

Moral Panic, Regulation and Social Workers' Burnout in England: Empirical evidence

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Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

- * Data related to burnout are extracted from the final reports of two national evaluations of social work practices with children and adults. The evaluation of the social work practice with children was funded by the Department for Education and the evaluation of social work practice with adults was funded by the Department of Health.
- * The arguments and views presented here are of the author's alone and do not necessarily represent that of the funders.

Aims and Methods

- * Examines how 'moral panic' can be used as an analytical tool in relation to social workers' stress
- * Explores evidence of mitigating factors to counter the effect of burnout
- * Utilizes standardized measures of burnout (Maslach Burnout Inventory); job control and psychological job demand (Karasek JCQ) from 2009-2013
- * Complemented by media and policy analysis from 2009 to 2013

Moral Panic Analysis Framework

An episode emerges as a threat

Mass media presentations

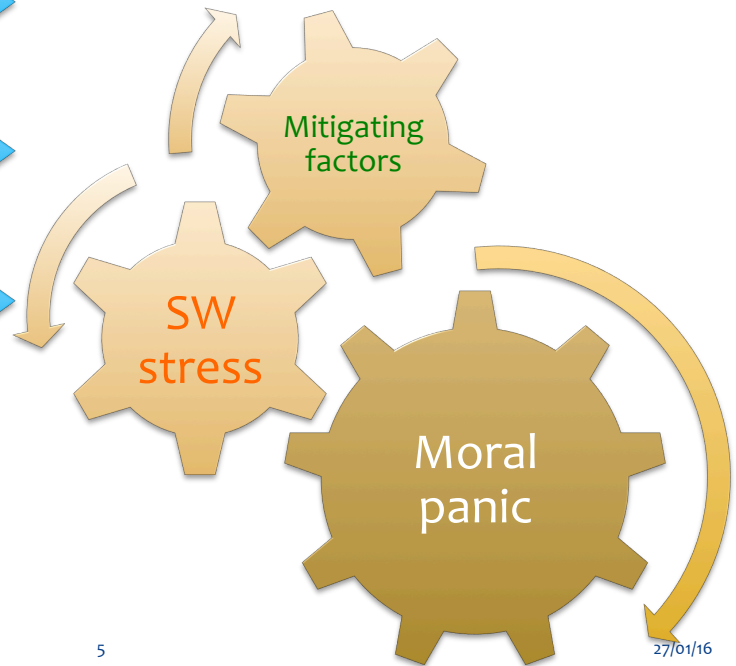
Expert and policy 'coping' mechanisms emerge

Condition disappears, submerges or reoccurs

Media/collective emotions

Policy/regulations

Social workers' stress



Risk and Blame Construction

2009-2013

The media and collective emotions

- * A continues attack since Peter Connelly – moral panic ‘episode’
- * Reporting bias: continues focus on what goes wrong’ – heightening public emotions of blame, shame, fear and disgust – social workers being a clear target
- * Small scale reporting mainly in professional press of social workers’ stress
- * Emerging positive portrayal of social workers since 2012; Yet, in dedicated programmes but not in the main news’ coverage

