be doing to the family may become a significant problem in the long run." (p. 58)

One participant explains: *My supervisor is always supportive and my co-workers as well. Very often, if a case is very stressful, we pair with another worker to deal with the situation, so it becomes less stressful for the individual worker ..... (A2).*

Another participant has a similar view on sharing cases with other colleagues.

*I have my limits. I will call my colleagues for support. It's the same thing we share. If they have a cultural problem, they will call me ..... we share the job, we may not do it the same way, but everybody believes in their own point of reference in the world. I think we complement each other (A5).*

Daley (1979) acknowledged that work relationships are another important factor. "Availability of time-outs, peer and supervisory support, and sharing of cases all reduce the likelihood of burnout" (p. 448).

The participant continues:

*..... I will get support from other colleagues. The ratio is very low. For example, where I work within the residential services, they don't have a lot of Black social workers. My supports within this aspect will be other colleagues from other departments. I will not go to a residential social worker, who is not Black, for any support (A2).*

Another participant share a similar sentiment: *Basically we turn to each other for support. I guess it makes the Black workers more united and a stronger force ..... we have each other for support and that is the biggest thing we have (A4).*

The manager shares how she copes:

*There are good people working at the agency. I am aware of what I can or cannot do, what I can or cannot change ..... I think having good friends and family helps. That's how I've been able to deal with the stress, knowing that just because today did not turn out the*



*way I would like it to be, does not mean that tomorrow is not going to be a better day (A3).*

It is obvious that workers seek out moral and social support from each other, which might help to buffer some of the stress and strain of the job.

Another participant commented on how she copes with the stress working with refugee claimants:

*It's a job that is extremely difficult to do alone. We need to create a support network, either with colleagues, friends, other organizations that are doing the same kind of work. So far, I have been able to establish that kind of support network. Even when you can't do anything more, and the person has to be deported, when the judgments have already been made - those are usually the most difficult case, whereby there is nothing anyone could do (A6).*

Mechanic (1974), acknowledged that job stressors "are not amenable to individual solutions, but depend on highly organized co-operative efforts that transcend those of any individual ..... no matter how well developed his personal resources" (p. 34).

Two other participants described the daily stressors on the job and the difficulty they encountered when dealing with their clients, due to lack of resources. One participant explains:

*Everyday we are hearing other peoples' problems. There are some situations we know it's a losing cause. When you look at a chronic situation, knowing that previous workers tried and it did not change, then you are a superwoman or superman to think that it could change. So it's very stressful, sometimes the situations you find yourself in are so damn stressful, you want to pull your hair out (A1).*

Another participant describes a similar predicament:

*Working in a social service agency is very stressful, especially now. There are a lot of people who are living in poverty, most of the immigrant families I work with are very poor, sometimes they*

*graduated from school and they can't find jobs. Most of the youths can't find jobs ... I'm limited in finding alternative services for them. There is a high rate of unemployment and I can't resolve the economical problem and it creates a lot of stress for me. They did what they should to find a job. They went to school and they can't find a job. I tried to help them to find a job, but it is not easy ..... I don't see the end of this vicious cycle. This makes me stressed. I feel like I'm outing bush fires. It makes me feel like I have no power over the situation ... I can't do nothing. This gives me headaches (A5).*

In analyzing the above statements, I will agree that it would be difficult to listen to other peoples' problems on a daily basis. I maintain that although the workers might be empathetic about their clients' predicaments, they may also feel helpless, knowing that they can only give moral support, due to their own limitations on what they can offer their clients.

LeCroy and Rank (1987) point out that "Social worker's environment can be quite demanding. Larson, Gilbertson and Powell (1978) call attention to the continual responsibility of meeting the emotional needs and desires of clients that social workers must face. They point out that social workers must be ready to clarify, confront, encourage, suggest, entice, frustrate and feel for clients as the occasion demands" (p. 24).

