

**Understanding of Work Stress among Hong Kong Social Workers
in elderly, children and youth services**

An Undergraduate Honours Project/Thesis

Submitted to

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ABSTRACT

With changing social trends, demographic, economic and political upheavals, social workers in Hong Kong are faced with more challenges than ever before, resulting in a double pressure of increasing service diversity and caseload. The workloads, demands and shifts in work priorities are frequent, and social workers often experience high levels of stress and distress. While social workers provide services and support to solve various social problems and to people in need, their personal welfare is largely overlooked. Without proper adjustment and support, the demanding nature of their work can be detrimental to their work-related well-being and health, and the high stress environment can result in an inability to counsel cases effectively.

In order to effectively promote the well-being of social workers, a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to the accumulation of work-related stress among social workers and the resulting impact is needed.

The study aims to find out how social workers cope with their work stress. By using in-depth interviews, it is to find out what the working condition of social work service actually is and what their sources of stress are, and to understand the ways in which they can reduce their stress and achieve a balance between work and life among research participants.

Keywords: social Workers, work stress, work pressure, self-care

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

With changing social trends, demographic, economic and political upheavals, social workers in Hong Kong are faced with more challenges than ever before, resulting in a double pressure of increasing service diversity and caseload. The workloads, demands and shifts in work priorities are frequent, and social workers often experience high levels of stress and distress. While social workers provide services and support to solve various social problems and to people in need, their personal welfare is largely overlooked. Without proper adjustment and support, the demanding nature of their work can be detrimental to their work-related well-being and health, and the high stress environment can result in an inability to counsel cases effectively.

In order to effectively promote the well-being of social workers, a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to the accumulation of work-related stress among social workers and the resulting impact is needed.

1.1 AIM OF STUDY

The study aims to find out how social workers cope with their work stress. By using in-depth interviews, it is to find out what the working condition of social work service actually is and what their sources of stress are, and to understand the ways in which they can reduce their stress and achieve a balance between work and life among research participants.

1.2 BACKGROUND of RESEARCH

1.2.1 Definition of Social Worker

According to IASSW General Assembly and IFSW General Meeting, social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Underpinned by theories of social work,

social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

In accordance with Code of Practice for Registered Social Workers, the Social Workers Registration Board defines social work as a professional activity which helps people in need and strive to address social problems. Social workers recognise the central importance of human relationships and seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, maintain and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations and communities for the prevention and relief of hardship and suffering.

Social work services in Hong Kong cover a wide range of areas, targeting all sectors of society and all aspects of social life, especially the disadvantaged groups in society. At present, the main services provided by social work agencies in Hong Kong are: family and children social work, youth social work, social work for the elderly, rehabilitation social work and community development work.

1.2.2 Current Situation of Social Workers in Hong Kong

According to the statistics provided by the Social Workers Registration Board as at 8/12/2021, there were 26,820 registered social workers in Hong Kong, nearly 70% of them were female and about 67% held a degree in social work. According to the Social Work Manpower Requirements System Annual Report 2020 (Joint Committee on Social Work Manpower Requirements, 2021), as at 31 March 2020, there were 17,401 filled positions recorded in SWMRS, including 10,147 social work degree positions (including social workers in local colleges) and 7,254 social work diploma positions.

Between 2016/17 and 2019/20, the number of social workers increased by 2,412, representing an average annual growth rate of 5.1%, with rising social needs to address increasing social problems. Whether it is poverty relief, high-risk families, violence, suicide, etc., social workers are always expected to provide appropriate treatment and care to these people. However, in this

work environment where work pressure and negative emotions are highly prevalent, the stress and accumulated negative energy carried by social workers cause imbalance in their physical and psychological state which is usually overlooked.

In the "Manpower Survey for the second half of 2020" released by the Hong Kong Institute of Human Resource Management, data from 42 companies representing a total of 54,603 employees were collected and analysed. The annual staff turnover rate for 2020 was 9.6%, the job vacancy rate was 3.1% and the absence rate was 2%. According to the Social Work Manpower Requirements System Annual Report 2020 (Joint Committee on Social Work Manpower Requirements, 2021), in 2019/20, the number of departures for all social work positions was 3,025, including 2,660 re-entry cases and 365 attrition cases; the staff turnover rate, job vacancy rate and absence rate were 17.9%, 15.8% and 2.2% respectively, all of which greatly exceeded the turnover rate of the general workforce.

1.2.3 High work stress among social workers

In 2008, the Department of Social Work of the Hong Kong Baptist University and the Social Welfare Department's Association of Assistant Social Work Officers conducted a survey on the work stress and emotional well-being of social workers in the Social Welfare Department to understand the challenges, work stress and emotional well-being of frontline social workers. A total of 483 social workers responded to the survey, accounting for more than half of the SWA grade in SWD. The respondents worked an average of 10 hours overtime per week, and the main sources of stress included overwhelming caseload, worrying about the number of cases, underestimating the staffing level of the unit, and various difficulties in the workplace. The social workers interviewed were under very high work pressure and emotional distress, almost one-third of the social workers interviewed experienced symptoms of depression (32.8%) and 60% experienced anxiety, which is worrying. The vast majority of respondents felt very tired (95%), very reluctant to go to work (88.4%),

did not sleep well (87.5%) and were worried about their future (71.7%). Two-thirds of respondents felt very uneasy during long holidays (65.9%) and had nightmares (63.7%), and more than half of respondents had unexplained physical pain (58%). While overall stress levels were high, some social work fields were clearly relatively more stressful, with medical social work and family services being the most worrying situations.

From June to September 2009, the Department of Social Work of the Hong Kong Baptist University and the Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union conducted the "NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) Professional Social Worker Stress and Emotional Health Survey 2009", in which 344 social workers from NGOs were interviewed. The survey revealed that social workers worked an average of 49 hours per week (5 hours more than the average full-time worker), and the main sources of stress were: too many cases to handle, underestimation of unit staffing, instability of the contract system, and various difficulties in the work situation. The social workers interviewed were under very high work pressure and emotional distress, and most of them had symptoms of physical discomfort. 30% of the respondents were pessimistic about life, and a quarter of them showed symptoms consistent with the diagnosis of depression or anxiety disorder. The vast majority of respondents felt very tired (95%), very reluctant to go to work (85%), did not sleep well (83%), three quarters of respondents wanted to leave their jobs, two-thirds of respondents had unexplained body aches and pains, and more than half felt pressure on their chests and felt mentally uncomfortable (Chiu & Ho, 2009). According to the survey, the prevalence of anxiety disorders in the general population ranges from 1% to 3.6%. However, 8.1% of the respondents had symptoms of anxiety disorder and 15% of the respondents interviewed had symptoms of major depression. The survey found that symptoms of major depression and anxiety disorder were associated with long working hours and heavy work pressure, and that these problems were mainly caused by the lack of protection in the social welfare system, which put heavy pressure on social workers. Many social workers continue to suffer from physical and psychological fatigue, which is blamed on high

work demands and low wage conditions (Su, 2018). To make matters worse, demographic, social, economic and political upheavals have become more severe in recent years, making the work of social workers more challenging and difficult than ever before. In particular, Hong Kong has been faced with a growing and ageing population, housing shortages and cramped living conditions, increased political and social disruptions, and so on (Census and Statistics Department, 2018; Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2017).

The Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union and the Department of Psychology of the Education University of Hong Kong conducted a study "Work-related Well-being of Social Workers in Hong Kong" on stress and mental health of social workers between July 2018 and March 2019. A total of about 400 full-time social workers were interviewed and their service areas included family services, youth services, elderly services, rehabilitation services, etc. The study found that over 90% of the respondents reported that they were overloaded every month and were worried about the quality of their services due to excessive workload. Over 70% of the social workers found it difficult or even impossible to work every month due to lack of training, interference by others, poor equipment and complicated work rules and procedures. In addition, over 60% of social workers reported high mental stress, nearly half of them indicated that they could not concentrate on their work, felt very unhappy and bored. 70% of social workers felt persistently tired, 60% had muscle tension and pain, and over 40% had headache. Apart from the heavy workload and pressure, full-time social workers were also dissatisfied with the salary and promotion situation, and about half of the respondents intended to resign. According to the study, about 40% of the respondents were dissatisfied with the salary and promotion opportunities, 30% were dissatisfied with the way the organisation implemented its policies, and about half of them even expressed their intention to resign.

1.3 PROBLEM FORMULATION

1.3.1 Research Question

- ✓ What is the actual picture of so-called stressful condition of social work professionals in Hong Kong today?
- ✓ How can social workers reduce their stress and achieve a balance between work and life?
- ✓ How can social workers cope with their work stress?
- ✓ Find out how to enhance the resilience of social workers after taking into account the case studies of the respondents.

1.3.2 Project Objectives

- **To understand the factors of work stress among social workers, including:**
 - ✓ Organisation and Management Culture
 - ✓ Job Role
 - ✓ Work Arrangement
 - ✓ Work Content
 - ✓ Interpersonal Relationships
 - ✓ Job Prospects
 - ✓ Work and Family Balance

- **To examine the possible impact of work stress on social workers, including:**
 - ✓ Personal symptoms
 - ✓ Organizational influences

- **To identify ways in which social workers can cope with their own work stress**

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Social work is a professional and scientific approach to providing professional services to clients in difficulty and helping them to solve their problems. Social workers use the knowledge and methods of the social work profession to provide services based on “the concept of helping people” to help people.

The work stress of professional social workers has received increasing attention in the literature. Major administrative, social and political changes have affected the role of workers and the responsibilities they have to assume. The majority of authors consider social work to be a highly stressful profession, with particular stress arising from the conflicting roles between client advocacy and meeting agency needs. Looking back at the social work literature, what factors contribute to social workers' work stress?

2.1 Work stress

The concept of stress was first introduced by Cannon in 1932, suggesting that individuals often engage in aggressive or avoidance behaviours to adapt to life in the face of various stresses (Dantzer, 2016). Stress is a state of tension, anxiety and anxiety that occurs when the psychological and physical stimuli imposed by the environment are exceeded (Newman & Beehr, 1979). In addition, according to the person-environment fit of stress model, stress is seen as a result of the interaction between the individual and the environment, resulting in a poor fit that causes a physical or emotional threat response (Edwards & Cooper, 1990). Michie (2002) mentioned that stress is a result of the interaction between the individual and the organisational environment, and that when placed in an uncertain, uncontrollable, threatening or unknown environment, the consequences can be detrimental to physical and mental health if the individual is overwhelmed.

The definition of work stress is derived from stress, which is distinguished from stress in that work stress refers to stressful reactions to work-related events, whereas stress in general refers to stressful reactions to all life events including work stress (Cooper, Sloan & Williams, 1988, p. 7). In the workplace, when people perceive that the expectations and demands of the work environment are beyond their capacity to cope, negative emotions may arise and somehow the physical or psychological reactions to the threat must be absorbed in order to regain physical and psychological balance, i.e. work stress, which occurs when the work itself is more than it can cope with.

Robbins (2013) identified sources of work stress as ambiguity about work goals, conflicting demands from colleagues or superiors, overload, inability to participate in decision making and having to take on the work of other colleagues. Sutherland and Davidson's (1993) study of managers revealed that the sources of work stress include: job ambiguity, work overload, workforce shortages, organisational culture, managerial roles and interpersonal relationships. In summary, overload is often a major cause of work stress.

The most important difference between social workers and general workers is that, apart from the profession of work, another important aspect is the helping profession, which tends to focus on the psychological aspect of the service. Social workers generally have a more emotional personality, with an empathetic, respectful and caring approach to counselling clients. Social workers experience emotional, physical and psychological overload when interacting with clients. They experience stress and anxiety due to environmental pressures and internal discomfort. Social workers also have to deal with the complexity and challenges of social problems, and therefore the workload of social workers is often higher than that of ordinary workers. Social workers must have more flexibility and space to cope with the pressure and difficulties brought about by their work.

According to Fineman (1985), the personality, self-concept and skills of social workers need to reconcile the influences of work factors, non-work factors and support systems to create a

stressful response to work. According to Brown and Bourne (1996), the sources of stress in social workers are divided into four major systems: the worker, the practice, the team and the agency. In other words, the sources of stress in the above-mentioned social work systems may be due to their own backgrounds and lives, or to difficult feelings of co-ordination with clients, teamwork and co-workers or supervisors.

According to Li Kam-fung (2010), a study on work stress and coping strategies among psychiatric social workers, emotional coping strategies are significantly associated with work stress. A study by Chiu Yu-lung and Ho Wing-lan (2009) on the work stress and emotional health of social workers in Hong Kong found that when social workers were under excessive stress, about 33% experienced symptoms of depression, 67% experienced anxiety, symptoms of physical fatigue, reluctance to go to work, poor sleep and anxiety about the future, and nearly 60% of the respondents even felt physically unwell.

2.2 Factors contributing to work stress

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Council (2017), the factors of work stress are as follows.

<p>Organisation and Management Culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of communication within an organization • Improper performance appraisal system
<p>Job Role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confused by ambiguous responsibility and assignment from supervisors • Conflict arising from multiple roles and responsibilities
<p>Work Arrangement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive workload • Prolonged working hours and insufficient rest breaks • Shift work or irregular work patterns • Tight schedule or deadlines

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to control the working schedule of employees
Work Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great responsibility requiring high concentration • Tasks involved working under emergency situations or encountering violence or death • Miscellaneous tasks
Interpersonal Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict with clients • Conflict with supervisors or subordinates • Lack of support from co-workers
Job Prospects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of opportunity for personal development, advancement or promotion • Threat of staff cutbacks, and insecure career prospects • Disproportionate between workload and salary
Work and Family Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to take family responsibilities due to heavy workload • Lack of family support

2.3 Effects of excessive work stress

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Council (2017), the effects of work stress are as follows.

Personal symptoms	<u>Physical</u>	<u>Behavioural</u>	<u>Psychological</u>	<u>Emotional</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising blood pressure • Stuffy chest • Constipation or diarrhea • Stomachache • Headache 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased smoking / drinking • Increased drugs intake • Anorexia and bulimia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to concentrate • Lowering creativity • Difficult in making decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Depression • Agitation • Helplessness • Short temper

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscle pains • Fatigue • Peptic ulcer disease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short tempered or violent acts • Sleeping disorders / Insomnia • Absenteeism • Suicidal tendency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgetful • Hesitancy 	
Organizational influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High turnover rates • Frequent absenteeism or sick leaves • lowering service quality • Increased errors at work • Poor relationship between employers and employees, or among the co-workers 			

2.4 Managing Work Stress

When faced with excessive work stress, the Occupational Safety and Health Council (2017) recommends the following ways to improve one's ability to cope with work stress.