Moral Regulation



Social Workers' Burnout, Job Demand and control

2009-2013

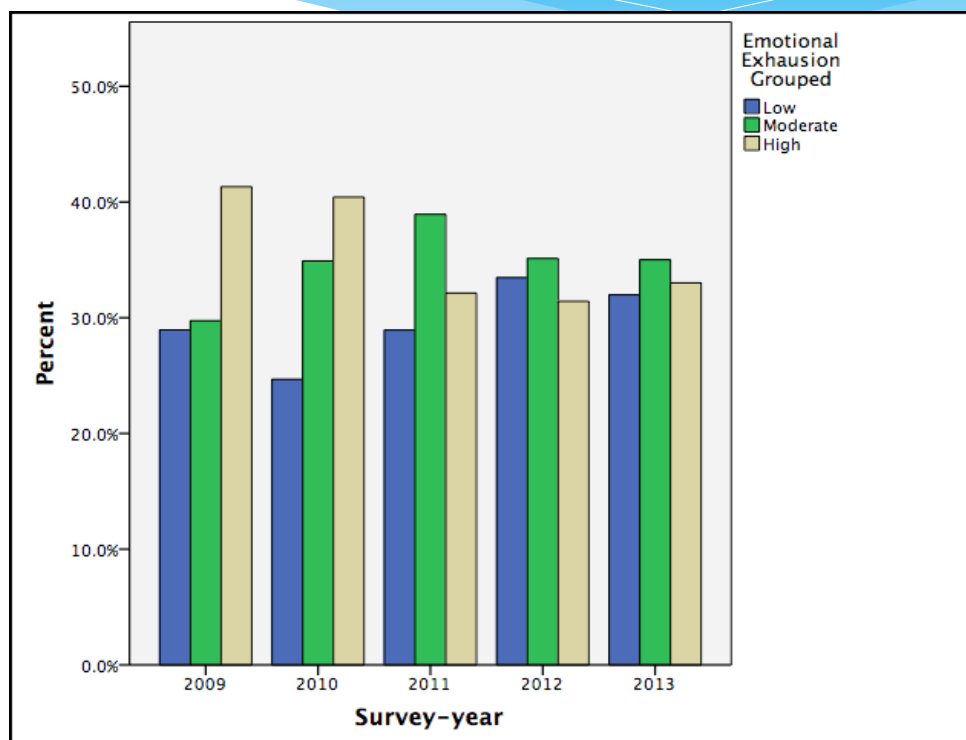
Survey Data

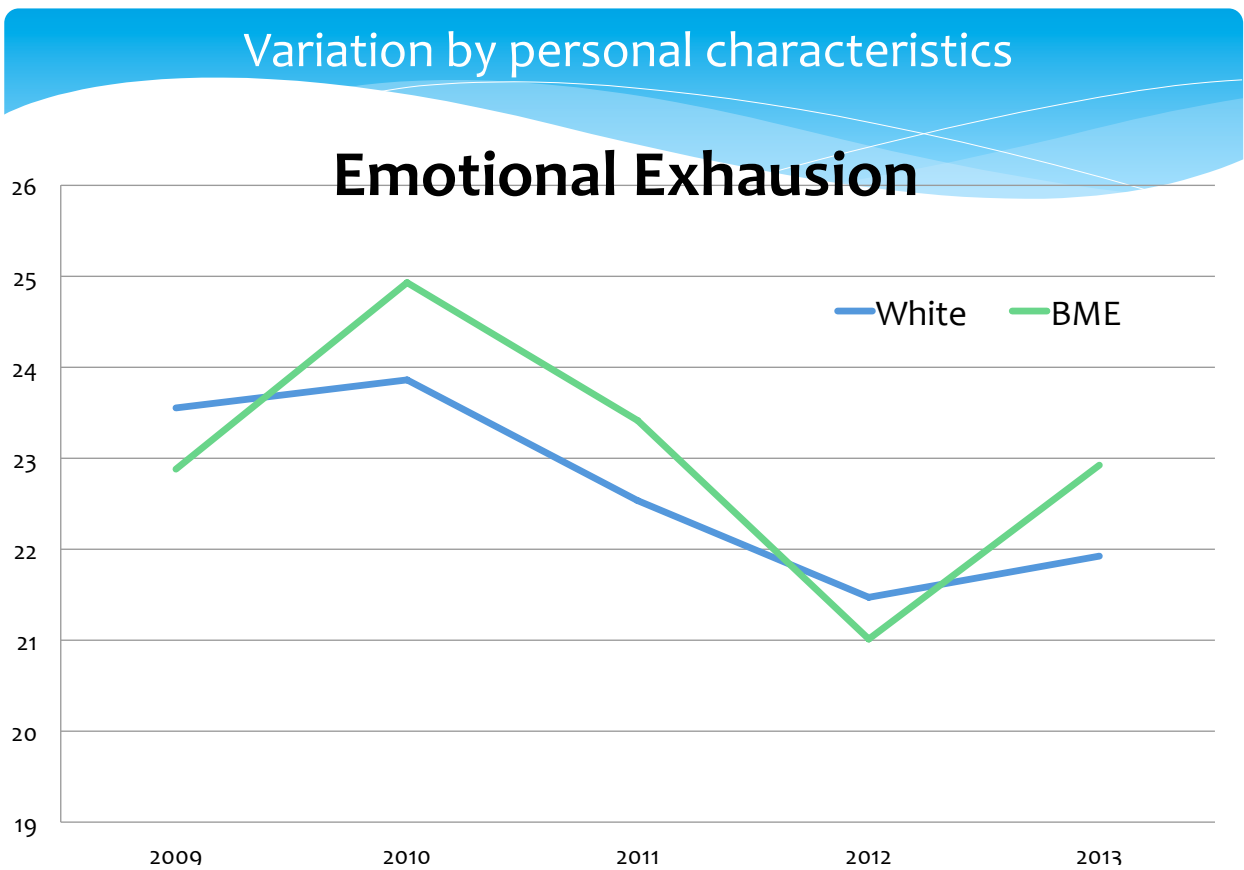
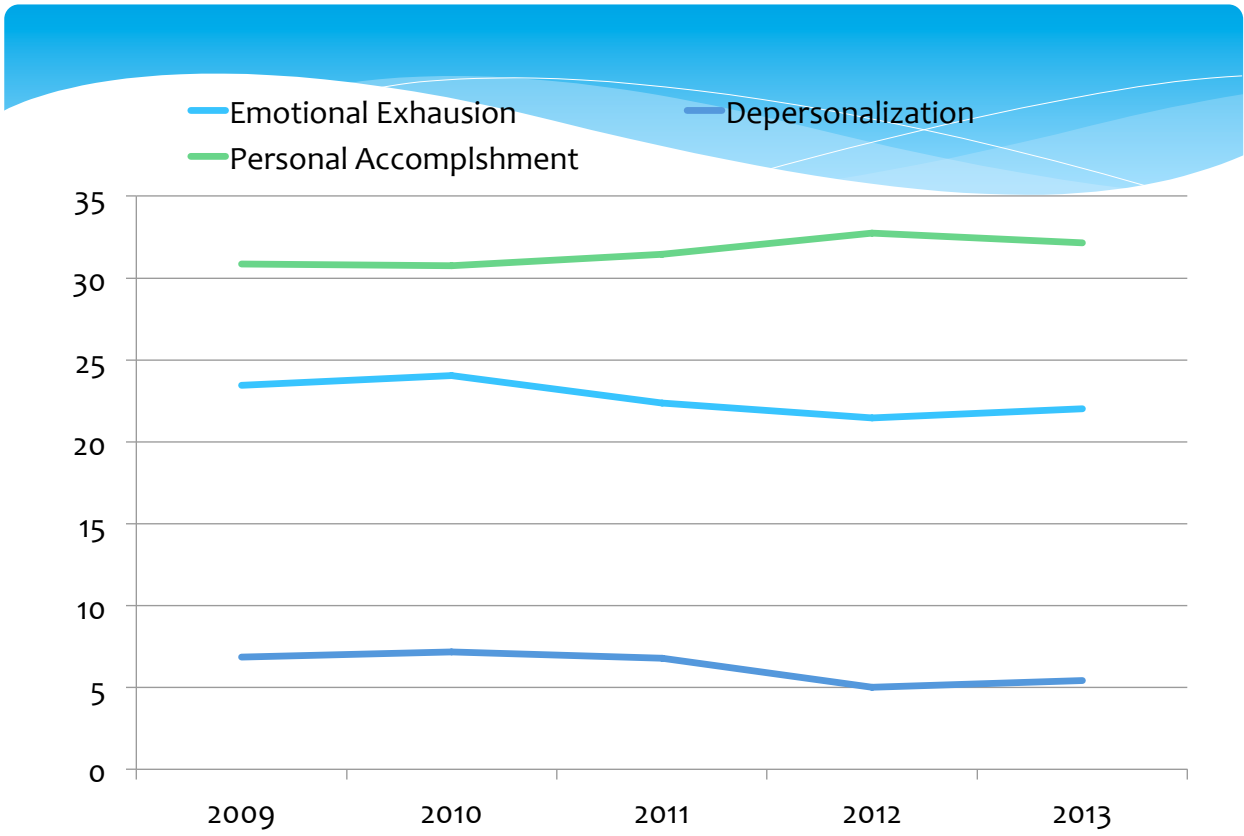
- * Spanning from 2009 to 2013 and covering two large groups of social work practitioners:
 - * From 22 diverse Local Authorities
 - * Working in the main with
 - * Children and families (n=2050; 2009 to 2011)
 - * Adults and older people (n=2978; 2012 to 2013)
- * Collecting standardized information on burnout and Demand-control model

