



Emotional Intelligence and Burnout in
Child and Family Social Work
ESRC Project ES/K001914/1
2012-2015

Research Background

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Background to ESRC Project: Emotional Intelligence in Social Work

Aims of the study

Work-based stress and burnout are widely recognised as important problems at work among a range of public service professions including: teachers, police officers, nurses and social workers (McQueen, 2004; Bennett, Evans & Tattersall 1993; Kyriacou, 2001; Burke, 1994). Emotional intelligence skills are associated with less burnout (Melita, Prati & Karriker, 2010), but there is little consistent evidence to show the benefits of emotional intelligence interventions on practice. This project assessed the benefits of Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence training for child and family social workers in relation to stress and burnout using a randomised control trial. The occupation of social work was chosen because of the emotionally demanding nature of the job.

The rate of work related stress and burnout among social workers is high compared to similar professions, (Lloyd, King & Chenoworth, 2002). For example, Curtis (2010) estimated the average working life of a social worker was eight years, much less than that of 15 years for similar demanding professions such as nurses. The Health and Safety Executive 2013 reported that those working in human health and social work occupations had 2,090 stress cases recorded per 100,000 people working in the last 12 months, higher than for any other industry (HSE 2013). Such levels of stress and burnout contribute to high vacancy rates, particularly in the areas of child care, young people and families. Survey data show a vacancy rate of over 14% and a turnover rate of 15% amongst child and family social workers at the end of September 2013 (Department of Education 2014). The associated costs of stress to employers, through increased recruitment and training expenditure, are significant. No less important are the psychological and physical effects on individuals. Therefore, finding ways to reduce stress at work would have benefits for employees, employers and service users.

The aim of this research project was to examine the relationship between Emotional Intelligence, stress, burnout and social work practice and also assess whether Emotional Intelligence training for social workers would reduce their burnout rates and improve their practice over time.

Design

The second study was a randomised control trial to evaluate the effect of Emotional Intelligence Training on stress and burnout. A Randomised Control Trial is a gold standard research design which randomly allocates participants to each group, in this case either into the early training group or the later training group. This random allocation helps account for individual differences such as different levels of stress or Emotional Intelligence in each group. For example, if the early training group had people who were more stressed than those in the later training group; this difference could influence the results.

Participants

Participants for study 2 were 207 child and family social workers recruited across eight local authorities in England. The local authorities varied by authority type, size and urban/rural location, see Table 1.

Table 1. Participants by local authority type and size

Local authority type	Size (Total children's social workforce) at 30 Sept 2014 - Headcount)	Participant Total	% of participants to social workforce total
Shire	538	77	14%
Shire	341	16	5%
Shire	275	43	16%
Shire	199	12	6%
Large unitary	192	18	9%
Small unitary	130	27	21%
Small unitary	94	5	5%
Outer London Borough	88	9	10%
Total	1857	207	11%

The majority of social worker participants worked in Safeguarding, Foster Care/Adoption and Looked after Children services, see Table 2.

Table 2. Participants by type of child and family social work

Type of social work	Number of participants	Percentage of total participants
Safeguarding	1171	57%
Foster Care/Adoption	45	21.5%
Looked after children	35	17%
Disability	5	2%
CAMHS	1	0.5
Non-assigned	4	2%
Total	207	100%

Forty-three of the 207 social workers who started the study withdrew over the study period, accounting for 21% of the original sample. Reasons for participants withdrawing from the study included: maternity leave, workload, leaving the authority, leaving social work and sick leave. In the intervention group, 109 participants started the study and 18 (16.5%) participants withdrew. In the wait list control group, 98 participants started and 25 (25.5%) withdrew. Further breakdown of withdrawal rates can be found in the Consort Diagram. The final sample total was 164 (*164 is the n in the supplied SPSS Files*), see Table 3.