- Formulate work plans; prioritize the work; improve time management
- Face problems positively; discuss with co-workers and supervisors to solve problems
- Exercise regularly to keep fit and healthy
- Ensure sufficient sleep; clear your mind before going to bed
- Learn relaxation techniques

- Build up good relationship with your co-workers, family and friends; establish a supporting network
- Accept support from others and give a helping hand to co-workers
- Adopt a healthy living style. Arrange leisure activities and develop personal interests
- When facing anxieties, talk to people that you can trust or seek counselling from professional counsellors or psychologists
- If coming across with symptoms of anxieties, unease and depression, seek for medical consultations

2.5 Fight against stress with the faith of a social worker

New social workers entering the workplace are full of enthusiasm for their work, and this enthusiasm stems from the urge to prove their abilities even when they are desperate. However, when reality and ideals do not match, the pressure of work accumulates over time, which can erode the enthusiasm and the positive energy at the beginning. Therefore, it is important for social workers to have the belief and meaning of their work, to recognise their mission and values in social work, and to uphold their position and justice as social workers.

In his book "Back to Faith: The Practice of Social Work Beliefs", Professor Kam Ping-kwong mentioned about the importance of social work beliefs for social workers: Social workers' beliefs remind us of what is valuable and what we believe in and value. These are the beliefs behind the practice of social work, and we can be said to be the roots of social work practice. The clearer a social worker is about the roots of his or her practice, the better he or she will be able to grasp the focus of his or her work and the more confident he or she will be in his or her position. A belief-based social work practice will not easily deviate from the objectives of social work, and will help social workers to build up a solid foundation and find the characteristics of the social work profession. A conviction-based social worker will be clear about the direction of his or her work. Beliefs will guide us on the path we should take. The work of social workers needs to change and

develop according to the changes of the times or the social environment. If we do not have clear beliefs, we will easily lose our way in an environment that demands constant changes. Beliefs are our anchor to help us identify the core elements of social work that we need to develop: they are also our important steering wheel, allowing us to find the right way forward as we navigate different directions (Kam, P. K., 2010).

When social workers are faced with challenges, setbacks and loss, they can establish their own beliefs and master the methods of holding on to them. In the face of rapid changes and difficult times in the social welfare sector, if social workers know and remember to return to their basic beliefs and recognise the meaning of their social work, they will be greatly supported and have more confidence to persevere.

2.6 The relationship between work stress and social workers

The above-mentioned symptoms illustrate the physiological, psychological and behavioural responses of all workers, including social workers, to work stress. Also, when these stressors are not addressed in a timely manner, work stress can also have a direct impact on the work of social workers, resulting in a lower willingness to stay in the workforce. Huang Wan-ching (2003) suggested that the more stressful the work, the lower the professional identity. The main factors that cause these factors are: work overload, frustrating environmental pressure, often facing conflicts that do not match with one's own perceptions, feelings of powerlessness, lack of achievement and interpersonal tension, etc. (Hwang Yuan-shie and Chuang Li-hsin, 2019). Work stress can cause social workers to be emotionally volatile, unable to think calmly and find the best way to handle and make judgments, resulting in low work mood and inability to counsel cases effectively. In these physically and emotionally exhausting situations, work stress can have a direct impact on work mood, leading to burnout in the social work profession.

Due to the rapid changes in the external social environment, the role of social workers has become more uncertain and the workload has increased, which can easily lead to stress if the individual is not able to cope with the situation and emotions. There is no definitive definition of stress, but when the right amount of stress is applied to both external and internal stimuli, it can lead to growth and better performance; however, if stress is built up over time, it is often impossible to recognise the tipping points that can be faced, and the ability to heal and defend oneself against health problems is missed.

On the other hand, if social workers can effectively cope with their work stress, they can avoid burnout, for example, by allocating their time effectively, arranging relaxing activities, and seeking help when they are troubled, etc. The work of social workers has the meaning of serving the people, and the mission of the work can also be reconciled with the work pressure, which in turn can generate positive work emotions and enable social workers to achieve higher levels of achievement from their work, thus turning work pressure into an aid and a key to sustaining social workers. Therefore, the factors affecting work stress, the possible effects of work stress on social workers, and how social workers can cope with their own work stress will be the main focus of this study.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study design

The work pressure of social workers is due to the unique nature of their work. The immediate nature of their work and the increasing diversity and complexity of their work as society develops will lead to a high level of pressure. Therefore, this study used social workers as the main interviewees, adopted a qualitative research approach and through in-depth interviews, to understand the factors of work stress among social workers, the possible effects of work stress on social workers, and how social workers cope with their own work stress.

3.2 Procedures

The research process was divided into four stages: pre-study preparation, interview, interview data compilation, relevant data analysis and research results.

1. ***Pre-study preparation:*** collecting and reading literature, developing a research plan, interview outline and consent form for participation in the study, etc.
2. ***Interviews:*** The number of interviews per respondent is one and the duration of the interview was about 1-1.5 hours, depending on the actual situation.
3. ***Compilation of interview data:*** The interview notes and the researcher's observations of the interviewees were used to revise and compile the interview content for the next interview, and the questions were presented in verbatim form with textual comments on the emotional state of the interviewees.
4. ***Research results:*** The results of the study were made available to the respondents for verification and validation.

Identifying the theme and purpose of the study



Literature Collection



Targeting interviewees



Outline of the interview



Conduct a formal interview



Verbatim and coding



Compilation and analysis of interview results



Conclusions and Recommendations

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Study Method

This study used semi-structured in-depth interviews with a sample of social workers in Hong Kong by means of purposive sampling. Six respondents with different years of work and working fields were selected as representative and willing to participate in the study.

The semi-structured open-ended interviews guided the respondents to go deeper into the interview outline, focusing on listening, observing, exploring and synthesizing information during the interviews, and giving appropriate responses and links, and finding valuable information from them. Through in-depth interviews, respondents were able to empathise with the content of the interview, which was more representative and enriched the information collected during the flexible dialogue process.

3.3.2 Target informants and sampling

This study uses purposive sampling to target social workers. A total of six respondents were interviewed, who had been working in social work for two years or more, self-reported feeling stressed at work. In this study, their names are given as code names for the sake of privacy.

Respondent "A" has been working as a social worker for 14 years, mainly in youth services, including youth centre social worker, outreach social worker and mental health promotion programme social worker, and has changed service units in three agencies.

Respondent "B" had been working as a social worker for 10 years, mainly in elderly services, working in the same agency, and generally changing the work unit and service type in two to three years.

Respondent "C" has been working as a social worker for 21 years, mainly in elderly services, mostly in residential care homes for the elderly, and has changed service units and types of services for four agencies.

Respondent "D" had been working as a social worker for 10 years, mainly in elderly services, and had worked in sheltered workshops for rehabilitation services, neighbourhood elderly centre, and support centres for dementia, and had changed service agencies, with two of them.

Respondent "E" has been working as a social worker for 15 years, mainly in primary schools, and has also worked in elderly services, rehabilitation services and drug rehabilitation services, and has changed several service agencies.

Respondent "F" has been working as a social worker for 6 years, mainly in the area of elderly services, and has worked in youth centres, and had changed service agencies, with two of them.

✓ Basic Information of Respondents

Code	Gender	Age	Years of experience in social work	Field of work	Whether changed agency/unit	Whether changed jobs other than social work	Date and form of interview
A	F	35-40	14	Mainly youth services	yes	no	12/3/2022 ZOOM
B	F	35-40	10	Mainly elderly services	yes	no	17/3/2022 ZOOM
C	F	40-45	21	Mainly elderly services	yes	no	22/3/2022 ZOOM
D	M	35-40	10	Mainly elderly services with previous experience in rehabilitation services	yes	no	27/3/2022 ZOOM
E	F	40-45	15	Mainly youth services, with experience in elderly service, rehabilitation service, drug rehabilitation service and school service	yes	no	30/3/2022 Phone
F	M	35-40	6	Mainly elderly services with previous youth services	yes	no	3/4/2022 ZOOM

3.3.3 Data collection

In-depth interviews were used as a means of data collection in this study, and the interview was facilitated by supplementary tools, including the researcher, the interview outline, the transcript, and the interview notes, etc. The relevant descriptions are as follows.

In-depth Interviews

Interviews were mainly conducted in the form of ZOOM meetings and conversations. Qualitative interviews were the most widely used method of data collection in social science research, focusing on the personal feelings and experiences of the respondents. Interviews were used to explain respondents' perceptions of the research topic.

The interview began with a brief explanation of the research outline and key points, followed by a background story that framed the key issues in the stories shared by the respondents and re-explains the key points through the content of the conversation; reflecting on the responses of the respondents during the conversation, developing a new story line, re-integrating and developing new ideas or changes, and changes in the respondents' self-acceptance and identity.

Interview guideline

The interview guideline is a reference framework for the interview, starting with general questions, then focusing on specific issues to understand the way the respondents think and express themselves, so as not to limit their ideas, and then gradually moving on to the main issues explored in the study. The interview outline is as follows, with the "it" in the questions indicating the dilemmas and pressures brought to bear on the social worker (Appendix III is the Chinese Version).

- (1) How long have you been working in the social work field? What are the clients you have counselled and the content of your social work?
- (2) Which of these different types of work (units) have impressed you the most? What have you found to be the most rewarding or the greatest experience along the way?
- (3a) What incidents or situations have occurred that you often found the most difficult and demanding?
- (3b) What were the main things that made those events or situations difficult for you to deal with?
- (3c) What kind of people or situations make you feel "it"?
- (4a) If you had to use a specific image to represent 'it', what would you use?
- (4b) What is the most uncomfortable or unlikeable effect of its presence?
- (4c) What is the physical/behavioural/mental/emotional impact of its presence on you?
- (4d) How has the presence of 'it' affected your practical work?

(5a) Is there a time when you have not been (or are less) affected by it, because of any change in external circumstances? Or how was it different for you?

(5b) What have you done in this process that has sustained you through this dilemma?

(5c) What have you tried to do to release yourself from the pressure of work?

(6) What does it mean to you now to think about these dilemmas or to have gone through them?

(7) What are you holding on to in these processes? What do you hope to gain?

(8) What do you think are the reasons or actions that have driven you to serve in the social work field for a long time?

(9) What methods or mottos do you use to encourage yourself?

Interview journaling

After the interview, immediately recorded the observations of the interview, important events, unanticipated situations and own observations of the interview, so that the details of the interview could be compiled for revision and reference in the next interview.

Interview Consent Form

The interview consent form was designed to respect the research participants and to protect their privacy and personal rights. The purpose of the research, the research process, and the use and confidentiality of the audio recordings were clearly explained to the respondents before the formal interview and audio recording, in order to reduce their defensiveness. The consent form was amended according to the respondent's opinion and the interview was conducted after the consent was signed.

Recording equipment

The interview was recorded throughout the interview. The audio files were used for data analysis and for no other purpose.

3.3.4 Research credibility and ethics

1. Respect for personal preference: The interview process respected the personal preference of the interviewee.
2. Interview questioning: Interviews were conducted in accordance with the interview method, after confirming the wishes of the interviewee, an outline of the interview was sent to the interviewer and the interview was scheduled.
3. To ensure the privacy of the interviewee: Information about the interviewee was treated under a pseudonym during the research process to ensure privacy.
4. Do not endanger the physical and psychological well-being of the interviewees: avoid touching the physical and psychological well-being of the interviewees, avoid sensitive issues in the interview, and choose a comfortable space and sufficient time for the interview so that the interviewees do not feel pressured during the interview.
5. To comply with the principle of integrity: The research trusts the interviewees and they understand the purpose and content of the research and that they contribute to the research.
6. To analyse relevant data objectively, without deliberately excluding negative or unintended data, and to obtain a complete picture of the findings of the study; to explain the shortcomings and limitations of the study design to enhance the credibility of the study.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS/ FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Through in-depth interview collection and data analysis, the researcher further examined whether the inferences in this study were supported. In the following three sections, the findings of the interviews with the six respondents are analysed in terms of work stress factors, work stress effects and ways to cope with work stress.

During the interview process, the researcher did not exactly follow the set questions, but tried to keep the interview as light as possible, allowing the respondents to speak freely and describe their work experiences, the situations that cause emotions and the way they deal with them, etc., in order to explore the direction and depth in a casual manner.

4.1 Factors contributing to social workers' work stress

Stress at work arises mainly from one's own work. The changes and demands of the internal and external environment are difficult to handle with the experience and resources available, resulting in abnormal physical and psychological conditions and generating The psychological feelings of unease, anxiety and depression. It is assumed in this study that the main reasons for social workers to feel stressful at work are their work arrangement, including heavy workload, long working hours and overtime work (Proposition 1.1). On the other hand, the organisation and management culture has increased the work demands and expectations of supervisors (Proposition 1.2). Moreover, the work content of social workers is somewhat unique and there are often difficulties in handling cases (Proposition 1.3). In addition, improper interpersonal relationship management may lead to tension between social workers and their clients, or disagreement with colleagues and supervisors (Proposition 1.4), increasing the work pressure of social workers.

Proposition 1.1: Work arrangement (heavy workload, long working hours, overtime work)

A, who has been working for 14 years, is now working as a social worker in a large social welfare organisation promoting mental health programmes. As the organisation is of a certain scale, her supervisor is very aggressive in expanding new services and always gives personal advice to her subordinates on their work. The workload is even more demanding and trivial than her previous organisation, and even in her spare time, she has to handle work and reply to messages, often working overtime.

"I must have worked more than 50 hours of overtime. Because my role is also that of a supervisor, I have to do my own service on the one hand, and spend a lot of time managing my subordinates on the other, because I often have to fulfil not only my supervisor's requirements, but also assign work to other colleagues to handle. What they have done, I, as a supervisor, have to spend a lot of time to check and follow up. I have been working in different organisations in the past. The supervisors I used to work with in different organisations were also demanding types, even on Saturdays and Sundays we all had to reply to messages, so OT time was quite high." -- A

"I think there are a lot of OT situations in this industry. In many organisations, when you are in a middle level position, it is very difficult to let go of work, for example, when colleagues have a lot of unexpected situations, there will be a lot of complicated and changing things to deal with, and even when there is an epidemic, even if there are a lot of services that need to be suspended, supervisors want to have more services to expand, and want to try to meet the FSA requirements of the SWD, or supervisors will feel that they have to do more services because the service targets have needs, even if the service targets do not have needs, supervisors think that colleagues will have the time and space to do it." -- A

B, who has been working for 10 years, is now working as a social worker in a DECC with her current caseload being mainly elderly services. In the past, she felt a lot of pressure due to her lack of experience and seniority while handling management work. As the centre manager has taken a 16-week break due to maternity leave, B has become the replacement manager in a less senior position and has taken up supervisory duties that she has not done before, as well as being responsible for the annual performance appraisal of her colleagues and subordinates.