Stress and Burnout measures

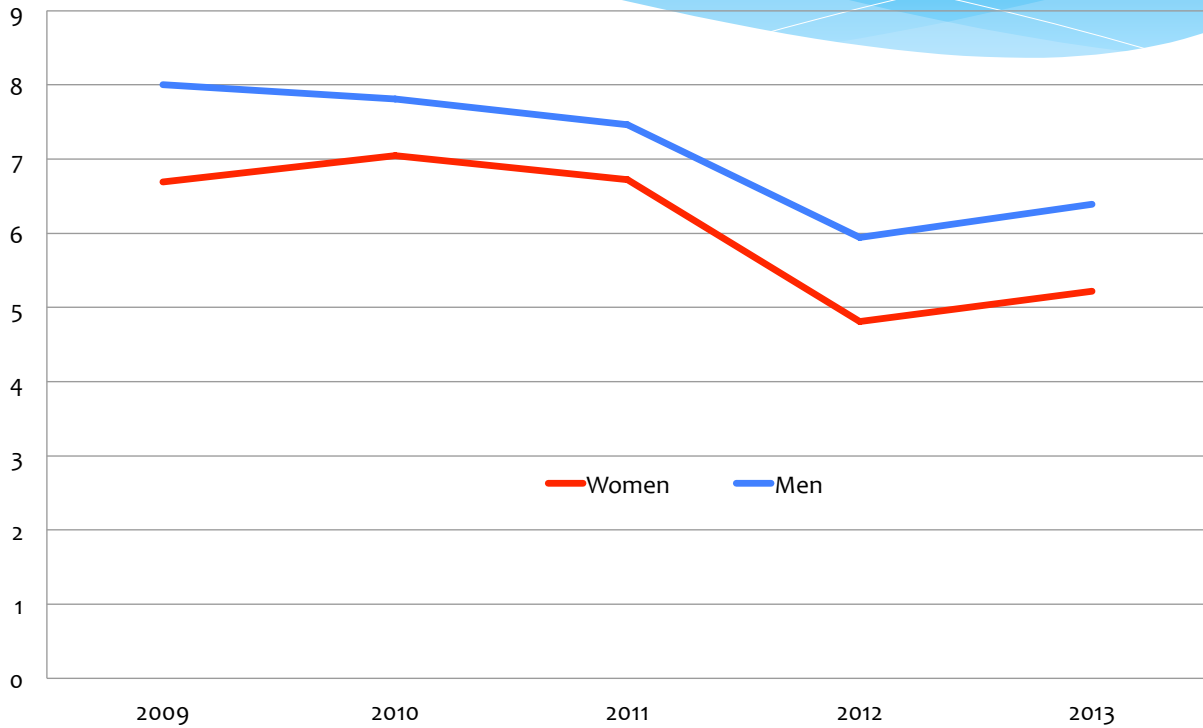
- * The MBI (Maslach et. al, 1996) is the most widely used measure of burnout.
- * 22-item, 6-point anchored Likert-type scale has three components:
 - * “emotional exhaustion” (EE; feelings of being overextended and depleted of emotional and physical resources);
 - * “depersonalization” (Dp; negative or excessively detached responses to various aspects of the job);
 - * and reduced “personal accomplishment” (PA; feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement at work).