Although the workers might have access to Employee Assistance Programs at the agency, as a form of social support, Black workers who may not subscribe to the traditional Eurocentric treatment model, might fear inappropriate or negative evaluation, stigmatization and mistrust that what they disclose in confidence might get back to the agency. For this reason, I suggest that Black workers might use other alternative approaches to help themselves cope with the stressors of the job. For instance, they might talk to friends, family members,

clergy or an elder in the community. Also, spirituality might play a pivotal role in helping Black workers cope. In short, from the narratives, it became apparent that workers relied on each other for support to help them cope with the stress and strain of the job.

## **CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSIONS**

### **Implications for social work practice**

Although Blacks have made some progress in terms of employment and education, equality has not been realized. They have also been subjected to extreme stresses of mobility and marginality. Most social institutions do not reflect adequate representation of Blacks in high status positions. Many questions remain. How effective is the Employment Equity Act? Is this a reflection of oppression from the dominant group? If there are policies in place, is it a lack of sensitivity or racist practices that there are few Black employees in management positions? Despite the fact that all government agencies purport to be equal opportunity employers, this policy still affects Blacks through structures and practices which limit their opportunities. As Blacks, we are also limited by racist practices which have resulted in over-representation in the entry level positions.

Policy-makers need to address the issue of inequality between Black and white workers. There is a need for hiring more Black front-line workers as well as Black managers so that they can speak out for other Black workers in the agencies. It would be erroneous for a white manager to speak on behalf of Black workers. On the one hand, we want allies from the dominant group to help us in the struggle against racist policies. However, on the other hand, we want representation of Black managers in upper level positions. Moreover, instead of promoting ethnic sensitive workshops which are geared for minority workers.

Policy-makers should implement anti-racist social work practice which should be inclusive.

Dominelli (1988) sums it up by saying that “anti-racist social work is not a case of simply adding ‘race’ to our considerations of a basically benign social work. What is required is the transformation of social work practice through the creation of social relations fostering racial equality and justice. To move in this direction, social work has to adopt a political stance against racism on cultural, institutional and personal levels within practice, social work education, and the state apparatus more generally. This begins the process of ending racism perpetrated and legitimated by the state itself, and challenging a professionalism whose neutrality disguises support for the status quo. Professionalism would have to be redefined to enable white practitioners to transform their work by refusing to perpetuate practices which enclosed racial oppression.” (p. 37)

### **Implications for future research**

Almost all of the burnout literature on social work in the human service sector have a Eurocentric analysis of the problem of burnout, including the lack of empirical research on stress and/or burnout among Black social workers. Therefore, most of these studies on burnout have methodological limitations, and the tendency to generalize findings from the mainstream samples to the entire social work profession.

In addition, there is no evidence of racism, sexism or classism mentioned in any study on burnout. For this reason, there is an obvious need for more research on stress and burnout on Black social workers. More attention should

be paid to improving research designs and methods to be more culturally inclusive in order to prevent the biases which occur within the traditional Eurocentric framework.

### **Recommendations**

Since the agencies are not ready to bring about structural changes, it is the responsibility of the Black workers to organize themselves by forming an association to address their issues, so that they could hold the agencies accountable for their role in perpetuating systematic racism in their policies and practices.

Moreover, the association and the Black community should take a political stance and challenge social institutions so that they could start addressing the movement towards equality.

However, if an association is in existence, it should promote awareness by disseminating information either through newsletters and workshops, where they could sensitize and inform other colleagues. In addition, they could also network with other Black organizations in Canada and in the United States to develop strategies for advancement through self-help and unity. Furthermore, there is clear evidence of non-support for Equal Opportunity Employment policies, on the part of the agencies and of the government, to ensure proper implementation of such policy. Therefore, the responsibility in gaining access to management positions and the improvement of other work opportunities lies on the Black workers.