Table 3. Final sample by gender and training group

	Intervention group		Control group		Total	
Women	n78	88%	n61	86%	n139	87%
Men	n8	12%	n13	14%	n21	13%
Total	n90	100%	n74	100%	n160*	100%

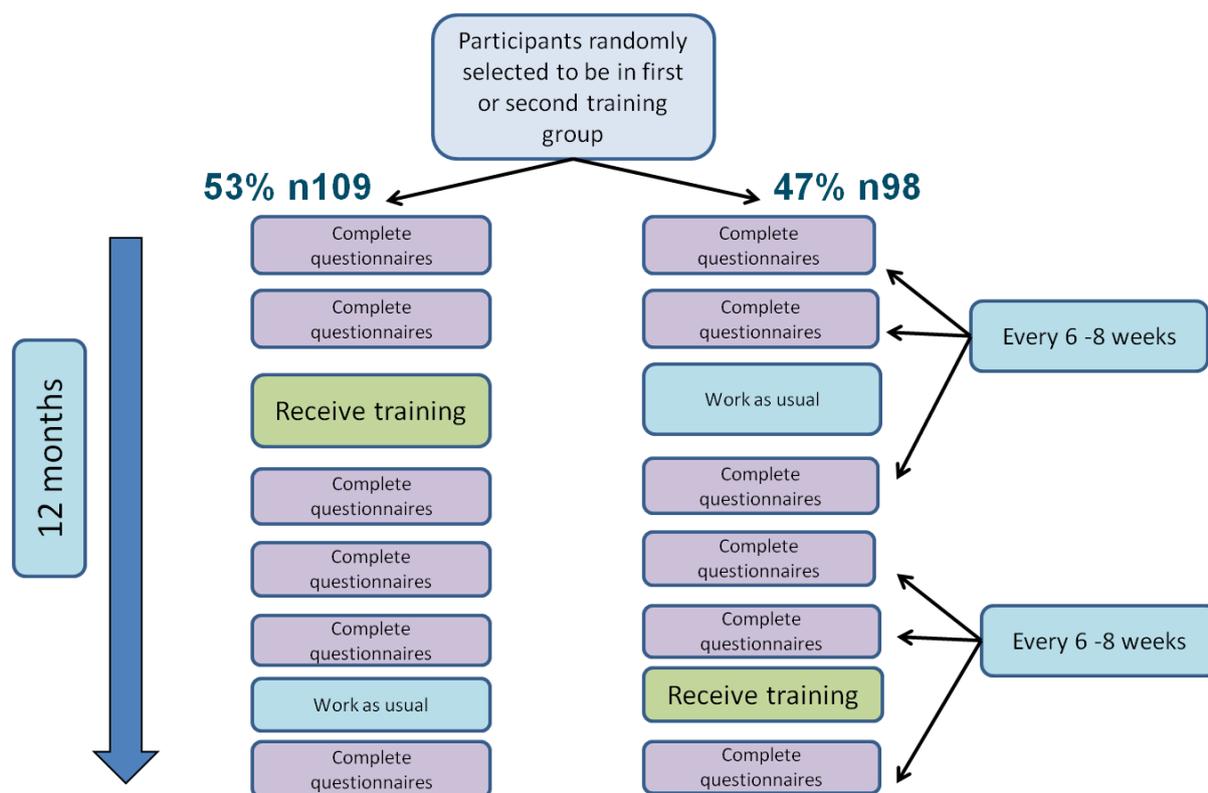
*No gender information supplied=4, final sample = 164

Participants' age ranged from 21 to 61 years. The mean age was 40.69 years, (SD10.48).

Method

Participants were briefed face to face about the project before they consented to take part in the randomised control trial. Participant information sheets and consent form can be found in Appendix 1 and 2. Participants were requested to complete six online questionnaires at approximately one to two month intervals across a 12 month period and attend a two day Training session on Emotional Intelligence during the same 12 month period. Participants were randomised into two groups: the training intervention group were randomised to receive the Emotional Intelligence Training first and the control (wait list) group received the Emotional Intelligence Training at the end of the study period, thus acting as a control group in the intervening period (See Figure 1).