“I was working on a nine-month project after graduating and was promoted to a three-year post as Programme Officer before the project was completed. It was only when I started that I realised how small and humble the centre was, as I had many good colleagues working with me at DECC. After the change, I found that the centre was small, there was a lot of work, no supervisor to give instructions, no colleagues to ask, and the change made me feel very lonely. It was a painful three years at that time. In a small centre with only a few people to run it, you have to do it all by yourself, and you really need to be versatile to cope with it. I had to wash the toilets because the organisation could not afford to hire more staff.” -- B

“The working environment is much more stressful than before. I used to work as a project base and only had to meet the requirements for regular submission of data files on top of the project, but now I am back in DECC, but my department has the same manpower as before and the workload is equal to the size of DECC, so as you can imagine there is a lot more work.” -- B

“In fact, I do not have the power to assign anyone to do a specific job. If the IC does the appraisal, the other party will not object, but if I do it, it will be very embarrassing because my work post level is a sandwich middle level, on the one hand, I have to maintain a good relationship with the IC, and on the other hand, I have to have good

communication with colleagues at the same level or lower level, so the appraisal will be very embarrassing and difficult for me.” -- B

With 21 years of working experience, C is currently working as a social worker in a CCSV with a focus on elderly services. In the past, she was mostly involved in residential care services for the elderly, which involved a wide range of professionals and co-workers in different positions, and there was a lot of complicated co-ordination work. She is also under a lot of pressure as she is the only one responsible for the communication and liaison with the elderly family members.

“The work must be stressful, in fact, social worker arranges each activity, the whole procedure and preparation work must be well thought out, need to make a check list and other colleagues to discuss, a joint meeting, a briefing, a debriefing, in fact, involves a lot of things, the whole process is very stressful.” -- C

“I feel that there is pressure on social workers in all areas, the front is to face the relationship with the client's family, the back is the co-ordination between colleagues, and of course social workers themselves have to be rush to meet the key performance indicators in number. Social workers are required to work in a number of groups and programmes each year, and there is a yearly plan of agency to follow up with them and meet the official statistics. There is a lot of pressure in it.” -- C

“As a residential service worker, you cannot do paper work during office hours, so you need to do OT every day. During the few years I worked in the residential care service for the elderly, I could not go home to have dinner with my family because I had to do OT every day, so I had to ask my family to leave food for me. On the other hand, as the family members of the clients would visit the elderly, usually between 5 and 6pm, they would leave after dinner and I would need to meet with them before 5 to 6pm to understand the situation of the elderly and ask them what they think about the daily care.” -- C

D, who has been working for 10 years, is currently working as a social worker in a DECC with a caseload of mainly elderly services. Due to the serious problem of ageing population in the area served, the centre has a large number of active cases. Also, the centre has a large number of members, which making the case load of the social workers three times that of FSA.

“There are a lot of cases that I have accumulated and there are a lot of documents that I cannot finish in time, but CASE after CASE, sometimes some clients or their family members call me and I may not be able to remember who they are immediately. At that time I felt a bit guilty, I felt that I had accumulated too much work and it was painful, but I couldn't finish it in one go, so the work just kept piling up.” -- D

“I personally handle over 60 active cases, with about 20 unopened ones, and I don't work exclusively on cases, but also on other tasks such as groups and programmes. Our case load is three times that of the FSA because of the ageing population in the district, so the number of cases is particularly high. The characteristic of this area is that the elderly are very long-lived and the elderly population is very dense, but government resources have not increased another DECC, so we only have one centre to cover all the needs of the elderly in the area.” -- D

“The most difficult thing is to deal with many cases, apart from cases, there are also members, members' matters also have to be dealt with, members can be cases or not cases at the same time. We have more than 900 members, if they need help to apply to the government to repair the water pipes, you have to help them too, even if they are not your case. The only thing you can do is to refer out those that can be referred out. But when these requests, if there are five or six a day, and colleagues share one per person is also very hard, each person will accumulate more than 100, and the case is not easy to open, need to spend time to understand before opening a case, will become a

home visit, only not open case intake. In fact, there are many trivial matters in the case of the elderly.” -- D

E, who has been working for 15 years, is currently working as a school social worker in a primary school, mainly in the area of school-based services. As there are many staff members in the school, she often communicates with different teachers and inevitably has to get along with different teachers. Some teachers do not understand and appreciate the work of the school social worker, which leads to communication difficulties and misunderstandings between them.

“Because the school director was so critical of the work, I had to spend more time revising it, and even ended up having to switch to another plan. This is often the case, and it wastes a lot of my time. It is annoying that the notice document has to be amended 10 to 20 times. I would wonder why he couldn't tell me what he wanted in one go, why did he have to revise it 10 to 20 times before he told me what he wanted? The school director is always critical, thinks the formatting is not good enough, and has many comments that make me dread working with him. I may not even be able to get my work done during office hour. I don't want to bring work home to do, I want to do it at school, which will make me spend more time at school and turn it into OT. Because I have to deal with other people's requests, I have to spend less time on other tasks, including meeting with students and other activities.” -- E

F, who has been working for 6 years, is currently working as a social worker in a DECC, serving mainly elderly cases. As his immediate supervisor is very aggressive, even though the number of services provided by the centre has reached the FSA standard of the SWD, his supervisor still asks his subordinates to do more and more work, which in effect increases his workload and requires him to spend extra time to cope with his work, making him feel difficult to cope with his supervisor's expectation.

“Sometimes it can be tricky to understand the expectations of your supervisor. For example, if you have friends or colleagues who are familiar with similar services in the district, you will sometimes find that the figures are different and that they are more lenient, and you find that your supervisor is more stringent by comparison. Naturally, you feel that you are trying to be more demanding and that you have worked hard to achieve your goals, but your supervisor is more demanding.” -- F

“I always work more than 44 hours a week and sometimes I take home paperwork that I can't handle during working hours or leave it at the centre for more time. I don't mind giving extra time to complete my work, especially since the recent epidemic, ‘work from home’ has made it more difficult to tell what is work time and what is private time. If colleagues or supervisors don't understand what the working hours are, I need to call them back immediately. It's really hard to keep track of work hours. Before the epidemic, it was common for me to work more than 10 hours a week, or one to two hours a day, during my private time. For example, recently, I had to do the annual accounts at the end of March. I had to go to work at 8am and finish work at 7pm to 8pm. I had to work 12 hours without having a meal. I prefer to work continuously, so I don't want to be interrupted. Social workers seem to be not more concerned about their overtime work. Some colleagues would take their work home and continue to do it.” -- F

In summary, the work stress of social workers is due to the huge workload, i.e. Proposition 1.1 is valid. Respondents shared that the main reasons for long working hours and excessive stress were due to the inconsistency between their supervisors' expectations and their own, the friction of different opinions with their supervisors, the lack of seniority and experience while having to cope with administrative work, the large amount of complex coordination work and the need to maintain close contact with family members, the problem of ageing population which makes caseload more

than other districts or units, the difficulty in integrating with the roles of different parties and building cooperative relationships with them. As a result, the workload of social workers is often very heavy, resulting in long working hours and even overtime work, which puts pressure on their work.

Proposition 1.2: Organisation and management culture (demands and expectations of work by the organisation and supervisors)

“I think the tricky part is how to get along with your supervisor, the difference in expectations or values, and how you can respond to that.” -- A

“I think that even if I move to a different organisation or a different service unit, I need to work with different types of supervisors to understand each other's ideas in order to develop services. Very often, from the supervisors' point of view, they want to do more large-scale activities and design a lot of innovative activities and services, but I think about whether those services are what the users need, or whether it's just a case of an organisation wanting to expand its service portfolio, when in fact it's the boss behind the scenes who wants to promote himself and then asks for more new services. I want to deal with some supervisors who only want to expand their services, but I do the frontline myself will feel whether the client needs it the most. If not, but I have to spend a lot of time to do these unrealistic services, I would find it very difficult and hard.” -- A

“It seems to be a waste of time because it is obvious that we have different ideas In fact, the intention behind him is not like this, I have just said that his purpose is actually to get a promotion of his position, or to get some merit or other things. I think the biggest impact of this is that, in fact, you clearly know that everyone's values are very different, but you have to package a go to explain the whole thing, so obviously everyone does not

agree, in effect, like a waste of everyone's time I feel as if we are all arguing about different things, but when the bottom line remains the same, a lot of time can be wasted in bonding.” -- A

*“I was given a lot of work by my supervisor, dozens of cases and many programs and projects, plus I had to write a lot of funding, which added up to a really big workload.” -
- D*

“I find it very difficult and stressful to deal with the school director. For example, he does not respond directly when asked beforehand, he does not explain what he want, but only after I have finished, he blame me for what I have not done well and only when something goes wrong. The partnership between social workers and schools is very delicate. Are social workers colleagues of the teachers? Are they helpers? Are they subordinates?” -- E

“Teachers always think that social workers are their subordinates. OK fine, it doesn't matter if I am subordinate, but you have to tell me clearly what you really want. I don't know what's in your mind, but when I make a mistake, you come and blame me, accusing me of not asking questions beforehand, when in fact you didn't tell me what I should do before. This makes me feel very hard. Sometimes the teacher will blame you mercilessly. He will think that you are not helping him but breaking the rules here.” -- E

“Sometimes it can be tricky to understand the expectations of your supervisor. For example, if you have friends or colleagues who are familiar with similar services in the district, you will sometimes find that the figures are different and that they are more lenient, and you find that your supervisor is more stringent by comparison. Naturally, you feel that you are trying to be more demanding and that you have worked hard to achieve your goals, but your supervisor is more demanding.” -- F

“A very realistic situation is that no matter which organisation or which type of service, they all have to meet the FSA requirements of the SWD, which vary from organisation to organisation or from unit to unit. The FSA is different for each organisation or each unit, although a line was initially set, there are differences, depending on each unit and even each supervisor's opinion. If you meet a boss who is aggressive and wants better numbers, then his subordinates will have more demands on their work, but there will be a strong sense of difference and pressure compared to other people in the same service.”

-- F

Summing up the above, the organisation and management culture, especially the demands and expectations of the organisation and supervisors at work, have a great impact on social workers, i.e. Proposition 1.2 holds true. Respondents shared their experiences of getting along with their supervisors, believing that some supervisors' demands were higher than the actual needs (FSA), their different expectations and philosophies from each other, or the difference in status between teachers and social workers could cause work stress for social workers.

Proposition 1.3: Work content of social workers (difficulties encountered in handling a case, significant work responsibilities, work involving handling a crisis or facing life and death, etc.)

B has encountered work content that is not commensurate with her position at work. As she was not a senior manager, she did not know management, administrative and supervisory skills. When she had to face the centre manager in lieu of maternity leave, she felt very stressed when she had to manage colleagues in similar positions, especially when she had to handle the appraisal of her colleagues. She is even more overwhelmed by the fact that this supervisory work is a big responsibility and she is afraid that it will ruin the harmony between everyone.

"I've tried several things that add up to a lot of pressure for me, and that is to deal with the personnel and services part. There is a period of time I need to help to manage a centre, called the fake director position, in fact, I had never been a director, in the service level is to do it alone I am in an inappropriate position, to deal with their appraisal for colleagues. Therefore, the appraisal will affect the relationship between myself and my colleagues, and at the same time directly affect the whole service, most importantly, it affects the perception of the centre by the elderly. I have to be the supervisor of my colleagues. In fact, the whole work structure should not be managed by me, but I become the supervisor of the service. " -- B

"The money and wages are always important to my colleagues. If the appraisal score does not lead to an increase in wages, my relationship with colleagues will become very stagnant. In fact, I don't have the power to assign anyone to work. If the IC does the appraisal, the other party will not object, but if I do it myself, it will be very awkward because my position level is a middle sandwich, I have to maintain a good relationship with the IC on the one hand, and on the other hand, I have to have good communication with my colleagues at the same or lower level. Therefore, it would be very embarrassing and difficult for me to do the appraisal." -- B

C has encountered many unexpected accidents or life and death situations at work. Although she knows that illness and death of the elderly are inevitable, every time she has to go through these separation of life and death, even though she is mentally prepared, she feels depressed and unknowingly creates a pressure.

"The life and death I faced in the home was a monthly occurrence, but not one that caused me a lot of grief. However, to be a home for the elderly, you have to be mentally prepared to face different deaths every month and to see familiar faces leaving every month, which is an invisible pressure of being a social worker for the elderly." -- C

“When you work in elderly services, the elderly are of a certain age and you will have to face the day when they will leave. To be honest, at the beginning, it really takes some time to adjust your emotions when you work in this field of service because you have just become a social worker and you are not facing a lot of life and death in your life experience. But after working for a while and experiencing this every day, and meeting elderly people in very poor health who are bedridden and have to have their throats inserted for long periods of time, I sometimes feel that they are worse than death. I have seen some cases who have been bedridden and have had their stomach and throat inserted for over 20 years. They are unable to eat on their own for a long time and sometimes I find this life very sad” -- C

D has been involved in many unexpected accidents or life and death situations in his workplace. He was confronted with a death at close range, which was very shocking to him and caused him a lot of guilt and depression. Even though he has heard of and witnessed many deaths in the past, he says that death is a limitation for him and even with more experience, he still finds it difficult to deal with the death of an elderly person and the grief of family members, feeling overwhelmed and stressed.

“Once I helped an elderly person to apply for a hot water pot, I had to take it up to the elderly’s home myself. When I went up there, I saw that his wooden door was not closed, and in the gap between the metal gates I saw the elderly man crouched on the floor. I was so shocked that night that he didn't respond to my shouts and saw blood all over the floor. I didn't even think about it and called my supervisor to report the incident to the police The police took my statement, asked me what my relationship with the elderly was and asked me to go and see the dead body and ask if I knew the person. It was the first time I was so close to a corpse at work. I had been working as a social worker for about five to six years at that time, and it was the first time I had been so close to a

death. Even though I usually heard about elderly people jumping to their death, I did not see it with my own eyes or in real time, so it was not so shocking.”

“This is really the most shocking incident in my social work career. It made me think about it a lot in the days to come, the images of that time often flash back and I still remember it vividly. It was not so bad that I could not sleep, but I kept asking myself whether I could have done more and whether it would have made a difference. I blamed myself for the fact that if I had gone to visit the elderly a day or two earlier, I would have noticed some clues and could have seen or reversed some things. After this incident, I had to reflect and Guilty, I did not share and express my emotions to my boss or colleagues much, but only focused on reporting the incident and handling it.”