## Conclusion

Adrienne Shadd writes: "It always amazes me when people express surprise that there might be a 'race problem' in Canada, or when they attribute the 'problem' to a minority of prejudiced individuals. Racism is, and always has been, one of the bedrock institutions of Canadian society, embedded in the very fabric of our thinking, our personality." (1989)

Although Canadians would like to believe that racism does not exist in Canada, it is alive and well, with its subtleties playing out of relations of subordination and domination in respect to race in our everyday interaction in today's society. All this exists despite the fact that we have laws, such as employment equity legislation, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and so-called anti-racism policies. As a safeguard to shelter us from discriminating practices, there is still no guarantee that these laws are in place to protect people of color in Canada.

Although Canada is a multi-cultural society promoting diversity, tolerance and respect for individual differences, people of color are still confronted with different experiences of racism, whether it be impersonal and systematic or individual and everyday racism.

The object of this thesis was to investigate whether, and how, Black social workers experience racism in various social service agencies. The study was also aimed at assessing the validity of the structural perspective on racism through an examination of the policies and practices within the agencies.

What I have tried to do is to explore how Black social workers cope with their daily stressors on the job and to understand their own interpretations of their experiences at their workplace. The most important conclusion from conducting this research is that most of the participants reported that they experience little or no discrimination. However, after further probing a few participants disclosed that they have experienced unfair treatment, but also stated that racism is more subtle and more difficult to pinpoint than overt and conscientious racist practices. The findings reveal that many participants were reluctant to divulge if they were subjected to racism for a number of reasons. First, they might be afraid of reprisal; second, they might be in denial and believe that racism does not exist at their workplace. In addition, some workers chose to survive by being invisible, especially if they were the token Black worker and/or they assimilate into the mainstream culture. Other workers chose to challenge racist practices and policies.

From the analysis of the narratives, five themes emerged. Subtlety, uncertainty and denial of racism, institutional racism: forms of exclusion, examples of "good colonial subjects" and "bad colonial subjects", discrepancies between policies and practices, and finally the daily stressors of the job and coping mechanisms.

In spite of the fact that some of the participants denied any personal experiences of racism at their workplace, they were cognizant that covert racism does exist. Some participants spoke candidly about institutional racism. They recognized that there is under-representation of Black personnel in management



positions. But they also acknowledged that the dominant group is only interested in maintaining their positions, by curtailing any opportunities for Blacks to gain access to management positions, in order to maintain their *status quo*. As a result of this, some workers choose to assimilate into the mainstream culture and become “good colonial subjects” or “bad colonial subjects”. The workers, who choose to subscribe to the white middle class norms and values, they are the ones who are frequently chosen to fill quotas. Notwithstanding this, the few managers are in middle management and their jobs are generally insecure ones, because they were often the “last to be hired and the first to be fired”.

Furthermore, “bad colonial subjects” are the workers who choose to challenge the *status quo* and they are sometimes labeled as “trouble makers”. As one participant explains, she used her voice to speak out for colleagues because they might be afraid. She commented:

*..... I don't need to work to survive and that's why I have the freedom to say what I want. I just take my job for a challenge and to fight for my community. I can't do nothing from the outside. I have to be on the inside to fight my rights, those of the community and the family. It's true some of my colleagues (nurses or homemakers) need their jobs to survive and I understand that, but sometimes when I see other white colleagues setting up Black colleagues, I answered for them and fight for them ..... I know they need their jobs, and I know that sometimes they have to play soft..... I am sure now, if my agency has to choose a social worker for a promotion, they will not choose me because I give them a lot of problems (A5).*

Although the agencies initiated ethnically competent practices in order to project an image that the agencies are providing culturally sensitive treatment to culturally diverse populations, some participants discussed discrepancies between policies and actual practices. Some workers are not convinced that the

agencies are committed to ensuring the proper implementation of these services. Yet the leaders of these agencies try to present a culturally sensitive and non-racist face to the public. Sometimes, they strategically appoint a Black manager to a visible position in order to demonstrate that the agency is not racist.