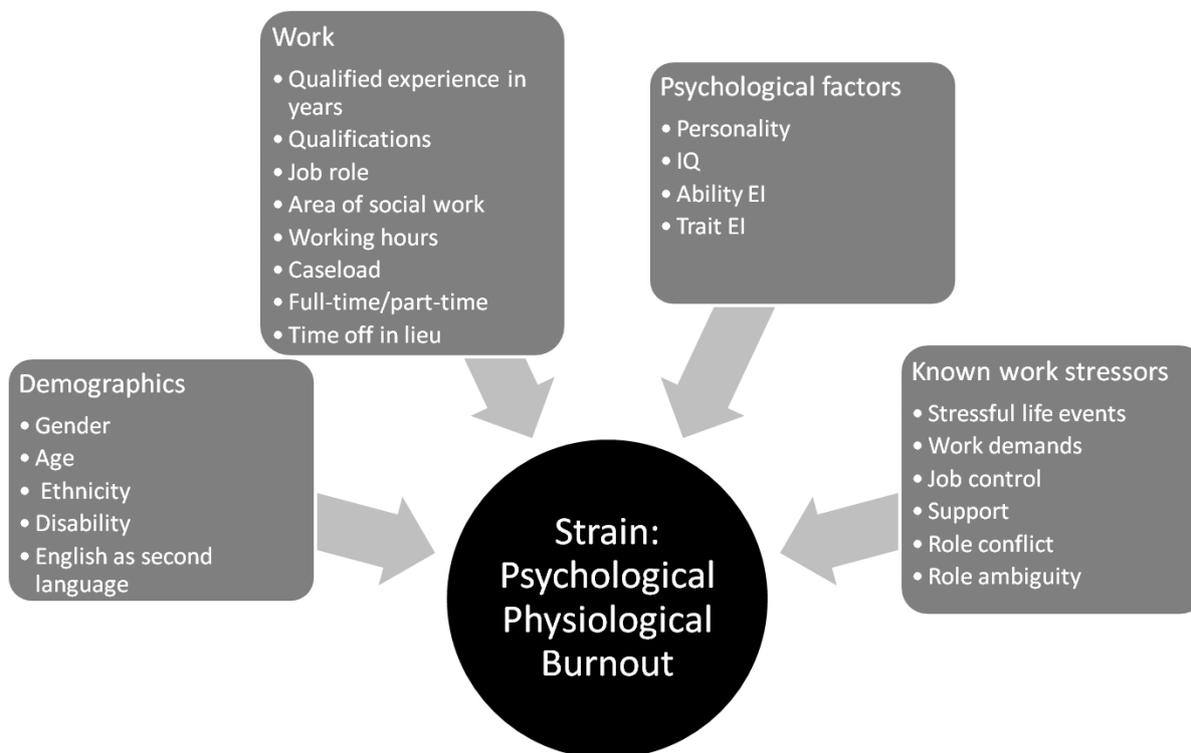
Figure 1. Participants' route through the Emotional Intelligence Training Study



Measures

The online questionnaires (See *Questionnaire files*) included questions about participants' demographic details, work context, social work experience, reported psychological and physiological stress and burnout, personality, work demands, stressful life events and Trait and Ability Emotional Intelligence. The choice of work related measures for the questionnaire were based on previous research measuring common stressors at work (Health and Safety Executive 2007, Haynes 1999). A summary of the measures are outlined in Figure 2 below and are detailed in *EI RCT Measures scoring guidelines.doc*.

Figure 2. Measures used in the Emotional Intelligence Training Study



Work Context Interviews

Fifty three participants across the eight local authorities were interviewed (approximately a quarter of participants in each local authority) to give some background context about their team and physical work environment, emotional challenges and rewards at work, coping strategies, training take-up and provision, organisational support and supervision. Fifty two interviews transcripts are archived, two interviews did not record; one transcript is compiled from notes.

Emotional Intelligence Training

The Emotional Intelligence Training was developed for the study using the RULER Programme (Brackett & Rivers 2014) as a framework. The RULER programme was developed by Marc Brackett from the Centre for Emotional Intelligence, Yale University for Schools (teachers, managers, administrators and children) and offers several training programmes. The first training programme covers The Anchors of Emotional Intelligence (4 days) and it was this programme that was adapted to two days for this study. Two days training was offered, as two days appeared to mirror the format of training offered in the area of Emotional Resilience/ Emotion Intelligence in the Social Work profession. An outline of the programme is provided below.

Day 1

- What is Emotional Intelligence?
- Function of emotions
- Identifying emotions – self. Introduction of the Mood Meter
- Using emotions in thinking
- Understanding emotions

Day 2

- Managing emotions – self + others. Introduction of the Meta-Moment and The Blueprint
- Interpreting Emotional Intelligence Individual feedback profiles. (Each participant received a confidential Emotional Intelligence profile and feedback from the MSCEIT Ability Emotional Intelligence Test as part of the training.)