“Fortunately, there are not always crisis, and the situation of the elderly is mostly stable, with one sudden accident occurring about once a year. It could be a suicide by jumping from a building or an accident at home. Is it easy to face these situations? In fact, death is a limitation for me. I don't know how to deal with death. Although there are many trainings, I don't think it's a matter of my skills, but I am not ready to deal with death. I don't know why, at that time I just listened quietly to the family, but I didn't know how to respond to them properly afterwards. Some of my typical counselling skills don't seem to work at that point, so it's a difficult situation for me.” -- D

“In fact, I was able to accept the departure of the elderly. Would I be very, very unhappy to see them go? No, I am ready, but I am not ready to talk to their families. If an elderly person passes away naturally, or in their sleep, it is normal for them to be old and to have reached the end of their life expectancy, and they have family members to take care of them. But when their family tells me about the death of an elderly person and then they cry out of control, I don't know how to react, even though I know they will cry.”

-- D

"I feel that it is not easy for me to empathise with an elderly person at the end of his live. When an elderly person is facing some difficulties, and he is still capable of autonomy and consciousness, I can work with him to tide over the difficulties. This is a time when I can use my empathy. I once went to the hospital to visit an elderly person who was already bedridden and had his throat inserted, and although he was conscious, he could not move. I looked at him and I knew he was going to leave, but I didn't know what to say to him. If there was a practical problem that he wanted to solve, I could empathy it, but when it came to the end, I was at a loss for words. I would be overwhelmed myself, and this is invisible stress." -- D

To summarise the above, the complexity and variety of work, especially the difficulties encountered in handling cases, the great responsibility of the work, the work involved in handling unexpected incidents or facing life and death, etc., have a great impact on social workers, i.e. Proposition 1.3 is established.

Proposition 1.4: Interpersonal relationships (tensions with service users, disagreements with colleagues and supervisors)

A often puts in a lot of effort and time when dealing with differences of opinion with her supervisor. Often, her supervisor's expectations and her understanding of the needs of the service users are very different. A does not give up communicating with her supervisor, but in the process of discussion, she has to spend extra time researching information or finding colleagues who share the same views to convince her supervisor of her different position, which creates a lot of conflicts at work and causes stress for her.

"I think we all have very different concepts and values, for example, I want to do a project, I will think about how to co-ordinate the project, how to plan the whole thing to do well,

is to hope that the money of this service is really to help the service users, is to stress the quality, I will carve each section of the group how to do well. But the concept of the boss, for example, he wants to apply for a funding. Firstly, he wants to call on a large group of people to participate, he wants a lot of outcome figures, secondly, he wants it to be an outstanding service, he wants the whole project to be known by more people, he will ask me to consider whether I can be interviewed on the radio, whether I can do more high-profile publicity, or tell the whole world what the new project is about.” -- A

“For example, we have recently organised an art exhibition and we hope that a group of young people will produce some artworks and tell their life stories in the exhibition. If it is our social workers who consider that even if some service users have little confidence and want to express their ideas or thoughts, I would like to help them solve some of their immediate difficulties so that they can finish the whole work and tell others. But my supervisor's expectation may be that when participants presents their work, my supervisor will only focus on undermining the confidence of the participant by saying, "Actually, if our organisation were to display this exhibition and put your work out there, there would be a lot of criticism and comments, what would you think if that happened? And I have to deal with my organisation, my superiors, to let them appreciate, to introduce this work out, so it must to have the appreciation value” then he will focus on this perspective, and ignore the service users to pay and grow. For some service users is a sad thing, because he will only focus on how to promote the program or agency. Then I would find it more difficult to work this way, I am working in his organization, I am his subordinate staff, I and his values are very different, how to discuss with him to a consensus outcome it?” -- A

B has difficulty in pinpointing each other's expectations of appraisal in handling her colleagues' appraisal. Her colleagues would blame her for B's rating and even affect her practical work, making her position very awkward and helpless.

“A colleague and I used to have a very good relationship, but after the appraisal was completed, the relationship turned upside down. What he originally appreciated about you would become a direct accusation that you were not doing well, and he would even badmouth you to the elders, making you feel that it would be difficult to face the situation and making you hysterical. A supervisory service that was originally not related to me, but has given rise to many personnel problems.” -- B

C found it very difficult to manage relationships with clients and family members. On the one hand, she was young and inexperienced, and on the other hand, her colleagues passed the buck to her, making her feel very helpless. The only way to deal with it is to do it the hard way. She also said that co-ordination with colleagues was very complicated. Establishing good communication and cooperation with all the parties added a lot of pressure to her.

“There was a Christmas event and colleagues invited an uncle to play the role of Father Christmas After the event, when the uncle took off his shoes, we found that there was broken glass on the inside, uncle's foot was not injured at the time. But the strangest thing was that a few days later, the back of his heel became inflamed. The daughter of the uncle was a senior government worker at the time and she became furious and wanted to pursue the incident, claiming that she had to report the incident to the police. Because of the inflammation, arrangements were made for the uncle to see a doctor and to have an X-ray, and many procedures were done. It was a really stressful time for me. Although I didn't cause the incident, the problem was that something happened to colleagues in my team and I had to deal with it. they will think it's not about them, they think I'm the team leader, so I have to be responsible for

explaining, to meet their families, to meet the doctor, to meet all the people, and I have to take full responsibility to meet one by one, which makes me a lot of pressure that incident was finally settle, finally found out all the information, the uncle's family after a long, long time, they apologised to us, because the uncle's daughter was very exaggerated, claiming to seek legal responsibility for the kind of incident since then, the number of visits from the daughter has increased and we have been greeting her every time she arrives, trying to re-establish a good relationship with her and mend the broken relationship caused by the misunderstanding.” – C

“In elderly services, nurses and social workers are in fact very contradictory, nurses have their own set of ideas and do not trust social workers, social workers want to do something for the elderly, but nurses may not be willing to cooperate In short, when you arrange for the elderly to go out, it will affect their work and rest, so colleagues in the nursing team will find it very troublesome colleagues have to do all the daily procedures with the elderly in advance, change their clothes and diapers, arrange for the elderly to be pushed to the activity venues, which actually takes a lot of manpower and arrangements. If there is a meal arrangement in the programme, there is even more work to be done. Each elderly person has different meal needs, which is very complicated, and the nurses are very nervous about the whole process, as any small problem can lead to a big accident. So these co-ordinations are very complicated.” -- C

“You usually have to face different families of the elderly, and the biggest pressure in working in a residential care home is that family members seldom visit the elderly If the relationship is distrustful, some conflicts will easily arise, no matter which team causes the conflict, the social worker will intervene because the social worker is to be a good bridge of communication with the families, so no matter which team happens, the social worker will handle it. So apart from the pressure of coordinating with your

colleagues and your own team, it is also a stifling process to maintain a good relationship with the families of the elderly.” -- C

E has found it very hard and stressful to manage the partnership with the teacher. On the one hand, she is not the one who knows the school administration best, so she has to consult the teachers frequently, but she often does not get the right response. She tried to find out what the other party wanted while she was doing it, and as a result, she repeatedly made mistakes in her work, wasting a lot of time and effort in making changes. On the other hand, the teachers did not approve of her role as a social worker and resisted the activities she designed, making it difficult for her to build a cooperative and trusting relationship with them.

“I was most impressed with my dealings with teachers. I tried to organise a teacher appreciation activity and one of the teachers felt that the activity was directed at him and thought that if the students wrote down their opinions and feelings about the teacher, it meant that they would write something unfavourable about himself, so he felt very resistant and disgusted and even reported the matter to the headmaster. I was shocked and overwhelmed by the teacher's reaction of being allergic and resistant, and could not believe that he would report the matter to the headmaster.” -- E

“I find it very difficult and stressful to get along with the school director. For example, when I ask school director beforehand, he don't respond directly and don't make his own requests clear, but only after I've done it does he blame you for what you've done wrong, and only after there's a problem does he blame you. The partnership between social workers and schools is very delicate. Is the social worker a colleague of the teacher? Is it a helper? Or is it a subordinate?” -- E

“Teachers always think that social workers are their subordinates. OK fine, it doesn't matter if I am subordinate, but you have to tell me clearly what you really want. I don't know what's in your mind, but when I make a mistake, you come and blame me, accusing

me of not asking questions beforehand, when in fact you didn't tell me what I should do before. This makes me feel very hard. Sometimes the teacher will blame you mercilessly. He will think that you are not helping him but breaking the rules here. I try not to bother any teacher and I try to coordinate all the time. I always consult the teachers about the dates, but sometimes the teachers may not be able to give me specific dates and I have to find out for myself. After all, I am not the most familiar with the school's procedures, so if I find out after arranging the dates that they are not to his liking, he will not be happy. I find this very annoying.” -- E

When dealing client's problems, F had encountered a lack of understanding towards client. As F wanted to help the client out of financial difficulties as soon as possible, he unconsciously made the client feel embarrassed. The impact on relationship building has been significant and has caused F to feel the impact and pressure.

“I once followed up a case and spent a long time with him. The case was in a difficult financial situation and the financial situation even affected his health. I tried to help him apply for financial assistance but he refused and later found out that he was resistant to apply. Sometime later, the case was brought to the attention of my colleagues and I found out that the reason for his resistance was that he felt insulted by this action and that he felt that I did not care about his feelings, which affected our relationship. He even asked my supervisor for help and tried to ask me to refer the case and not to let me follow it up. I was only trying to help the case, but I had other feelings and thoughts and felt that my "kindness as ill intentions". I felt that I had put a lot of effort into the case, I had given a lot of time to help him, but I felt that he was ungrateful and I would meet him again in the centre in the future, so I felt very uncomfortable. I have a hard time dealing with cases” -- F

In summary, social work is a people-to-people job, and dealing with complex interpersonal relationships, including tensions with clients and disagreements with colleagues and supervisors, is a major challenge for social workers, i.e. Proposition 1.4 is established.

4.2 Possible Effects of Excessive Work Stress on Social Workers

Previous studies have shown that when social workers were under excessive pressure, they would experience different personal symptoms including physical, behavioural, psychological and emotional (Proposition 2.1), such as depression and anxiety, which could lead to physical fatigue, reluctance to go to work, poor sleep, anxiety about the future and even physical discomfort. Some of these social workers may also have an impact on the organisation or practical work (Proposition 2.2).

Proposition 2.1: personal symptoms (including physical, behavioural, psychological and emotional aspects)

❖ Physical aspects

“I sometimes feel very unappetizing and uncomfortable with them, and sometimes I even feel gassy because sometimes I get so annoying and angry that my stomach doesn't feel so good.” -- A

“I was in a lot of physical discomfort as a result of the panic. For example, my body complained of blurred vision throughout the day and I went to the doctor many times but he told me he could not find the cause. My body also complained that my fingers were numb and I could not even hold a pencil steadily.” -- B

“Sometimes poor sleep quality, insomnia, waking up during sleep. I believe this is a sign of stress.” -- B

"Sometimes I have headaches and stomachs. Sometimes I don't have time to eat during lunch hour because I have too much work and I want to have a quick bite to eat, so I don't digest well. Sometimes the stress of work can cause me to have stomach pains. Insomnia and waking up in the middle of the night can affect my work performance the next day." – B

"If I am under a lot of stress during that period of time, I will wake up and only sleep lightly, I will not sleep enough, I will not be able to sleep after waking up suddenly and my sleep quality will be worse. I would lose a lot of weight all of a sudden, now I suddenly lose 6 pounds a month. I have a lot of soreness at the bottom of my neck and shoulders, probably because I have to work in front of a computer and my posture is not very good, which affects my back muscles and I often have to keep my head down. Plus I don't sleep very well, so my body is naturally irritable and I get a bit emotional." -- D

"Sometimes I don't sleep very well and sometimes I even have dreams about my boss, I have actually seen my boss in my dreams and it wasn't a pretty dream. Headaches are frequent and are a cycle. I feel very unhealthy because I often forget to eat and sleep. Although I think I am fine with not eating for 12 hours, I feel uncomfortable afterwards." -- F

"I have tried taking painkillers regularly because I have frequent headaches. Sometimes when I am busy at work, the headache will make me feel very confused and I would rather take painkillers to reduce the impact of the headache on my work. For example, if I want to concentrate when I see a case and do not want to be affected by the headache, I will take painkillers." -- F

To summarise the above, the physical symptoms that respondents experienced were: stomach and intestinal problems, poor appetite, indigestion, gastric pain; vision problems, blurred vision; finger paralysis; sleep disorders, poor sleep quality, insomnia, waking up in the middle of the

night, nightmares; headaches, relying on painkillers; sudden loss of body weight, rapid weight loss; various body aches and pains, such as neck and shoulder pains, etc.

❖ Behavioural aspects

“Because I have to take care of many areas of work, I often have little time to eat, and I eat in a hurry, and sometimes I don't even have time to go to the toilet.” -- A

“Because I was under a lot of pressure and I wanted to get rid of it, I ate a lot. I like to eat spicy food to stimulate my mind, so to a certain extent, I have eaten more spicy food, which has made me fat.” -- B

“It makes me want to avoid him when I see him. I want to avoid him at school and try not to have any contact with him.” -- E

“I have tried taking painkillers regularly because I have frequent headaches. Sometimes when I am busy at work, the headache will make me feel very confused and I would rather take painkillers to reduce the impact of the headache on my work. For example, if I want to concentrate when I see a case and do not want to be affected by the headache, I will take painkillers.” -- F

In summary, behavioral symptoms that respondents experienced were: not taking enough time to eat, chewing and swallowing too quickly; not taking time to attend to one's physical needs, e.g. going to the toilet; increasing health-impairing habits, e.g. reduced or excessive eating, eating stimulant foods; avoiding work, avoiding the people one has to deal with at work; increasing use of medication, e.g. painkillers.

❖ Psychological aspects

“Because in fact, very often you have to discuss some projects or meetings with your boss, you have to do a lot of preparatory work in advance to protect yourself, and you will

think about how to make his ideas not work. For example, if he wants to convince you to do something, he may want to convince you at a meeting. You have to communicate with other colleagues before the meeting to discuss whether they are willing to do it and what they think, so that they can stand on top of your vote of support. Then you also have to anticipate that your supervisor will hijack some of your topic at the meeting, or he will give a lot of personal opinions, you have to prepare some relevant statistics beforehand, to cite why what you say is more reasonable, or you can first insist to. Because I am a person who will insist but not necessarily compromise on everything, I will also refute him on some positions, so I will do a lot of preparatory work in advance and make a lot of documents.” -- A

“The most important thing is that my stomach can't handle it, and sometimes when I eat too much spicy food, I wonder why I have to work so hard, but I can't get rid of the unhappiness, so I think it's not worth it.” -- B

“The effect on me is that I get a bit nervous at work afterwards, and I get more attention when I go through major festivals and when I see an elderly person who is always talking about death. The normal elderly person may only meet once every month or two, while the more negative ones will contact them in a couple of weeks. Also I would call him on a major festival.” -- D

“I feel like I have less capacity and less space in my thoughts. Capacity means the capacity to tolerate oneself, or I can say that when I can handle my work in an organised way, I am full of smiles, if I am suddenly forced to handle a lot of work, I will be in a very bad mood and less tolerant of people. There really is an impact.” -- D

“I have always had a very close relationship with him at work and he is my boss, so I am under a lot of pressure. He is not supportive, but he keeps on destroying your achievements, which makes you feel very uncomfortable and moodless. I feel that

working with him makes me feel very unsure of how I am doing, whether I am doing a good job or not, and I often have doubts about myself. It's hard to get inside his head.” -

- E

“In the past, I have found it difficult and stressful to deal with cases where there was a delay in dealing with them, or when my supervisor's expectations differed from my own.