Finally, with regards to coping mechanisms, evidence presented in the findings shows that some of the participants did not rely on the same coping mechanisms as the dominant group, since most of the participants perceived stress and/or burnout differently. Although the participants did not form a homogenous group, they had mutual aid as a common and communal part of their jobs. Some of the participants went beyond their responsibilities and were committed to all who had a need. They shared the communal Africentric feeling of the community. Therefore, I suspect that they have developed a set of cultural attitudes, a pattern of coping strategies, which has enabled them to survive in a sometimes cold and unsupportive environment (Gibbs and Fuery, 1994).

### **Summary**

In summary, racism was imposed on Blacks from the time of slavery and is still alive and well to this day. I will argue that it is the responsibility of the white people to eradicate this problem of inequalities between Blacks and whites. Most people from the dominant group take a passive attitude towards the injustices in society. As a consequence, combating racism remains the responsibility of Blacks. (Essed, 1990)

I will suggest that all social institutions should take on the responsibility of coming together and reflecting on their role in perpetuating racism. They have

been “talking the talk” for many years now by promoting culturally sensitive workshops. However, I am challenging all social institutions to “walk the walk” towards equality.

Dominelli (1997) also argued that: “I am saying that the responsibility for dismantling society's racist edifice belongs to white people who enjoy the privileges emanating from it. The primary task of white social workers wishing to implement anti-racist practice is to change their own racist attitudes and practices and those of the organizations within which they work. If they were to do this, Black social workers could concentrate on getting resources to Black communities instead of exhausting their energies helping white social workers to overcome their racism.” (p. 41)

**APPENDIX A - (copy remitted to participants prior to beginning of interviews)**

Consent form to participate in research

This is to state that I agree to participate in an interview being conducted by Bertlyn Joseph as a partial fulfillment of the requirement for her Master's degree in Social Work at McGill University.

A. Purpose:

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to explore the narratives of Black social workers who are working in predominantly white social service agencies. I will explore whether, and how, they experience racism and how their experiences might result in a range of stressors in the work place.

B. Procedures

The interview will take approximately one hour and will be carried out in a location convenient for the participants. Confidentiality is assured and it has been emphasized that no individual or agency will be identified in any way in the publication of results. Also, I have been informed that the results may be published as an article in a journal. I will be asked to provide the researcher with some personal insights regarding racism and stress. I will also be asked to provide basic information on: my age, gender, marital status, level of education, ethnicity, length of service and work type.

C. Conditions of participation

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without notice if I feel uncomfortable. I understand that the interview might trigger some emotional discomfort. However, I am also cognizant that the researcher will be able to provide moral and emotional support at the end of the interview, if needed.

I have carefully read the above and understand this agreement. I freely consent and agree to participate in this study. I understand that these interviews will be recorded on tape for use as referral for the researcher only.

Participant's name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Background characteristics of the sample

Please check the appropriate box (3)

Age                      25 - 35 years  
                                  35 - 45 years  
                                  45 - 55 years  
                                  55 - 65 years

Gender                    male  
                                  female

Marital status            married with partner  
(optional)                  divorced/separated  
                                  widowed  
                                  single  
                                  other

Ethnicity                   Afro-Caribbean  
                                  Afro-Canadian with West Indian  
                                  heritage  
                                  African  
                                  Other

Length of service        0 - 5 years  
                                  6 - 10 years  
                                  11 - 15 years  
                                  16 - 20 years  
                                  21 years +

Level of education      College (Social Counselor)  
                                  Bachelor in Social Work  
                                  Master's Degree in Social Work  
                                  Other (\_\_\_\_\_)

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following questions serve as a guide in exploring the research goal:

1. What it is like for Black social workers to work in a mainstream social service agency.
2. How Black social workers manage the daily stressors of their jobs.
3. How do Black social workers deal with an institution or organization which maintains systemic and institutional racism.
4. Whether, and how, Black social workers experience racism at their workplace.
5. The ways in which Black social workers deal with racism and discrimination at work: assimilation or resistance?

\*\*In addition, the manager was asked two other questions.

6. Based on some of the interviews I have already conducted, the implication is that it is very difficult for the Black workers to climb the managerial ladder. How has it been for you?
7. Have you had occasions or incidents when you have to deal with a Black worker complaining about racism? If so, how did you deal with it?