Relationship between moral panic and social workers’

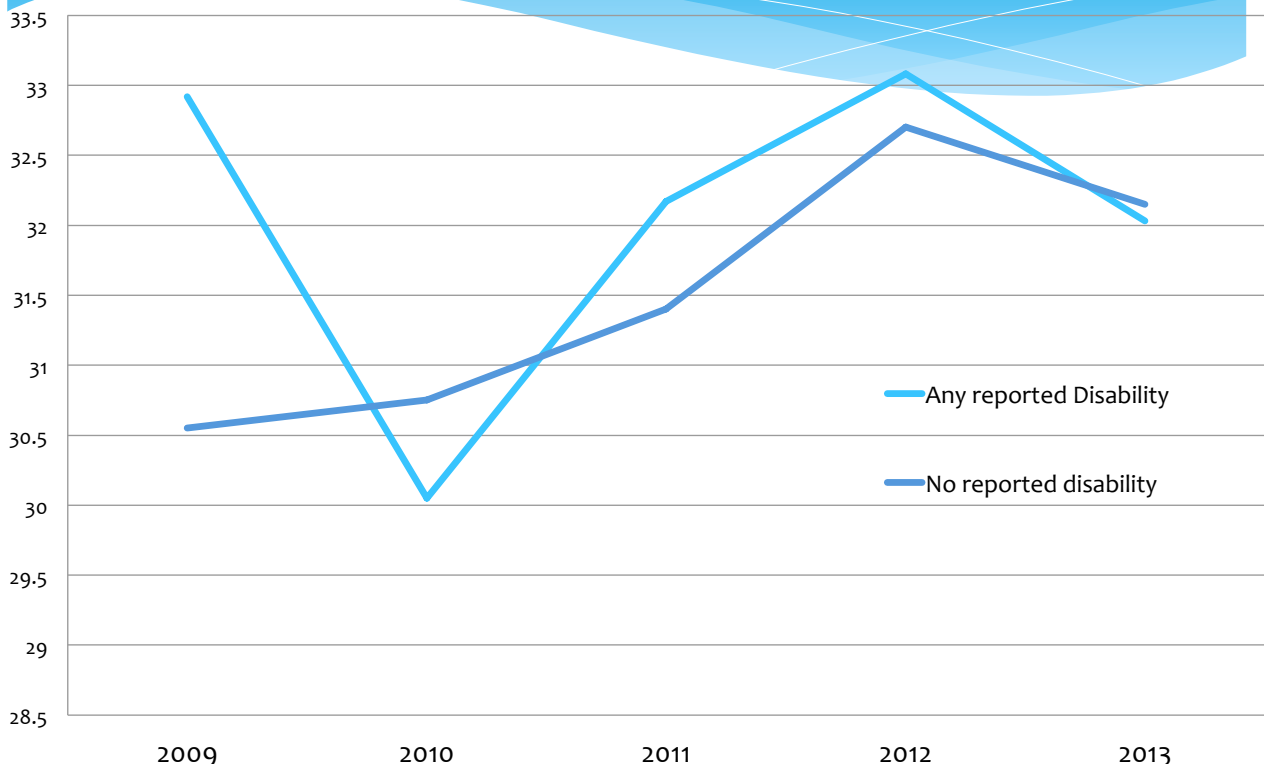




Deprsonalization



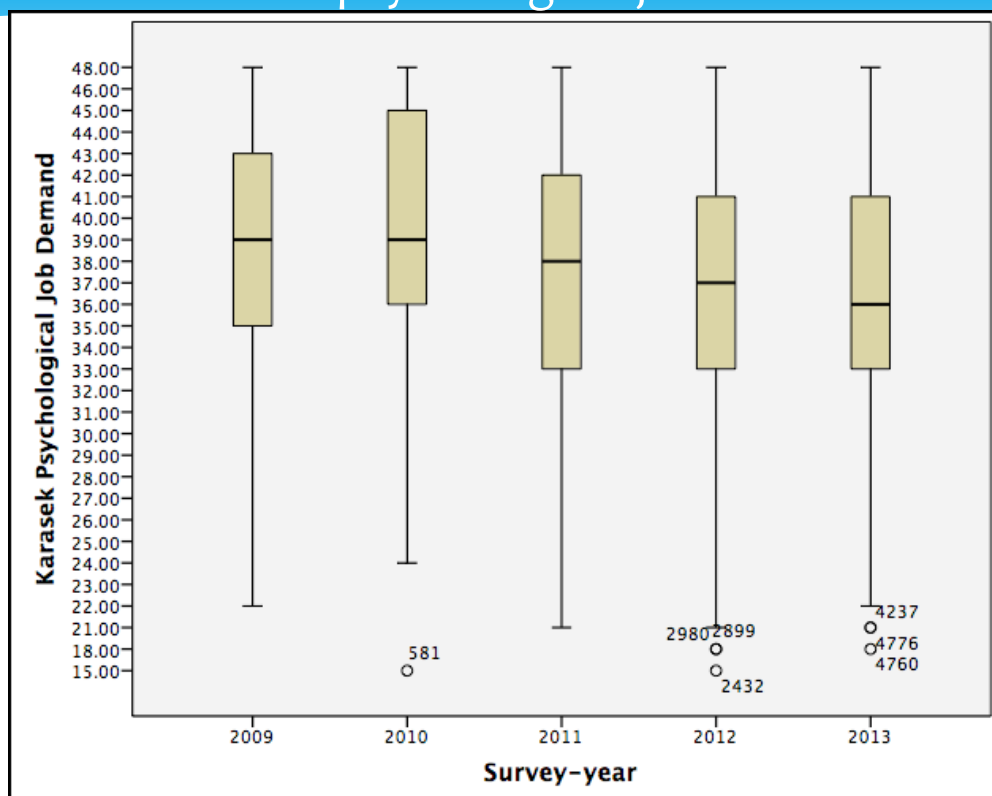
Personal Accomplishment



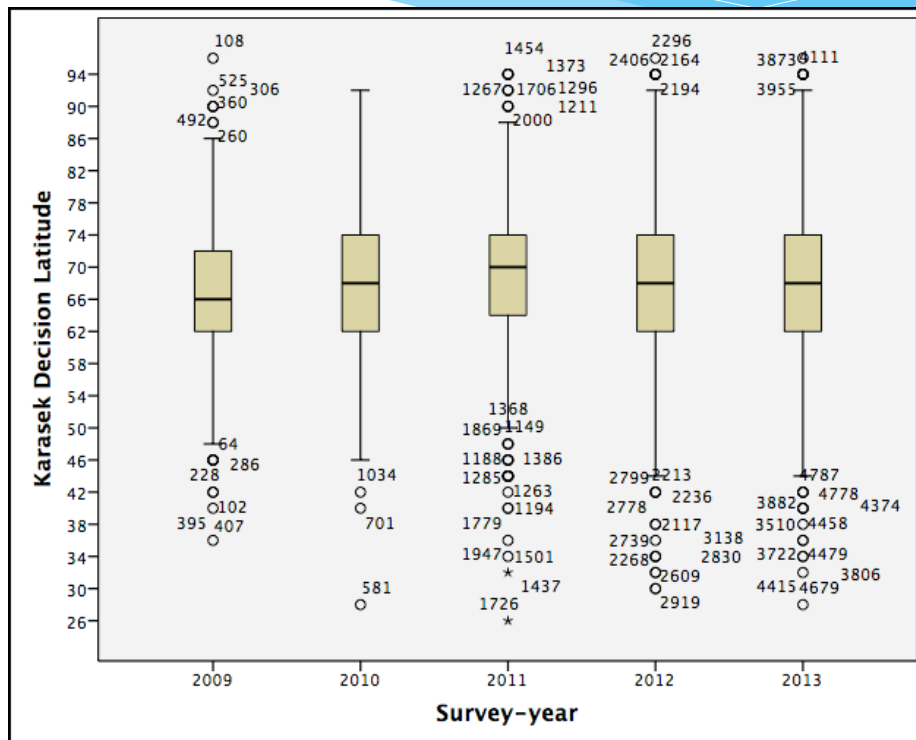
Karasek Job Control Questionnaire (JCQ)

- * JCQ is a self-completed instrument designed to identify two crucial aspects:
 - * Job demand, the stressors existing in the work environment.
 - * Job decision latitude, the extent to which employees have the potential to control their tasks and conduct throughout the working day (Karasek, Brisson, et al., 1998).
- * JCQ social support scale combines both coworkers' and supervisory support scales.
 - * Such support is theorized to moderate or buffer the impact of job-related stress
 - * Individuals in high stressor jobs will have lower psychological strain in the presence of social support.