This situation can be described as 'frustration'. This frustration has often been present in my past work experience. I'm a competitive person myself, so I don't like it when things don't go perfectly or the way I want them to go, so when things don't go well, when they don't go in the right order, it makes me feel uncomfortable.” -- F

“Because I am more competitive, I hope that the work will go according to my plan. If I get stuck on one thing, I will reflect on whether I have not arranged it well enough, and then I will trap myself and make myself think more. Such a predicament will make me tense up and not let go” -- F

To sum up, psychological symptoms that respondents experienced were: insistence on one's own views and difficulty in seeing the big picture; self-doubt, self-induced dilemmas; mental tension, increased anxiety about the unknown; reduced tolerance and acceptance; loss of self-confidence, increased frustration, indecision and difficulty in making decisions.

❖ **Emotional aspects**

“Because I sometimes get so annoying and angry, and my stomach doesn't feel so good, sometimes I get a little nervous and irritable when I'm preparing for a meeting.” -- A

“At that time, there were not enough people to help myself because all my colleagues only had three, but in fact, if the main person was working, I only had to work alone. My subordinate was only half of PA and I was really under a lot of pressure at that time. Maybe I was so naive at the time that I thought I was being promoted to Programme

Director, but in fact there was no increase in salary. I was so young at the time that I thought I was being promoted to the post of Director, so I was willing to move up. It was certainly a more painful three years, but it was actually more painful after that.” -- B

“The process of working will make me feel low because of the problems of cooperation and mediation with my family members, the whole process will make me face a lot of different pressures, especially facing family members, this pressure may be very big family members may not all have points, not everyone is right, but I know that the other party is not right, I will not want to have too much conflict with him, because ‘putting the clients first’, I do not want to challenge the other party's wrong, it takes a lot of thought and effort to deal with to.” -- C

“I hate it when work builds up, I'm a person who needs to work in sections to keep my desk nice and tidy, I'm also an organised person who manages my time well, so I have a clean desk and I feel annoying if I have a lot of files on it.” – D

“I was shocked and overwhelmed by the teacher's allergic and resistant reaction, and I could not believe that he would tell the headmaster.” – E

“I think I like to be more frank with the other person, but the teacher likes to keep his words to himself, which is my biggest fear. It's hard to control if you don't make it clear, and although I may not do a bad job, I may not do what the other person wants, which makes me feel so helpless.” – E

“Sometimes work can affect my emotions and make me feel sad. But try to control my emotions so that they don't get in the way of my work.” -- F

To summarise the above, emotional symptoms that respondents experienced were: agitation, anxiety, nervousness, helplessness, depression, confusion, overwhelm.

To conclude, the physical conditions and personal symptoms of social workers often show different warning signs when they are under immense work pressure. All these are the negative effects of work stress, i.e. Proposition 2.1 is valid.

Proposition 2.2: Implications for institutional or practical work

“More work done additionally. I have done more work in dealing with my own service, but also to be strategic or very prepared for unexpected work. It makes me very anxious, and these emotions cause me to make small mistakes in my work, and I become very busy, spending a lot of time on preparatory work, which in effect leaves me less time for other services.” -- A

“On the one hand, I have to meet the requirements and expectations of my supervisor, and on the other hand, I have to insist that the services I provide are helpful and quality to the clients. Therefore, I have to pursue my supervisor's personal expectations and do what I find interesting, which really makes my work more demanding.” -- A

“Because these preparatory tasks may not necessarily affect the time spent on interviewing cases or direct services, but will in effect increase overtime work and use more of my own personal time to deal with them. For example, I have to reply to many official messages after work, I have to reply to each other during holidays, I have to get up very early to go to work, etc.” -- A

“Fear can make you feel intimidated by the actual work. There are some things that I should handle decisively, but I am afraid that it will affect the harmony between my colleagues, so I will often avoid it, or do it myself if I can, and end up imposing other tasks on myself. For example, we often need to call elderly members to inform them of important matters, but staff members may feel that it is not my job to make phone calls, so why should I be asked to do it? But the fact is that making phone calls is a routine job.

They just think that they should do what their supervisor assigns them to do, and you are not my supervisor, so you do not have the right to assign me work.” -- B

“In office hours, there are many conflicts between the elderly, because living together will have difficulties. When elderly people live together, arguments are basically a daily occurrence and can happen in different rooms, especially when an elderly person with dementia is living with an able-bodied elderly person. Therefore, there is no way to do paper work during office hours, but to do it during non-office hours. Therefore, when conflicts between people arise, even though conflicts between colleagues can be reconciled, relationships between family members or the elderly will take more time to deal with paper work.” – C

“Being in a hurry will only force me to finish my work at a certain time, which will affect me. I have to plan the night before what I'm going to do tomorrow, what I'm going to do, and plan ahead. Everyone has a limitation, so I will think about which of the more urgent ones to deal with first” – D

“I have thought about not doing this job, I would not want to stay in this environment and leave this job.” – E

“Because he was so critical at the end, I had to spend more time revising it, and I even had to switch to another plan. This is often the case and wastes a lot of my time. It's annoying to have to revise the notice document 10-20 times, this is so annoying, so it's better to tell me in one go. He would pick on me about the formatting and blah blah blah. I really dread working with him. I may not even be able to do some of the things I do during office hours, so I have to stay at school for a long time to finish them. I don't want to take work home with me, I want to do it at school, so I'll spend more time at school and become OT. Because of the need to meet his requests, there will be less time for other tasks in disguise, including meeting with students or handling other activities.” -- E

“As I am not an easy person to say no to, I often have overload situations where I have to spend more time than the scheduled 44 hours of work. Although I can take care of my practical work, I have to spend extra time on it and even use my personal time.” -- F

As social workers are responsible for their clients, they have a great sense of responsibility and mission. Therefore, the respondents would rather sacrifice their private time and continue to work on the unfinished work during their rest time or after work hours. Even if they work overtime, they do not want to affect the progress of their casework. Therefore, even if social workers are under work pressure, it does not have a great impact on their practical work. Some respondents preferred to take on more workload to avoid the continuous influence of work stressors, while others had planned their work priorities for tomorrow in their private time so as to deal with the pressure they were facing as soon as possible. In summary, there is still a slight impact on the organisation or practice, i.e. Proposition 2.2 is valid.

4.3 Ways for social workers to cope with their own work stress

Social workers have their own ways to cope with their own work stress (Proposition 3.1, for example, by allocating their time effectively, arranging relaxing activities, and asking for help when they are troubled. The work of social workers has the meaning of working with people (Proposition 3.2). The mission, value, perseverance and beliefs of social work can also be reconciled with work pressure (Proposition 3.3) to generate positive work emotions, so that social workers can achieve higher levels of achievement from their work and turn the work pressure into an aid to sustain social work (Proposition 3.4 and Proposition 3.5).

Proposition 3.1: Ways to handle social workers' own work stress

“I have a lot of different ways of reducing stress, for example, I come across a lot of New Age stuff to try and help me relax and understand myself, there are a lot of different

forms of ways to help myself. New Age is some new spiritual methods, for example, a lot of different mind strategies, a lot of different things about myself, understanding a state of being, or using aromatherapy to relax myself. There are also crystal, tarot, the law of attraction, how to think about something that will have a better effect, to believe in hope, to believe in wishing for a better outcome, in fact it can relax you, you can be aware of your state, what your situation is and where you are, and if it is not OK, then you can choose to take a break, or choose not to do the job. It helps you to know where you are.”

-- A

“I used to travel a lot to help relieve myself from the work environment. If I was in Hong Kong, I would be approached by a lot of people, even though technology is advanced and it is easy to find someone there. But when I go on a trip, some people think I am not in Hong Kong, so they don't bother me as much. Travelling is a way to escape from stressful places and relax for a while.” – A

“There is no special way to deal with my stress, I just have to do the appraisal and I don't have time to think about it, so I just have to do it.” -- B

“Faced with a stressful working environment, I actually attach great importance to the relationship with my colleagues, so I have made a lot of efforts to mend it. If a colleague has a programme and I still have a bit of space, I will help and work together with them. So I will deal with the problem first, ignore the pressure on myself and fix the relationship first, then the pressure will be gone.” – B

“Exercise is a good way to relieve stress, even if I am busy, I will take some time to have a walk. I will set two hours to free, no matter where I go, after one hour I can go back and turn around, then I can control I don't think about anything for two hours, I just let empty myself, it's like mindfulness, instead of putting tension in my head, I put my thoughts in my limbs or other parts of my body. Or look at the scenery and think of

something cheerful. I am very Q-ish in thinking of something cheerful, and to a certain extent, this is a way of relieving stress at work.” – C

“It works on me, but it may not work on others because everyone's personality is different. I am not a person who holds grudges. When I am not happy, I can relieve my stress by eating a meal that I like to eat.” – C

“There is a way not to think about it or not to remember it, because people have a choice, they can choose to be happy and forget about it. So this is a very wise choice. I don't know if I was born with this flaw, but it's my body's ability to not remember things I'm not happy about, maybe it's a gift from God. It's a choice whether you choose to think positively or whether you choose to be miserable all the time.” -- C

“My beliefs have also supported me and made me change my mind. The Bible teaches me not to be angry until tomorrow, and I feel that I am not a wise person, that I may not be able to handle every conflict, but I remember all the time that God will not be more difficult than we can bear, so I feel all the time that no matter what difficulties we face, there will be someone who will help me, who will say that there is no difficulty that I cannot overcome.” -- C

“I would take the initiative to tell my supervisor about my grievances. I had a particularly heavy workload in elderly services before Christmas last year, I have a few more fundings to write at the same time and I was under a lot of pressure. The pressure was so great that it almost burst into flames. I was thinking of quitting my job and had a long talk with my supervisor before I exploded and released my grievancesI don't mean I don't have to do it, but I have more colleagues to help me do it together, so I don't have to do it alone. I have to do it all, I have to be in charge, but it's much easier to do it with the help of my colleagues, so I'm over the resentment and the urge to quit at that moment.” -- D

"I will take care of what I have to do as soon as possible, so that the pressure will be reduced. If I have something to do, do it first and don't procrastinate, so that I don't continue in this situation." -- D

"I would drink red wine to reduce stress, I think I was a bit of an alcoholic myself, I drank half a bottle of red wine a day, which was actually quite a lot, I would empty myself, I would sit on the massage chair and drink wine, after I finished drinking I would take a nap, I would not think about anything, I would sit on the massage chair and float around, so calmly for half an hour, for an hour, for a nap, I did not have to do anything." -- D

"Is there any other way to reduce stress? I really don't think so in the last two years. I used to run, but now I have an epidemic and don't want to run around, so I used to walk home after work as a stress reliever." -- D

"When he knew I was going to do placement and decided to quit, I was reborn. I told him that I had to do placement and I couldn't continue to work here, so I had to quit the job, and since he knew I wasn't going to do it soon, his attitude changed for the better. I think he thought I was not going to leave, so that's why his attitude changed. I thought I hadn't promised to stay here and I would really want to die if I had to work another year." -- E

"I have used some methods to help me release myself from the stress. I can release the stress when I deal with students. Not all the students I deal with are naughty, but some are cute and I can be more forgiving when I deal with them. I am very happy with the students. If I don't enjoy dealing with students at school, and I am dealing with bad teachers, I am really under a lot of pressure." -- E

"Because of the pressure of work, I sometimes spend more time relaxing, for example, playing the computer, eating, drinking or shopping to relieve stress. Sometimes I will buy something to admire and let myself relax." -- F

“On a personal level, the way to relax is to let go of yourself and do something relaxing, such as playing video games. On a work level, I look for colleagues who share the same ideas or are close to me, so that we can exchange ideas and talk about work-related topics. Cooperation with colleagues is very important.” -- F

“Although we do all the work on our own, we need the support and encouragement of our colleagues. We can't work alone, and when we get stuck, we need to ask for help. A little help from colleagues would make things even better. It's hard to find supervisors with the same philosophy, but it's easier to find colleagues with similar ideas.” -- F

Social workers themselves are professionally trained and know how to help their clients cope with their own stress, so it is easy to see that social workers also have appropriate ways to deal with personal stress at work. Some of the ways to reduce stress include: developing personal interests, using New Age methods to free the mind; arranging relaxing activities, such as going on trips, walking, spacing out, running, doing exercise; building good relationships with colleagues, such as sharing food, sharing work; developing personal interests, such as finding food or wine to taste, playing video games, eating, drinking, shopping; maintaining positive thinking, such as choosing happiness, forgetting pain; seeking support from religious, such as spirituality, prayer, reading the Bible verses; reflecting views to management, releasing grievances and stress; discussing solutions to problems with colleagues and supervisors, eliminating or reducing sources of stress, working with colleagues to complete work and reduce workload; planning work, setting priorities, dealing with urgent matters as soon as possible, improving time management, not delaying work; enjoy the happiness and sweetness of work, enjoy spending time with the people you serve; accept the support of others, exchange views with colleagues who share similar ideas, build up a support network with colleagues, lend a helping hand to those in need, and provide mutual support and encouragement; and take the initiative to seek help when in trouble. Some respondents also said that they had decided to leave their jobs for the time being to find a more suitable direction for themselves. The Occupational Safety and Health Council (2017) recommends several ways to

improve one's ability to cope with work stress. In this study, it was found that the methods used by the social workers interviewed to deal with work stress were almost identical to those recommended by OSHC. Summing up the above, proposition 3.1 is valid.

Proposition 3.2: What past difficulties mean to social workers

❖ Standing her ground

A said that the meaning of past work stresses and difficulties is to learn more about herself, to learn to stand up for what she thinks is right, to speak up for the people one serves and for justice, and to try to make one's voice heard to reach out to those around one.