Research publications to date

Biggart, L., Ward, E., Cook, L., Stride, C., Schofield, G., Corr, P., et al. (2016). *Emotional Intelligence and Burnout in Child and Family Social Work: Implications for policy and practice. Research Briefing*. Norwich: Centre for Research on Children and Families, UEA.

References

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- McQueen, A. C. (2004). Emotional intelligence in nursing work. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 47 (1), 101-108.
- Melita Prati, L., & Karriker, J. H. (2010). Emotional intelligence skills: the building blocks of defence against emotional labour burnout *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion* 3 (4), 317 – 335.

Appendix 1 - Participant Information

RESEARCH STUDY
Child and family social workers
EMOTION SKILLS TRAINING
EVALUATION



Participant
Information
Booklet

What is the study about?

It is an opportunity for you to trial an innovative training on emotion skills designed to help you manage the emotional aspects of your role.

If participants find the training effective, it will be developed further to be made available nationally to social workers and other public sector workers.

This research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), is being carried out by researchers at the University of East Anglia.

How do I benefit from taking part?

- ***Access to CPD relevant training*** designed to help you handle positively the emotional challenges you face at work, which can be used for CPD portfolio development
- ***Individual feedback*** will be given to you about the emotion skills. This provides a unique opportunity to receive personalised information about your emotion skills profile. (See Box 1 overleaf for an example of how the feedback will look)
- ***Directly help the social work workforce*** by contributing to the development of training which, if found to be effective, will be made available nationally
- ***Privileged access to resources*** on research website
- ***Practitioner workshop*** at end of the study to find out about the findings

What would I be expected to do for the study?

Social workers

We will randomly select you to receive the training in one of two groups. Both groups receive the same training but at different times. It is important that you remain in your allocated group for your allocated training days.

All participants will be asked to fill in questionnaires at 7 different time points before and after the training to evaluate its effectiveness. You may also be asked to take part in a short recorded telephone interview about your work context and experiences of the training.

Supervisors

Your supervisor or team manager will also be asked to complete 2 questionnaires about any of their staff participating in the study. This will give us two perspectives on social workers' practice resulting from the training course, and provide contextual information about the organisation and team. Supervisors will **not** have access to participants' scores or feedback.

What is the time commitment?

Care has been taken to ensure that evaluating the training causes the least inconvenience to you, as we recognise you have very busy working lives.

The training course lasts 2 days. You will be expected to complete questionnaires 6 times over a 12-18 month period. The questionnaires require a tick box response and should take no more than 1 hour to complete. These can be completed online or in paper copy if preferred. All participants will complete questionnaires at the same time points. The diagram in Box 2 sets out how the evaluation will work.

Some participants will be approached to take part in a short interview about your experience working for your organisation. If you take part in a telephone interview this will last around ½ hour. We will give you lots of warning and arrange a convenient time for you in advance. See Box 2 for a project timeline.

What is covered in the training?

The training consists of two 1 day sessions, with participants asked to undertake some simple tasks between sessions. The training aims to:

- a. Improve your knowledge of emotion and consider **confidential** feedback (See box 1)
- b. Introduce you to an emotion skills toolkit
- c. Provide opportunities to practice these skills

Box 1: Example of personalised feedback for emotion skills

The scoring
Scores show low, medium and high performance in Emotional Intelligence ability, as shown in this colour coding below.

Consider developing	Competent	High Performance
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You also obtain feedback on your Emotional Intelligence performance across four Emotional Intelligence Domains.

EI domain	Skill level
Total EI	Consider developing
Perceiving emotions	Competent
Using emotions to facilitate thought	Consider developing
Understanding emotions	High Performance
Managing emotions	Competent

Is the study confidential?

Yes! Although your supervisor and team manager will know that you have attended the training course and are involved in the evaluation. Only the research team will have access to your questionnaire information which will be treated completely confidentially. All questionnaire data will be anonymised and coded to allow the researchers to match the questionnaires completed for each time point. The ID codes will be stored separately from questionnaire data and only the researchers will have access to them.

If you participate in an interview, this will be recorded with your consent and all names and places will be anonymised when transcribing and reporting. The data provided about you by your supervisor will be treated confidentially and your supervisor will not have access to the results.