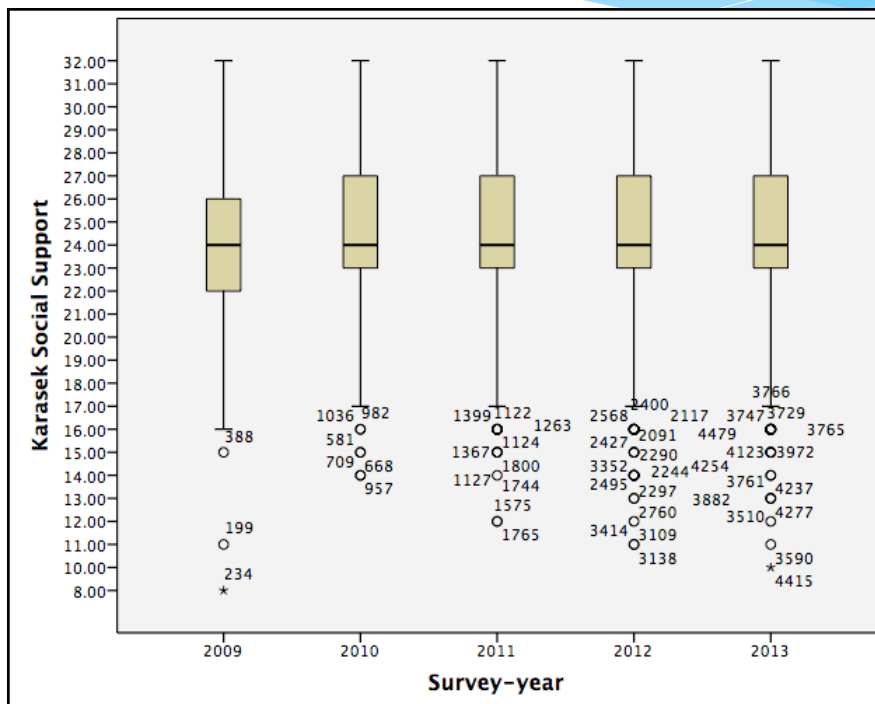
Social workers' psychological job demand trend



What about decision latitude?