“This situation of hypocrisy has taught me more about myself and I have learnt to stick to certain things. I think that social workers themselves are more obedient and willing to obey, but when they start to have some experience and see things differently, and when they encounter some injustice or something that they don't think is right, I think they need a voice to speak out, to express their own ideas, to try to discuss with the other side, not necessarily just to be obedient. If I can help a service after expressing my opinion, it will be more meaningful, if no one speaks up, many things will not be changed. I think that as a director or a senior officer, they are not exposed to a lot of frontline work. If I do not express my own voice, it seems that I am not fulfilling my responsibility as social workers. So I have learned to be more infected or to try to express myself in different ways.” -- A

“In fact, some unforgettable experiences of past cases, can become my support point because I am fond of doing frontline work, in the frontline work such as meeting cases, doing services in the process, I see that the client has grown, or I see that the client has needs, I would want to plan some services for them to improve their current situation and these positions would entice me to continue to want to do the whole thing better.

Even if your voice is weaker, or your supervisor is under pressure to you, or even the whole unit is under pressure, you will feel that you should persevere, even if you are a small voice, you will not want to compromise easily, because if you have your reasons, he has his neglect, you will want to hold on.” – A

❖ **Rethinking the meaning and goal of her study**

B said that the past work pressure and hardship had brought her the meaning of rethinking the meaning and goal of her study, examining her own shortcomings, appreciating the pressure of becoming a senior manager and the reality of work difficulties, and understanding the importance of learning management skills.

“I would ask myself why I was studying for. It was because I didn't want to stay in a position where I was given orders to other people. I hope that I can provide services that can meet the needs of the elderly and create a harmonious corporation situation between myself and my colleagues, but I really didn't think that I would be intimidated at management level. Then you will think about why you are actually studying for.” -- B

“Initially, my belief was that after studying, I would be able to move up to the management level so that I could have more room for better cooperation with my colleagues, or I would not need to be assigned to do things, and I would have more power to do what I want to do. However, after this incident, I may reflect on the fact that there is a certain amount of pressure to manage other people at senior level and it is not as simple as I thought. Therefore, when I reflect on what I can achieve after studying, I may not be able to achieve what I want.” -- B

“This time I will find that there are many more hurdles in reality, many things to continue to respect each other and many more management skills to learn.” -- B

❖ **Renewed sense of appreciation for her past hardships and gains**

C said that the stress and hardship of the past work has brought her a renewed sense of appreciation for her past hardships and gains, a recognition of her past commitment, and a way to cope with her difficulties by choosing to face them head-on and changing her mind to find God's hope and will in the midst of them.

"I think my career as a social worker is very satisfying because I have been through the hard things and I have been through it all. I think it is a very difficult job to be a residential care worker, and I think I have overcome the 10 years of hard work. The one I started with was the hardest one, so the one after that was not so hard because I had already gone through the hardest one. Of course, there are many difficult things in this world that I have not experienced, but I have made a framework for myself. I prefer to do elderly services, so I have already done the most troublesome level of elderly services. I am happy with my job." -- C

"I don't think you can change the environment unless you change jobs, but I think the most important thing is your personality, you have to think about it, because if it's the same pattern, if it happens to organization A, it will happen to organization B, and it will happen to organization C. So I don't choose to change the environment, I choose to settle issues and change myself, I adjust my thinking." -- C

"God will close a door, but he will open a window for you. He will not fail to give you a way out, it is just a matter of whether you are willing to find a way out and whether you are willing to pray to God." – C

❖ **Affirming the importance of time management skills**

D said that his past work stresses and dilemmas have taught him the importance of learning to improve his time management skills, planning his work, setting priorities and dealing with urgent matters as soon as possible.

“Being in a hurry will force me to have better time management. If I am in a hurry, I will think of ways to handle the work in batches and force myself to grow. I used to pile up a lot of work on my desk and put it off, but now I am learning how to deal with work faster and prioritise it, and my attitude will grow.” -- D

❖ **Greater awareness of people's true needs**

E said that the stress and hardship of her past work has brought her a greater awareness of the people she serves and a better understanding of their true needs.

“I have never thought that there are many teachers of different types, and I have never thought that there are such teachers, so I have the opportunity to open my eyes.” -- E

“I realised that there are many different kinds of teachers and different kinds of parents in the school. In handling each other's situations, I understand their needs better. I have been able to influence my colleagues at work and become their companion, experience with them and be their support.” – E

❖ **Self-Recognition of achievements in serving others**

F said that the stress and hardship of his past work has taught him to learn to relate to and communicate with the elderly, and to understand that the way to relate is to be tolerant and patient, which he embodies in his own parenting. He felt the influence and power he brought to the service users, witnessed their growth and change, and recognised his belief in helping others.

“Because I work in the elderly centre, I have learnt to work with the elderly, so I have a better understanding of what tolerance and patience means.” -- F

“This job has given me a lot of meaning. I did not have a good relationship with my parents when I was growing up, but by working in elderly services, I have become more

patient in communicating with the elderly, and I understand that I need to be more patient and spend more time with them.” -- F

“When I worked with young people many years ago, the service users were very young at the time, but now they have grown up and have changed a lot when I met them, and some have even become celebrities. Although I have not had a great impact on them myself, I am glad to see their growth and changes and it is a support to me to experience their growth.” -- F

“Our work cannot completely change people's lives, but to walk with them in their lives and experience their growth and changes is a rewarding experience for us as social workers. Not only do we see a change in our service users, but we also see a change in our outlook on life and our understanding of the needs of the elderly and how to communicate with them, which leads to a deeper understanding and tolerance of our family members.” -- F

“I used to be a person with a twist, I was not very good at school when I was young. I participated in leadership training in a youth centre when I was younger. At that time, I came into contact with social welfare services and social workers, and the social worker who led the activities had a great influence on my growth. She gave me a lot of advice and encouragement, which made me want to help others. I was influenced to become a social worker by my past social work experience.” -- F

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said: “He who has a why to live for, can bear with almost any how”, if he can find a solid reason for living, he can bear all hardships. The word 'meaning' refers to the role and value that people can bring to an action, including their perception of meaning and their understanding of life. The meaning we give to our work determines the attitude we adopt in our work, which ultimately affects the quality and excellence of our work and what we get out of it.

Despite the difficulties, the respondents were able to find meaning and hope in their careers as social workers, and these were the driving forces that kept them going. In summary, proposition 3.2 is valid.

Proposition 3.3: Own persistence and beliefs of social workers

❖ Recapitulation of personal choice

A holds the belief that even though she works hard, she still feels that she has a choice. She believes that she has own choice between continuing to do what she does and fighting or disagreeing with different positions, believing that she can hold on to what is right.

“In terms of beliefs, even though I am working hard, I think I am not a person who has no choice, I feel that I have a choice. But even though it's hard, I still insist on it because if you are a person who has no choice, you have taken this position, you have accepted a salary and you have to rely on this job to make a living, once you lose this job you will die. In disguise, you are under a lot of pressure to do this job, and you must obey whatever your boss says.” – A

“So I will tell myself that even if I find it very hard, this is a choice I want to continue to make, so I will continue to think that way. I have more than just one choice. I can choose to continue doing this job, I can choose to give up this job, I can choose to do this job in a sloppy manner, I can choose to follow my boss, I can choose to stick to my beliefs and do a good job. In this industry, it is hard work, whether it is following his beliefs or my own consciousness. I think that among the many choices, I think my own position is related to the fact that I choose to continue to do it, and I can still fight or disagree with it, and I can stick to my own ideas.” -- A

❖ **Continues to persevere and face difficulties**

B holds the belief that no matter what difficulties there are in her work, she must continue to persevere and face them with courage, especially in her goal of studying. She recognises her mission as a social worker and has always been with the elderly. She is able to continue on her path as a social worker because she has persevered in her beliefs and overcome challenges one after another.

“In fact, I have to continue to persevere, because in personnel matters, no matter what stage you are in, you have to face it. In the past, whether I was a Programme Officer or a Centre Supervisor, I was always faced with the problem. But I understand that if I don't have a degree, if I don't put myself in a higher position, I won't even have a voice and I won't be able to fight for what I see and what I want. That's why I will always stick to my goal of studying.” -- B

“I feel that in my life, there are no other visitors than the elderly. I feel as if I am with them for the rest of my life, and I have a heart to walk with them. My life is with him and his life is with me. My past experiences have been a constant source of inspiration for me. I have been given many challenges by God and I have been willing to accept them. I have not given up on this job in the middle of the process because I was challenged. I did not do it in a sloppy manner, but I went through one hurdle after another with determination. It is because of my perseverance that I have been working as a social worker for such a long time and have continued to do so in these 10 years.” -- B

❖ **Each and every harsh difficulty has been overcome**

C holds the belief that “each and every harsh difficulty has been overcome”. No matter how many difficulties are before her eyes, no matter how many rocks of different sizes are in front of

her, she will always try to smooth them out, instead of diverting or avoiding them, and accepting the current challenges with courage.

"I always tell myself that if I leave work because I'm unhappy about something, I haven't dealt with it and it will come up again somewhere else. I'm going to avoid repeating it, I'm going to overcome it and I'm going to try to smooth it out so that there's not another stone in my path that's going to I will try to smooth it out so that there is no more stone in my path to trip me up. If the stone is sharp and I don't make the road flat, I'll always have the opportunity to go back down that road and I'll always stumble. So if I'm not happy in one job and I go to a second one with the same problem, maybe the stone is bigger and more broken, so I might as well grind it down before it's too late." -- C

❖ **Become a companion on an equal footing**

D holds the belief that the role of a social worker should not be high and mighty, but to sit on an equal footing with the clients and walk side by side with them. In the process of walking with them, he can learn from each other's life experience and life philosophy, learn to be humble, see through life and not to be obsessed, and understand the truth of helping others to help themselves.

"I can learn from their life experience, I can learn to humble myself, social workers are not a superior profession, social workers should not have hegemony, the elderly can also share some good things, they can learn their philosophy of life, they can learn to see life as they see it, many things do not matter, over time I learn not to be so obsessed, so that I can see life as I see it, the elderly can also influence me. The social workers can really help people to help themselves, and I can gain a lot from each other." – D

❖ **Discovering the bright spots in each individual**

E holds the belief that she must find the best in her students, guide them to see the good in themselves, increase their motivation to change and help them remove the negative stigma.

“I will insist on seeing more of the students' strengths and try to find them out. I used to see only the bad things they did and look for their weaknesses, but now I will look for their strengths more. When you find their strengths, they will immediately become different, they will be very happy, when you magnify their strengths, they will feel that I have a lot of very good things for people to find out, they will be very motivated to change themselves And sometimes we have to pretend not to see their weaknesses, because their shortcomings are often deliberately uncovered by others, we don't need to reinforce their low self-esteem because they are already full of holes and they have been criticized a lot by their teachers and family members. So sometimes we have to look at the good side of them and help them to remove the negative labels from their bodies.” -- E

❖ **Walk with the needy and witness their growth and transformation**

F holds the belief that the mission of a social worker is to walk with the clients, to experience their growth and changes, and to learn a lot from them and change his outlook on life.

“Our work cannot completely change the lives of other people, but the experience of walking with them in their lives and experiencing their growth and changes is one of the rewards of being a social worker. Not only do we see a change in our own service users, but we also see a change in our outlook on life and our understanding of the needs of the elderly and how to communicate with them, which leads to a deeper understanding and tolerance of our family members.” -- F

The path of social work is not an easy one, as it is full of obstacles and restrictions, and there are different hurdles to overcome, and if one is not careful, social workers may easily fall down, feel tired or even lost. If a social worker holds on to his or her beliefs in practice in any situation, he or she can regain confidence and strength to face the challenges ahead in his or her social work journey. The six respondents all have their own set of beliefs about social work, and in summary, proposition 3.3 is valid.

Proposition 3.4: Reasons for continuing to do social work

“Having a stable salary is one of the reasons why I continue to work as a social worker.

Although the working hours are long, the job and the salary are relatively stable, on the one hand it is not really easy to fire people, and depending on the economic situation, you still have a job, there are some places you can still work from home, on the other hand, because the job is quite busy, you work long hours, there is little time and opportunity to explore other jobs, even if you have some other interests or missions, you think it is possible to make a living, but the long working hours are not enough to find time to immerse or explore other ways.” -- A

“For the time being, I still feel that I enjoy working with my clients to solve their problems and witness their growth, and the satisfaction that your work has paid off makes you want to stay. I can't promise that I will continue to do it after many years. I think social work is one of the times in your life that you will enjoy it, but I don't think it is necessarily the job of my life, it's just that at this stage I haven't found another thing that suits me better, I haven't found a job that I want to do more. Maybe one day I will give up and change my career when I feel tired and I can't take it anymore.” -- A

“I'm actually quite happy in this job. Although not every part of the job is very generous, for example, the pay is not very high, the time is not very sufficient, and there is still a lot

of workload, there is at least one thing that cannot be replaced by other jobs, that is, social work is a very special job, in this job I can witness the growth of people, other jobs may not have this kind of reward and satisfaction.” -- A

“In fact, I have no idea about the word "social worker". I don't think social work is a halo. I feel that I am living in a situation where I am spending time with the elderly, in fact, I have been with my parents-in-law for the past 10 years. I don't think I am a social worker, but I think I want to take one more step to make a difference and that's why I have been in this profession for so long. Although I have been in the agency, I have changed many positions and areas so that when I am bored, I can do something new and start again. For the sake of the elderly, I want to learn something new, such as horticultural therapy, so that I can have fun with the elderly and experience the joy together with them.” -- B

“My persistence is really stinking with money, because I have to buy a flat and make mortgage repayments. Whenever I think, I want to quit the job when it is so hard to do it, I tell myself, I still need to make mortgage repayments, so I push myself to persist and what I persist is that I want to make mortgage repayments in the first place, so I have a good clear goal in life.” -- C

“Fortunately, in my working life, I have been able to crack all these boulders and solve my problems every time, and then I can continue to persevere. I think I am very lucky that my colleagues and supervisors get along well with each other, so there is no job that makes me so angry and impulsive that I have to leave.” -- C

“The reason why I have been a social worker for 10 years is that I am not a good material for the business world and people who come to me for business should lose money. I think being a social worker gives me a great sense of satisfaction. I don't just help people, I work with them and see a change in their mentality. For example, we often feel that talking to the elderly about life planning is a boring task, or even that they are nearing

the end of their lives, so there is nothing to plan for. However, sometimes when you give them some information, they will really think about what they will do when they live in a home for the elderly in the future, and which home they should use. These are the topics that we can talk to them about and I think that sometimes these views will make a difference to them.” -- D

“Don't think of it as simply a job. It's good to have the opportunity to reach out to different parents and students in the school, because the school I work in is a Christian school and it's easy for me to talk about religious-related topics. I think it's a mission and it's good that I can spread the gospel in my work. It's good to be able to pray with the people I serve and pray with the parents, it makes me feel that it's not just a job, it's good to be able to spread the gospel.” -- E

“Have I ever thought of giving up and changing jobs? No, because I know that I can find happiness in my work. For example, if you can't choose your boss, fortunately there are dozens of colleagues in your workplace, so you can always find colleagues who share your ideas or support you in your work, or even go out together to relax and de-stress after work, and become each other's comrades. And when you are working on cases, if you treat them with sincerity and help them, they will understand and thank you from the bottom of their hearts. This is also a way of supporting yourself. The rewards may not always be in the form of our own salaries and tangible rewards, but also in the form of intangible rewards, such as empathy from colleagues or appreciation and thanks from the volunteers we work with, which are invaluable. Although I work long hours in elderly services and often have to work overtime, I am thankful that my job is stable and my salary is good, so I do not intend to change jobs for the time being. I am planning to work in this job for another 10 years.” -- F

Respondents had different reasons for continuing to persist in social work. Some are because of the stable working conditions and income, others because they do not have time to explore other alternatives However, more respondents said that they continue to work as a social worker because they have a clear goal in life (to support their family, to pay for their mortgage) and a sense of mission (they want to help them, they want to walk with them, to evangelise them). They have received positive feedback and support during their social work career (treat them with sincerity and help them, they will understand and thank you from the bottom of their hearts, received praise and thanks from their co-volunteers). They have been able to find colleagues and supervisors who share the same philosophy and resonate with them, they have built up a support network with good communication. Most of the respondents said that social work is a very special type of work, it is a job that can witness the growth of people. Other jobs do not necessarily offer the same rewards and satisfaction. In the process, social workers can enjoy walking with their clients, solving problems together, witnessing their growth and changes, realising that their contribution is effective, and finding happiness and satisfaction in their work. Summing up the above, proposition 3.4 is valid.