We will be providing a summary of findings to all participants and senior managers. Results will be based on average or percentage scores at group level, and no individual can be identified from the overall findings. Interview findings will be reported as themes, illustrated by quotes. However quotes will contain no information about individual social workers, team, location or service users.

We hope that you will enjoy taking part in the training and evaluation. Your involvement is completely voluntary and you have a right to withdraw from the study at any point although anonymous data, once submitted, cannot be withdrawn. You can withdraw by contact Laura Biggart – l.biggart@uea.ac.uk . You do not have to answer every question in the questionnaires or interviews if you don't want to, although it would be very helpful if you can.

How will the data be used?

Data from the trial will be written up for a report for the ESRC who are funding this research and will also be presented in journals and at conferences. However, only group data will be presented.

Collecting data is expensive and time consuming for participants as well as researchers. Therefore, we would like to be able to archive data from this project to give other academic researchers the opportunity to re-analyse it in future research projects. We would like to securely store project data in the UK data archive, a national service that exists to manage and store data collected in the UK. Archived data is double checked for anonymity using standardised procedures. Access to data is managed via a screening process and includes a legal agreement signed by any other researcher wishing to access the data for re-analysis. The option to agree or disagree to archiving your data is included on the consent form.

How can I find out the results of the research?

We will provide you with confidential *individualised feedback* on emotion skills once you have completed the first 3 sets of questionnaires, and again at the end of the evaluation. This feedback is for your own use and is not available to anyone else in your organisation.

You will be given access to a *project website*, which includes regular project updates, links to other relevant research, and priority access to findings. You will be invited to a *practitioner workshop* about the findings of the study and copies of the *final and summary reports* will be made available to you at the end of the study. Study findings will be published in *academic journals*, presented at conferences and will also feature in the public sector press and networks.

I have registered to take part - what next?

We are really pleased that you would like to take part in this study. We will be in touch to confirm training and evaluation dates.

What if my circumstances change?

We understand that during the study things may change for you at home or at work. If this happens please don't hesitate to get in touch with Laura Biggart (l.biggart@uea.ac.uk) to see if such changes will affect your participation in the study.

If you have questions about the study, please contact the project leader:

Dr Laura Biggart
School of Psychology, EDU Building, UEA
Norwich Research Park, Norwich, NR4 7TJ
l.biggart@uea.ac.uk
01603-593591

If you have any concerns about participating in the project, which have not been answered by us, you can also contact the Head of Psychology at UEA:

Professor Kenny Coventry,
k.coventry@uea.ac.uk
01603-597146

For more information and to keep up to date with the project, please see our project website: www.uea.ac.uk/emotionsatwork

Appendix 2 – Consent form

Emotion Skills Training - Consent form

Thank you for your interest in taking part in the Emotion Skills Training and evaluation. Please complete this form and return to the research team.

Please tick the following statements. If you are unsure about any of them please contact the research team on the details below.

1. I agree to be randomly selected to the first or second training group.
2. I understand that I will be required to complete questionnaires up to 6 times across an estimated 14 month period.
3. I understand that I may be asked to take part in a confidential telephone interview and agree to being recorded for the interview.
4. I understand that my supervisor will be asked to complete questionnaires about me and that this information will only be available to the research team.
5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any point without giving a reason.
6. I understand that I do not have to answer every questionnaire item or interview question if I do not want to.
7. I understand that no personal information will be shared outside of the research team and that data will be reported and published anonymously.
8. I understand that the study will be published which could include academic publications and more general publications.
9. I agree for my anonymised data to be securely archived at the UK data archive
10. I understand that other genuine researchers will have access to this anonymised data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information
11. I understand that other genuine researchers may use my (anonymous) words and numeric data in publications, reports, webpages and other research outputs
12. I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials related to this project to the Principal Investigator, Dr Laura Biggart

I give my consent to take part in the Emotion Skills Training Evaluation:

Name..... Team.....

Signature..... Date.....

Phone (office) Email.....

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Phone (mobile)

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Team manager name

Team manager email

.....

.....

Supervisor name (if different to manager)

Supervisor email (if different to manager)

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If you have questions please contact the research team at:

Dr Laura Biggart,
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