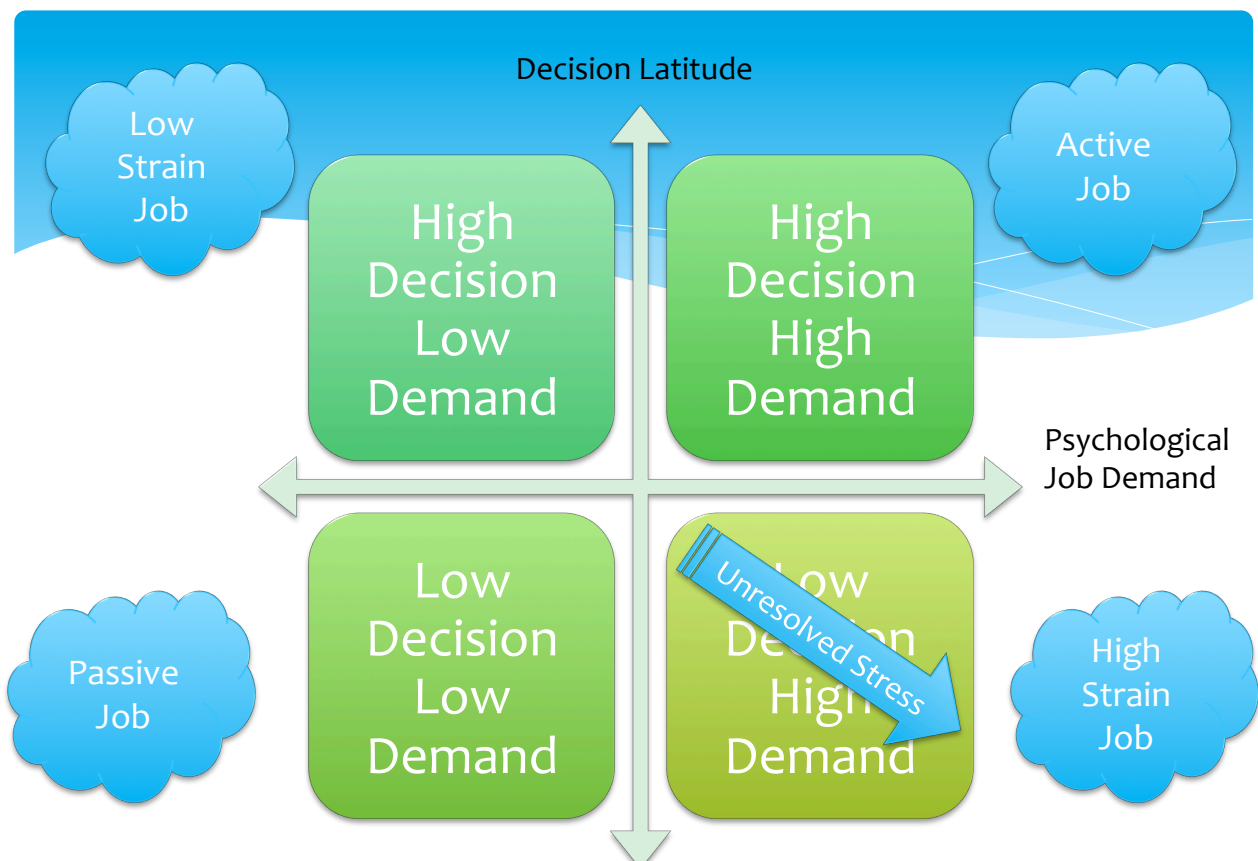


Social support as a moderating factor



Karasek Job Demand-Control Model

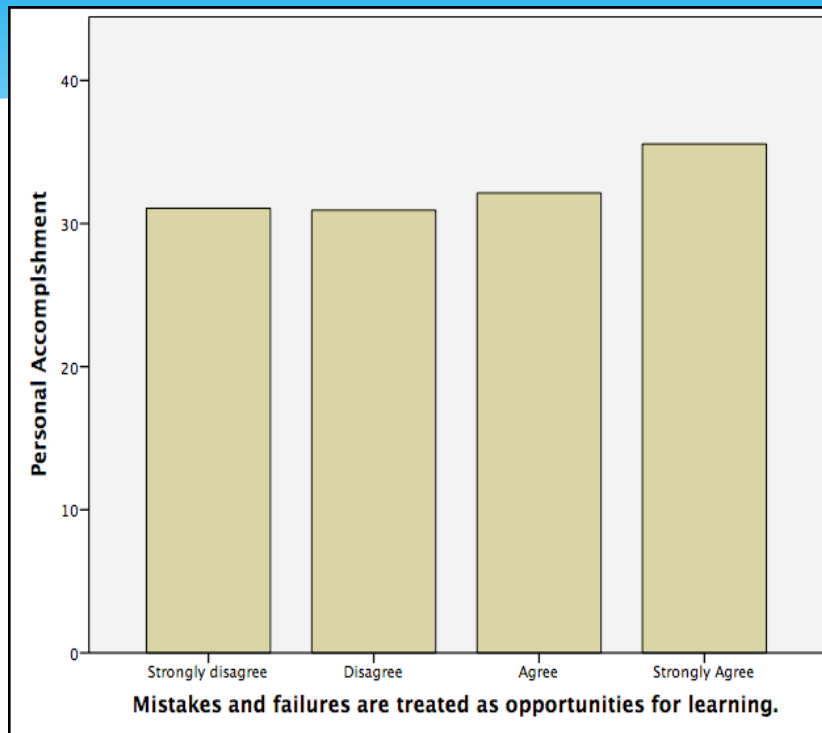
- * Postulates that job strain is the result of an interaction between demand and control
- * a job with high demand and low control is 'high strain' → unresolved stress
- * a job with low demand and high control is 'low strain'
- * Somewhere between these 2 extremes lie 'passive' and 'active' jobs → ideal state
- * The model was examined in relation to workers' health outcomes, esp. cardiovascular disease