Proposition 3.5: Self-motivation of social workers

"I always remind myself that I am right to stand up for what I believe in, even if I don't have religious belief, but I can stand up for what I do right and do my job with integrity."

-- A

"The one who laughs till the end is the one who is the best. Give yourself a positive message and you will be able to get to the end and laugh till the end. Or maybe it means that the winner is the one who holds on to the last one." -- B

"I often think that we should think about the good side of everything, I know that some people or some conflicts appear, in fact, because they think they are justified so there is a conflict first, even if we have to face a conflict is good, I will always feel that we all have

this conflict for the good of the whole thing, always think about the good side, it will be easy to yourself. When he is arguing with you until he is hot-headed, then you can say to him: "I know we are all doing this for the good of the elderly. Once you say this, the other person will basically stop talking." -- C

"If I can do it, I will do it to the best of my ability, but if I can't, there is nothing I can do. If I can do something, I will insist on doing it for him or with him." -- D

"God's grace is sufficient for me, and he has been able to give me the grace I need when I am most depressed, so that I can continue to walk with confidence." -- E

"I remember a friend once said that a social worker is like a ship that carries a group of people, so one has to equip oneself well to help those who rely on oneself. It is not a Titanic, but a big ship that there are a lot of entertainment facilities inside, which will bring them a lot of fun and attract them to come here. It can carry their negative energy and help them to get rid of their bad luck." -- F

The journey of life is like a marathon. Although there are people applauding and cheering for us along the way, these are only aids. True strength is still a matter of radiating bravery and raising strength forward by ourselves. Respondents were each given a motto to encourage and motivate themselves, which was summarised above, and proposition 3.5 is established.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Contribution of the study

Due to the rising demands of society as a result of demographic, social, economic and political upheavals, social workers in Hong Kong are faced with more challenges than ever before to address the ever-increasing number of social problems. Whether it is poverty relief, high-risk families, violence, suicide, etc., social workers are always expected to give appropriate treatment and care to these people. With a high workload, many demands and shifting work priorities, social workers often experience high levels of burden and distress. However, in this highly stressful and negative work environment, the stress and accumulated negative energy that social workers carry and the resulting imbalance in their physiological and psychological state are often overlooked.

Social workers are expected to work under a relatively high level of stress because of the many different types of services they provide, including social security, family and child welfare services, medical social services, rehabilitation services, elderly services, youth services, services for offenders, community development and other support services, etc. However, even under the same work pressure, different individuals will react differently to the pressure due to their different characteristics. As social workers themselves are the healers of their cases, the impression they are given makes it difficult to speak up or seek help to relieve the pressure. When stress is identified over time, it is often necessary to make greater changes to get out of the situation and then to reflect on certain people and things to regain a sense of purpose and motivation.

From the previous interviews, the researcher is able to find a relationship between FINDINGS and the RESEARCH CONCEPT in the conversations of the respondents (Figure 5.1):

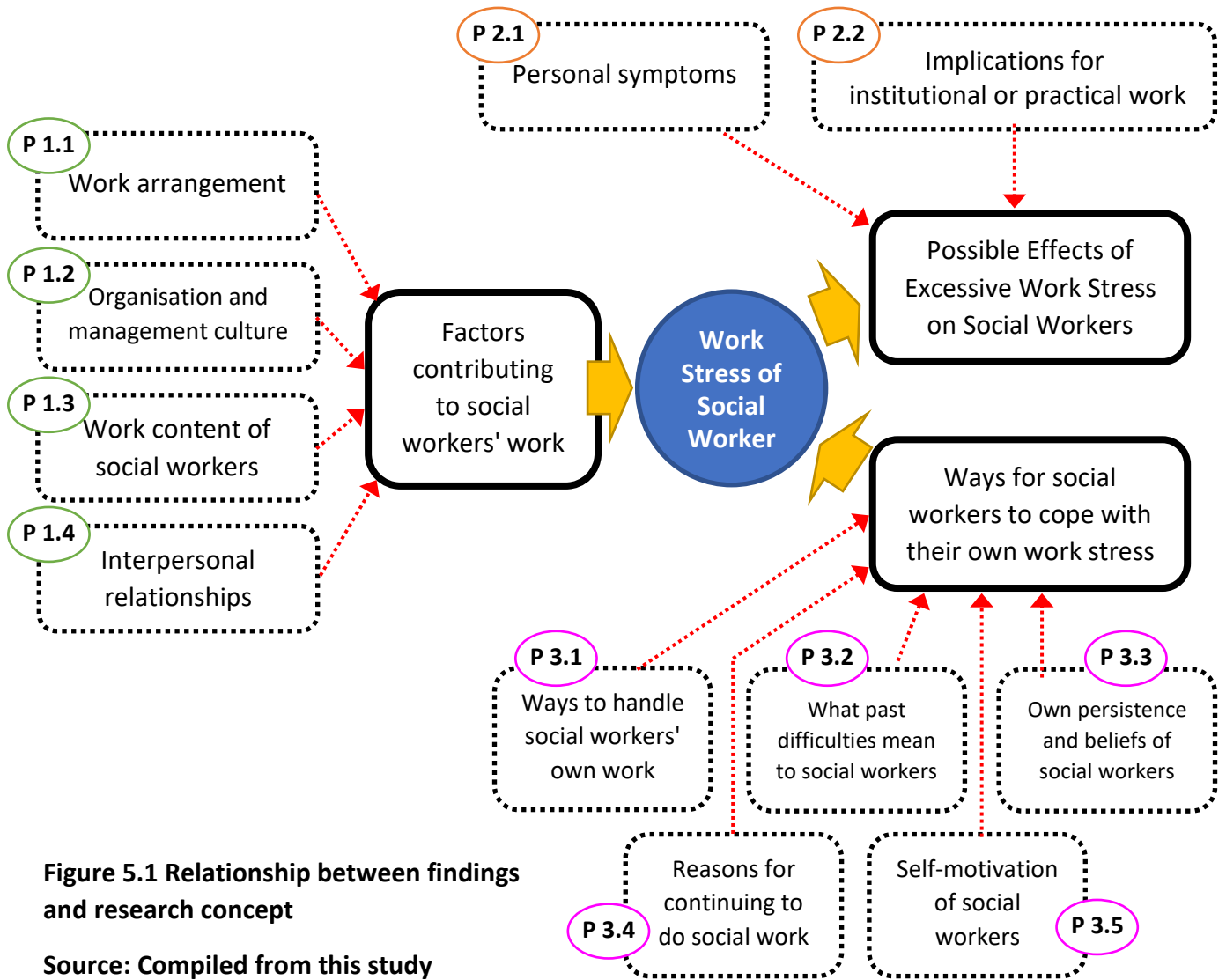


Figure 5.1 Relationship between findings and research concept

Source: Compiled from this study

In previous questionnaire surveys and studies, there are many data proving that social workers are under great work pressure. The sources of their pressure include: too many cases to cope with, overloading every month, worrying that something will happen to the cases, worrying that the quality of service cannot be guaranteed due to too much workload, underestimation of the staff establishment of the unit by the agency, and various difficulties in their work situation, etc.

In these interviews, all six respondents unanimously agreed that social work is often overloaded and that one of the reasons for the work pressure of social workers is the huge workload. All six respondents shared the reasons for the excessively long working hours and excessive stress. It was precisely because of the poor work arrangements that social workers were overloaded with

work, resulting in their long working hours and even frequent overtime work, which caused them work stress.

Respondents also indicated that their own organisation and management culture, especially the demands and expectations of their organisation and supervisors at work, also had a great impact on social workers. The respondents shared their experience of working with their supervisors, saying that some supervisors' demands were higher than their actual needs (FSA), their different expectations and beliefs, or the difference in status between teachers and social workers, all contributed to the work pressure of social workers.

At the same time, the respondents revealed that social workers have to face complex and ever-changing tasks every day, especially the difficulties they encounter in handling cases, the great responsibility of their work and the fact that their work involves handling unexpected incidents or facing life and death, which have a great impact on social workers.

Social work is a people-to-people job, and respondents have to put in a lot of effort every day to manage complex interpersonal relationships, including tensions with clients and disagreements with colleagues and supervisors, which is also a major challenge for every social worker.

Social workers generally have more emotional personality traits and approach clients with empathy, respect and care. Social workers experience emotional, physical and psychological overload when interacting with clients. They experience stress and anxiety due to environmental pressures and internal discomfort. Social workers are also faced with the complexities and challenges of social problems, which makes their work more stressful than that of the average worker and makes them more vulnerable to burnout than other professions.

In previous questionnaires and studies, it has been pointed out that when social workers are under excessive stress, they may experience physical, behavioural, psychological and emotional

symptoms, such as depression and anxiety, and may feel physically tired, reluctant to go to work, sleep poorly, feel anxious about the future and even feel physically ill.

In these interviews, six respondents revealed that their work stress has affected them in various ways, including physical symptoms such as gastrointestinal problems, vision problems, finger paralysis, sleep disorders, headaches, sudden weight loss, and various body aches and pains. Behavioural symptoms include: not having enough time to eat, chewing and swallowing too quickly, not having time to take care of one's physical needs such as going to the toilet, increasing habits that affect health such as reduced or excessive eating, eating stimulant foods, avoiding work and the people one faces at work, increasing use of medication such as painkillers, etc. Psychological symptoms include: difficulty in seeing the big picture while holding onto one's own opinions; self-doubt, self-induced dilemmas; nervousness, increased anxiety about the unknown; decreased tolerance and acceptance; loss of confidence, increased frustration, indecision, etc. Emotional symptoms include: agitation, anxiety, nervousness, helplessness, depression, confusion, overwhelm. When social workers are under a lot of pressure, they often experience different warning signs in their bodies.

Social workers are responsible for their clients and have a great sense of responsibility and mission. All the respondents said that they would rather sacrifice their personal time and continue to work on unfinished tasks during their rest time or after work hours. Even if they work overtime, they do not want to affect the progress of their casework. Therefore, even if social workers are under work pressure, it does not have a great impact on their practical work.

The work pressure of social workers is often higher than that of ordinary workers, so social workers need more flexibility and space to cope with the pressure and difficulties brought about by their work. Social workers can avoid burnout by coping with their own work pressure and creating space for themselves to reduce their stress.

Social workers themselves are professionally trained and know how to help their clients cope with their own stress, so it is easy to see that social workers also have appropriate ways to deal with personal stress at work. Some of the ways to reduce stress include:

developing personal interests	e.g. using New Age methods to free the mind
arranging relaxing activities	e.g. going on trips, walking, spacing out, running, doing exercise
building good relationships with colleagues	e.g. sharing food, sharing work
developing personal interests	e.g. finding food or wine to taste, playing video games, eating, drinking, shopping
maintaining positive thinking	e.g. choosing happiness, forgetting pain
seeking support from religious	e.g. spirituality, prayer, reading the Bible verses
reflecting views to management	e.g. talk to supervisor to release grievances and stress
discussing solutions to problems with colleagues and supervisors	e.g. eliminating or reducing sources of stress, working with colleagues to complete work and reduce workload
planning work	e.g. setting priorities, dealing with urgent matters as soon as possible, improving time management, not delaying work
enjoy the happiness and sweetness of work	e.g. enjoy spending time with the people you serve
accept the support of others	e.g. exchange views with colleagues who share similar ideas, build up a support network with colleagues, lend a helping hand to those in need, provide mutual support and encouragement
leave the job	e.g. being to find a more suitable direction for themselves

Despite the difficulties, the respondents were able to find meaning and hope in their careers as social workers, and these were the driving forces that kept them going. In summary, past difficulties are meaningful to social workers.

Each of the six respondents had their own set of perspectives and beliefs about social work:

A holds the belief that "stand my ground, recognise that I have a choice".

B holds the belief that "rethink the meaning and goal of my study, continue to persevere and face difficulties".

C holds the belief that "renew sense of appreciation for my past hardships and gains, each and every harsh difficulty has been overcome".

D holds the belief that "affirm the importance of time management skills, become a companion on an equal footing".

E holds the belief that "have greater awareness of people's true needs, discover the bright spots in each individual".

F holds the belief that "recognise my achievements in my work, walk with them, witness their growth and transformation".

Respondents had different reasons for continuing to work as social workers. All the six respondents agreed that social work is a very special type of work, as it can witness the growth of people, and other jobs may not necessarily have such a sense of reward and satisfaction. In the process, social workers have a unique sense of mission, they can enjoy walking with their clients, solving problems together, witnessing their growth and changes, finding out that their contribution has paid off, finding happiness and satisfaction in their work, and receiving positive feedback and support in their social work career. They are all able to self-motivate and cheer themselves up on their own social work journey and then continue to move forward.

The beliefs of social workers not only help social workers to grasp the roots of their practice, but also provide guidance and encourage social workers to live their dreams and persevere in their ideals. When social workers face challenges or setbacks, beliefs are an important motivating force and a cheerleader: in the face of the rapid changes and difficult times in the social welfare sector, if social workers understand and remember to return to their basic beliefs, they will be greatly supported and will have more confidence to persevere (Kam, P. K., 2010).

The mission, meaning and value, perseverance and belief of social work can be reconciled with the work pressure to produce positive work emotions, which can lead to higher work achievement and turn the work pressure into help, which is the key to sustaining social workers. Despite the difficulties in the social work career, the respondents still found meaning and hope, and these are the driving forces that support them to continue.