## APPENDIX C

### “STILL I RISE”

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries.


Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a Black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,



I am the dream and hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.



## References

1. Angelou, M. Phenomenal Woman - Four Poems Celebrating Women. Random House, New York. pp. 7-9.
2. Amundson, J. et al. (1993). Temptations of Power and Certainty. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy. Vol. 19, no. 2, 111-123.
3. Brabson, Jones and Jayaratne (1991). Perceptions of Emotional Support, Stress and Strain among African-American Human Service Workers. Journal of Multi-cultural Social Work, Vol. 1 (3).
4. Bradley, J. and Sutherland, V. (1995). "Occupational stress in social services: a comparison of social workers and home help staff". British Journal of Social Work, 25. pp. 313-331.
5. Brown, C. and O'Brien, K. (1988) Understanding Stress and Burnout in Shelter Workers. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, vol. 29, no. 4, 383-385.
6. Cherniss, C. (1980). Staff Burnout: Job Stress in the Human Services. London, Sage.
7. Collings, J. and Murray, P. (1996). *Predictors of stress amongst social workers: An empirical study*. British Journal of Social Work, 26, pp. 375-387.
8. Daley, M. (1979). Preventing worker burnout in child welfare. Child Welfare, 58, 443-450.
9. David, Samantha (1996). Occupational Stress and Burnout Amongst Social Workers: A Review of the Literature. Unpublished Master's thesis, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec.
10. DeFrank, R.S. and Cooper, C.L. (1987). "Worksite stress management interventions: their effectiveness and conceptualization. Journal of Managerial Psychology, 2, 1, pp. 4-10.
11. Dominelli, Lena (1997). Anti-racist Social Work. MacMillan Press Ltd.
12. Edelwich, J. and Brodsky, A. Burnout: stages of disillusionment in the helping professions. New York: Human Sciences Press, 1980.
13. Essed, P. (1990). Everyday Racism: Reports from Women of Two Cultures. Hunter House Inc., publishers.

14. Essed, P. (1991). Understanding Everyday Racism: An interdisciplinary theory. Sage Publications. The International Professional Publishers. Newburg Park. London New Delhi.
15. Farber, B. (1983). Stress and Burnout in the Human Service Professions. Pergamon Press, New York, Toronto, Paris.
16. Fleras, A. and Elliott, J.L. (1992). Unequal relations: An introduction to race, ethnic and aboriginal dynamics in Canada. Second edition. Prentice Hall Canada Inc. Scarborough, Ontario.
17. Frances et al. (1995). The color of democracy - Racism in Canadian Society. Harcourt, Brace & Company, Canada. Toronto Montreal New York London Sydney Tokyo. Ibid 156
18. Freudenberger, H. (1974). Staff burnout. Journal of Social Issues, 30 (1), 159-65.
19. Freudenberger, H.J. with Richelson, B. Burnout: The high cost of high achievement. Garden City, N.Y. Anchor Press, 1980.
20. Gibbs, J.T. and Fuery, D. (1994) Mental Health and Well-Being of Black Women: Towards Strategies of Empowerment. American Journal of Community Psychology, vol. 22, no. 4.
21. Goldstein, H. (1994). "Ethnography, critical inquiry and social work practice." Chapter 4 in Qualitative Research in Social Work. E. Sherman & W.J. Reid (Eds). New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 42-51.
22. Harrison, W.D. (1980). Role strain and burnout in child protective service workers. Social Service Review, 54, 31-44.
23. hooks, bell (1995). Killing Rage. Henry Holt and Company, Inc. New York.
24. James, E. (1996). Perspectives on Racism and the Human Service Sector: A Case for Change. University of Toronto Press. Toronto, Buffalo, London.
25. Jayaratne, S. and Chess, W. (1984). *Job Satisfaction, Burnout and Turnover: A national study*. Social Work, 29 (5), pp. 448-453.
26. Jayaratne et al. (1986). Burnout: It's Impact on Child Welfare Workers and Their Spouses. National Association of Social Workers, Inc.
27. Jayaratne, S., et al. (1991). Job Satisfaction and Burnout: Is There a Difference? Journal of Applied Social Sciences, 15 (2), 245-262.