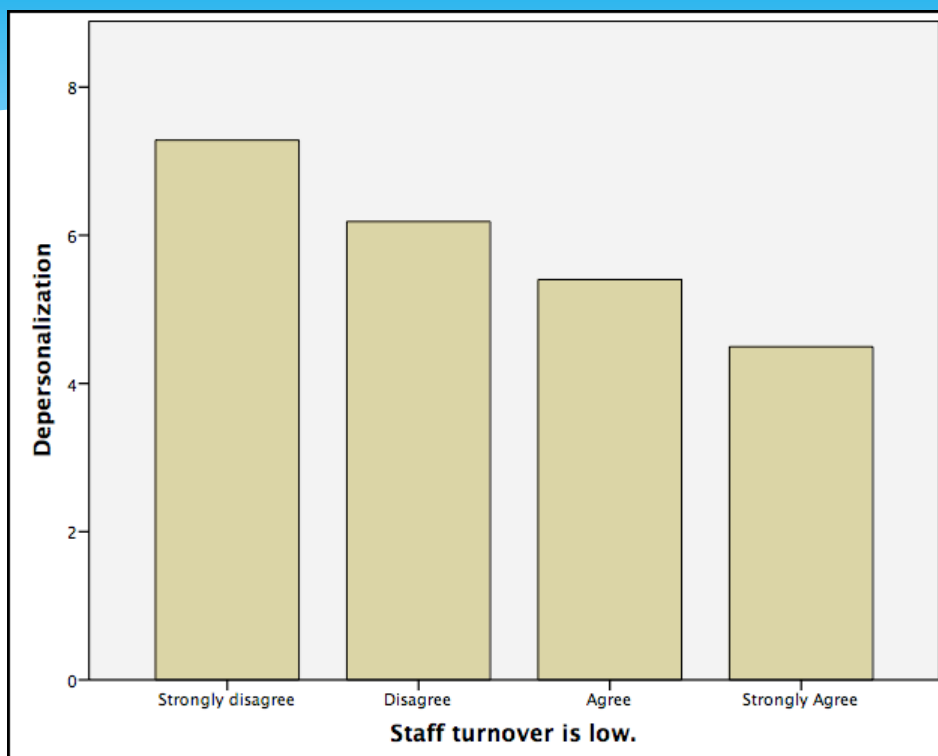


Work and organizational culture in mitigating social workers' stress

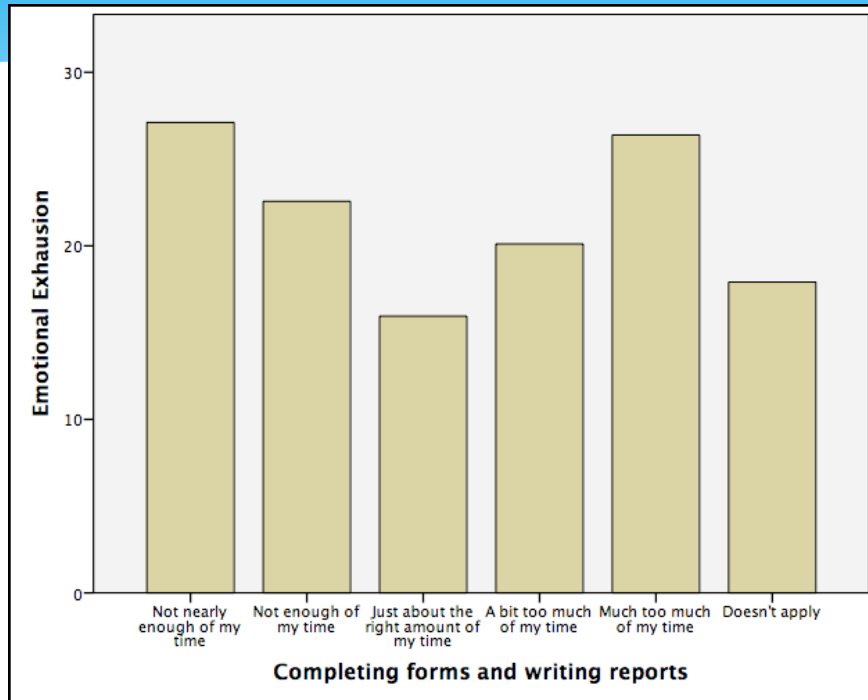
Work culture and stress



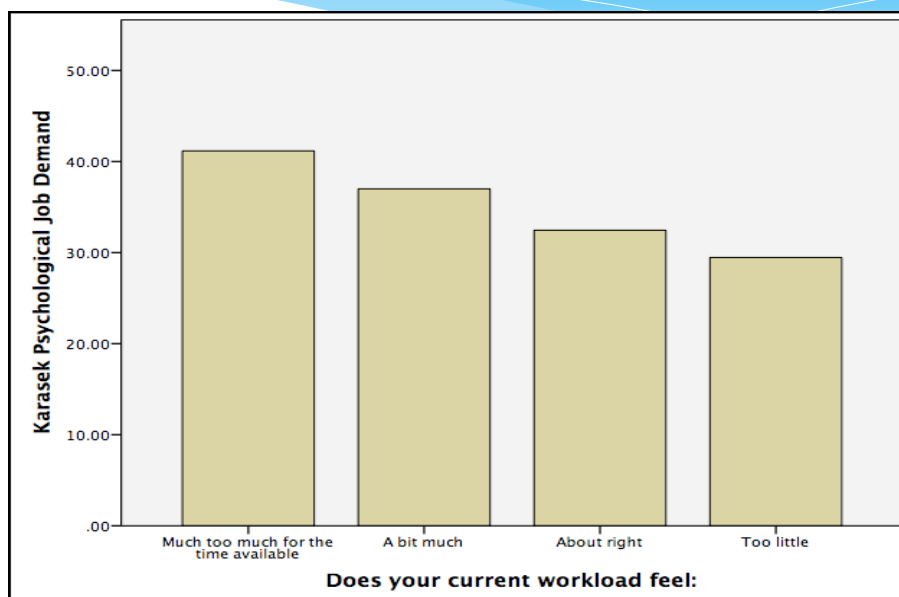
Turnover and stress



Completing forms are important but needs to be kept at the 'right' amount



Workload and job demand go hand in hand



Key points

- * Through moral panic, risk is constructed through collective emotional blame directed in large towards social workers
- * Moral regulation is evident in the emotional politics of policy construction particularly in relation to children social work
- * Empirical data show a correlation between moral panic episodes and social workers' burnout levels
- * Some factors appear to mitigate the impact on social workers' stress
 - * These factors operate at the levels of the individual, the organisation and the wider context

Group Discussions 30 Minutes – followed by 10 minutes reporting for each group

- * Discuss: Perceptions and own experiences of factors that can impact on social workers' burnout and job demands (consider both positive and negative impacts)
- * Group 1) individual/personal factors e.g. experience, motivation, personal coping mechanisms etc.;
- * Group 2) organisation structure e.g. management, support, model of working, staffing and case load etc. and
- * Group 3) other external factors such as policy direction, austerity measures/fiscal cuts, media etc.