28. Joint Research Committee. Profile of clients in the Anglophone Montreal Network: Examining the Situation of the Black child. 1992.
29. Jones, J.M. (1997). Prejudice and racism. Second edition. The McGraw-Hill Companies Inc. New York London Montreal Tokyo. Ibid p. 417 Ibid p. 438 Ibid p. 472
30. Kahill, S. (1988). Symptoms of Professional Burnout: A review of the empirical evidence. Canadian Psychology, 29 (3), pp. 284-297.
31. Karger, H. (1981). Burnout as alienation. Social Service Review, 55, 268-283.
32. Koeske, G, Koeske, R. (1989). Workload and Burnout: can social support and perceived accomplishment help? Social Work, 34, 243-248.
33. Koeske, G, Koeske, R. (1993). A Preliminary Test of a Stress-Strain-Outcome Model for Reconceptualizing the Burnout Phenomenon. Journal of Social Service Research, 17 (3-4), 107-135.
34. LeCroy and Rank (1987). Factors Associated with Burnout in the Social Services: An Exploratory Study. The Haworth Press, Inc.
35. Martin, U. and Schinke, S. (1998). Organizational and Individual Factors influencing job satisfaction and burnout of Mental Health Workers. Social Work in Health Care, Vol. 28 (2), 100-115.
36. Maslach, C. (1987). Burnout Research in the Social Services: A Critique. The Haworth Press, Inc.
37. Mechanic, D. (1974). Social Structure and Personal Adaptation: Some Neglected Dimensions. In G.V. Coelho, D.A. Hamburg, S.J.E. Adams (Eds.), Coping and Adaptation. (pp. 32-44). New York: Basic Books.
38. Michael, R., Daley. "Burnout: smoldering problem in the Protective Services". Social Work, 24 (September 1979): 375-379.
39. Mitchell, W.J.T. (Ed.)(1998, 1981) on narrative. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
39. Moy, L. (1997). Anti-Racism and Multiculturalism: Listening to Student Activists and Leaders. unpublished Master's thesis, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec.

40. Myers et al. (1989). Physiological Responses to Anxiety and Stress Reactions to Oppression, Galvanic Skin Potential and Heart Rate. Journal of Black Studies, vol. 20, no. 1, September (pp. 80-96).
41. Patton, M.Q. (1999) "Qualitative Interviewing" Chapter 7, in Qualitative Evaluation Research Methods. New York, Teachers College Press, pp. 56-71.
42. Perlman, B. and Hartman, E.A. (1982) Burnout - Summary and Future Research. Human Relations, vol. 35, November 4, pp. 283-305.
43. Peters and Massey (1983). Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress in Family Stress Theories: The Case of Black Families in White America. The Haworth Press, Inc.
44. Sefa Dei, George J. (1996). Anti-racism Education, Theory and Practice. Fernwood Publishing, Halifax, Nova Scotia.
45. Sutherland, V.J. and Cooper, C.L. (1990). Understanding Stress: A Psychological Perspective for Health Professionals, Suffolk, Chapman and Hall.
46. Thompson et al. (1996). Stress and organizational culture. British Journal of Social Work, 26, pp. 647-665.
47. Tutty, L. and Grinnell Jr. (1996). "Qualitative Research Approach" in Qualitative Research for Social Workers. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, pp. 3-22.
48. Um, M.-Y., and Harrison, D. (1998). Role Stressors, burnout, mediators and Job Satisfaction: A Stress-Strain outcome model and an empirical test. Social Work Research, volume 22, June 2, 1998.
49. Yee, Y. (1995). A Theoretical Analysis of Racism in Social Service Agencies. unpublished Master's thesis. McGill University, Montreal, Quebec.