This study has shed some light on the work stress of social workers. From Findings, we know that the causes of work stress are not only the heavy workload, but also other important factors such as the management of the social work agency, internal and external interpersonal relationship, and the complexity of the case. These factors need our attention more and more. It is urgent to prevent and alleviate the problem of social worker burnout. Future researchers can conduct more in-depth studies on these factors to understand the causes of social workers' work stress, put forward suggestions to prevent burnout of social workers from different perspectives, such as how to enhance the management of social work organizations, improve the organizational environment, clarify the duties and responsibilities of the posts, increase the communication platform and effective supervision system for social workers, establish a sound motivation system, etc., in order to reduce the impact of work stress on social workers. In Hong Kong, there is a lack of research on work stress among social workers, and there are no specific and clear guidelines to effectively prevent and intervene in social workers' burnout. It is hoped that future researchers will continue to focus on this topic.

5.2 Limitation of the study

- **Limitations of the study population**

The study was conducted mainly among social workers working in the elderly, children and youth services. As the target population was limited to a small number of areas, the findings of the study cannot represent the work stress situation of every social worker in Hong Kong.

- **Limitations of Interviews**

Due to the busy schedule of the social workers, it was not possible to conduct frequent interviews and to talk to the respondents within a limited period of time, which did not allow for much in-depth discussion. In addition, due to the epidemic, interviews could not be conducted face-to-face, but by ZOOM and telephone, so the researcher was unable to fully observe the expressions and body movements of the respondents. Moreover, the respondents were easily distracted by the presence of other people or the noisy environment when they talked to the researcher through ZOOM and telephone. The content of the interview is personal and private, and respondents may not be comfortable disclosing work-related pressures at home, which may affect the depth of the interview.

- **Limitations in data collection**

In previous studies, there is not much data on work stress among social workers in Hong Kong, nor is there sufficient information. Most of the information and literature on social work stress can only be found in overseas studies and academic papers, which may be subject to social or cultural differences. This limitation is also the motivation for the researcher to use this paper to stimulate future researchers to pay more attention to the work stress situation of social workers in different fields in Hong Kong.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the findings of this study, the actual situation of social work and the sources of their stress were revealed to the respondents, and the ways in which they have been able to reduce their stress and achieve a balance between work and life. The six respondents were aware of their own sources of stress, understood their own limitations and shortcomings, knew how to handle their own work pressure, recognised their own achievements, meaning and satisfaction in their work, and persisted in their beliefs and social work values -- even though they faced different storms and troughs in their working life, they still managed to swim against the tide and continue to move forward on their social work journey.

It is difficult to see immediate results in the work of social workers. Many social workers experience moments of frustration. When we do, what gives us the most support and encouragement is our belief in ourselves. If our beliefs are weak, we will easily become discouraged and give up when we fall down. But if we have a strong faith as our cheerleader, then falling is nothing and we will have the strength to get up and go again (Kam, P. K., 2010).

In his book "Back to Faith: The Practice of Social Work Beliefs", Professor Kam Ping-kwong advised social workers on how to cultivate personal qualities and hold fast to their beliefs:

- ✓ To defend social justice, not to stray from the oppressed and to do more than what is wrong.
- ✓ Have a heart-to-heart with service users and become their peers.
- ✓ Believe that people have abilities and strengths.
- ✓ Believe that people can change.
- ✓ To value the little things that make a difference, to use our own experiences and to influence lives with lives.
- ✓ The practice of love and the power of honesty, acceptance and care.
- ✓ Hold on to the vision and vision of social work, and be hopeful and never give up.
- ✓ Dare to persevere without fear of doubt.
- ✓ Believe that nothing is impossible, be brave in making choices and try hard.
- ✓ Emphasis is placed on cultivating the character of social workers, and the spirit of social work should be brought into play outside of work.

I very much agree with Professor Kam's suggestion, and it is easy to see that the respondents in this interview share these personal qualities and their own beliefs.

Based on the previous findings, I found the following factors of work stress and ways to cope with work stress among the interviewed social workers:

Factors of work stress	Ways to cope with work stress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work arrangement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • heavy workload • long working hours • overtime work ➤ Organisation and management culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demands and expectations of work by the organisation and supervisors ➤ Work content of social workers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • difficulties encountered in handling a case • significant work responsibilities • work involving handling a crisis or facing life and death ➤ Interpersonal relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tensions with service users • disagreements with colleagues and supervisors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ developing personal interests, using New Age methods to free the mind; ✓ arranging relaxing activities, such as going on trips, walking, spacing out, running, doing exercise; ✓ building good relationships with colleagues, such as sharing food, sharing work; ✓ developing personal interests, such as finding food or wine to taste, playing video games, eating, drinking, shopping; ✓ maintaining positive thinking, such as choosing happiness, forgetting pain; ✓ seeking support from religious, such as spirituality, prayer, reading the Bible verses; ✓ reflecting views to management, releasing grievances and stress; ✓ discussing solutions to problems with colleagues and supervisors, eliminating or reducing sources of stress, working with colleagues to complete work and reduce workload; ✓ planning work, setting priorities, dealing with urgent matters as soon as possible, improving time management, not delaying work; ✓ enjoy the happiness and sweetness of work, enjoy spending time with the people you serve; ✓ accept the support of others, exchange views with colleagues who share similar ideas, build up a support network with colleagues, lend a helping hand to those

	<p>in need, and provide mutual support and encouragement;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ take the initiative to seek help when in trouble. ✓ leave the jobs for the time being to find a more suitable direction for themselves
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According to the above findings, most of the respondents were found to be "self-managing" when faced with their own work stress. Among the six respondents, only one of them said that he had frankly reflected his work stress to his supervisor and sought support, while one of them said that she had no way to reflect her work stress to her upper supervisor and decided to resign -- the work pressure of social workers is obvious, can we consider other ways to prevent burnout not only by "ourselves", but also by improving the guidelines of the organisations and the policies of the government?

In several interviews, a number of respondents reported differences of opinion and conflicting values between themselves and their supervisors. Professional helpers are often overwhelmed with love and envision a world of love. In reality, the workload of social workers is so overwhelming that they cannot breathe. The senior management needs to have a macro view, they are concerned with the overall interest of the organisation and it is difficult for them to take care of each and every one of their junior colleagues and service targets. A single order or circular from the top is enough to make the frontline workers reel, feeling that they are not respected and may not understand the hidden feelings of the top management. Some frontline social workers are under great pressure to work. Ironically, the more withdrawn and indifferent the social workers are, the lower the rate of depletion. On the contrary, the more dedicated and responsible they are, the more likely they are to become depleted.

The respondents were also told that their work was often exposed to unexpected events and even death. In dealing with these incidents, they mostly concentrate on the process and the aftermath, but the emotional shock they experience, even the vicarious trauma, is ignored, both by the social workers themselves and by the agency's approach. They have accumulated a lot of negative emotions in their work, which they have to share with themselves or with others around them. Why is the well-being of social workers ignored in this way? Are these vicarious traumas not

considered to be the work injuries of social workers? It seems that the social welfare sector in Hong Kong has forgotten to protect social workers in this area, and it may be a trigger for social workers to leave their jobs because of their burnout.

Social workers are not God -- social workers can sometimes feel overwhelmed and can be stressed out. Social workers can only provide adequate care for others if they first take proper care of themselves. According to the findings, from the respondents, I heard them share their own ways of reducing stress at work. To summarise their views, I have the following suggestions for social workers who are under tremendous work pressure, on how to relieve their work pressure:

Personal aspects:

1. Practice self-care

Self-care is a good way to maintain your emotional and psychological well-being and to cope with work stress. Examples include getting enough sleep, meditating, eating nutritious foods, or taking time for yourself to exercise, among other strategies.

2. Control your rhythm

Take good care of your time. Practice good time management and put priorities first. Allow yourself some time and space in your busy schedule so that you can have a balanced life. Schedule time for rest, time alone, exercise and socialising.

3. Don't forget the beginning

Sometimes you need to remind yourself of why you wanted to become a social worker in the first place. Many people enter this field because it offers a sense of personal and professional fulfilment. Remember and remind this whenever you are feeling tired.

4. Know and respect your limits

We are not gods and we all have limits. Accepting that we are human and that social workers sometimes make mistakes and errors, we need to understand what our limits are. If you are doing

your best in your job, it is not your fault if the people you are working with are not making a difference to their lives.

5. Sharing with colleagues

There are many times when social workers encounter difficulties and obstacles in their work when dealing with complex and changing cases. Share the burden with your colleagues. You do not have to bear the pain of others too much. If a social worker is troubled, he or she needs to talk to someone who is a good listener and can be trusted. Try to find like-minded, empathetic colleagues and supervisors to build a support network of good communication.

6. Continuing education to add value

Social workers can take advantage of continuing education opportunities to learn about industry trends and new coping strategies to ensure that they are able to meet the challenges they face in their work.

7. Take time off to rest and pause

Sometimes, work stress is a sign that you are simply working too hard and need some time off. If planning a big trip sounds stressful, consider a holiday or short trip to another district in your area. The key is to give your mind a break. Rest is about going the extra mile.

8. Change jobs or positions

Sometimes, work stress doesn't come from within. Instead, it can develop from external factors, such as supervisor with unreasonable expectations or a long working day. In this case, you should think about finding a new job in the social workforce. If you are unable to find another job, especially in such a difficult job market, consider a change of position within your organisation.

9. Seek personal therapy

If a social worker is experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression as a result of excessive stress, seek advice from a professional counsellor or psychologist.

Improving the guidelines of the organisations and the policies of the government is necessary. Here is my suggestions:

Agencies aspects:

1. Agencies need to provide training and psychological support services for social workers to manage workload stress.
2. Agencies should ensure that social workers have the opportunity for reflective supervision and that there is a clear system for listening to social workers' views on workload issues and providing feedback on actions to address these issues.
3. Agencies should create a mutually supportive and fair working environment, provide appropriate support and assistance to working social workers, communicate with social workers on decision-making processes, allow social workers to express their views and feelings on issues such as pay and promotion, and enhance their sense of belonging and identification with the organisation.
4. Agencies should ensure effective communication with social workers, listen to their views and worries, and care about their goals and values, and strengthen the training of staff in handling incidents and solving problems to help them build up self-confidence.
5. Social workers should be encouraged to work together to solve complex problems and cases and to provide support and advice to other leaders and team members.
6. Agencies should increase staff and equipment as far as practicable to cope with the increasing workload.
7. In terms of workflow, agencies should streamline their work processes, reduce unnecessary paperwork (e.g. excessive funding applications), and focus on cases and services to reduce the fatigue of frontline social workers.

8. In the event of special events, such as epidemics or social movements, agencies should provide appropriate policies to cope with the rapid increase in workload of social workers caused by these events and provide time off.
9. Agencies should provide annual stress tests for social workers and early psychological support services for social workers with emotional problems.

Policy aspects:

1. The Government requires agencies to draw up and follow manpower guidelines to ensure that there is sufficient manpower to meet the needs of cases.
2. The Government allocates additional resources to the social welfare sector to relieve the heavy workload of social workers.
3. The Government need a comprehensive plan for the long-term welfare policy, including the mode of manpower training and resource allocation, the establishment of a regular service mechanism, a review of the structural problems of LSG, and listening to the real voices of social workers in different positions.

Social work is a very challenging job. Emotional exhaustion is not a monopoly of social workers, but a new social norm. Social workers are also ordinary people and need to learn to care for themselves. We need to be aware of the impact of such work on our physical and mental health, and then develop adequate support systems and self-care strategies. It is time for us to review the social welfare ecology, positioning and model, to heed the warning signs of the depletion of the social work profession and to reflect together on an effective model for the sustainable and healthy development of professional helpers.

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(Appendix I) Consent Form

宏恩基督教學院

社會工作學院

Understanding of Work Stress among Hong Kong Social Workers in elderly, children and youth services

探討香港長者、兒童和青少年服務的社會工作者的工作壓力

參與研究同意書

本人 _____ 備悉上述研究計劃目的在了解社會工作者的工作壓力之因素，研究工作壓力對社會工作者可能產生的影響，及找出社會工作者應對自身工作壓力的方法。本人亦知悉此研究負責人來自宏恩基督教學院之社會工作學士學位課程學生黃綺媚。

本人知悉所提供的資料將根據香港法例第 486 章《個人資料(私隱)條例》加以保護。而此研究所得的資料將會被錄音及可能被用作日後的研究及發表，但該研究及發表中亦不會包含能夠識別本人身份的細節。本人的私隱權利會得以保留，本人的個人資料不會被公開。

研究人員已向本人清楚解釋列在所附研究程序上的資料，本人明瞭當中涉及的利益及風險；本人自願參與研究項目，並同意參與提供個人意見。

本人知悉本人有權就程序的任何部分提出疑問，並有權隨時退出不受任何懲處。

參與者簽署 : _____

參與者姓名 (正楷) : _____

研究人員簽署 : _____

研究人員姓名 : _____

日期 : _____

備註： 就有關上述研究細則，可聯絡宏恩基督教學院社會工作學院陳家傑先生
電話：5804 4140 (內線：262)

(Appendix II) Interview guideline

The interview guideline is a reference framework for the interview, starting with general questions, then focusing on specific issues to understand the way the respondents think and express themselves, so as not to limit their ideas, and then gradually moving on to the main issues explored in the study. The interview outline is as follows, with the "it" in the questions indicating the dilemmas and pressures brought to bear on the social worker (Appendix II is the Chinese Version).

- (1) How long have you been working in the social work field? What are the clients you have counseled and the content of your social work?
- (2) Which of these different types of work (units) have impressed you the most? What have you found to be the most rewarding or the greatest experience along the way?
- (3a) What incidents or situations have occurred that you often found the most difficult and demanding?
- (3b) What were the main things that made those events or situations difficult for you to deal with?
- (3c) What kind of people or situations make you feel "it"?
- (4a) If you had to use a specific image to represent 'it', what would you use?
- (4b) What is the most uncomfortable or unlikeable effect of its presence?
- (4c) What is the physical/behavioural/mental/emotional impact of its presence on you?
- (4d) How has the presence of 'it' affected your practical work?
- (5a) Is there a time when you have not been (or are less) affected by it, because of any change in external circumstances? Or how was it different for you?
- (5b) What have you done in this process that has sustained you through this dilemma?
- (5c) What have you tried to do to release yourself from the pressure of work?
- (6) What does it mean to you now to think about these dilemmas or to have gone through them?
- (7) What are you holding on to in these processes? What do you hope to gain?
- (8) What do you think are the reasons or actions that have driven you to serve in the social work field for a long time?
- (9) What methods or mottos do you use to encourage yourself?

(Appendix III) 訪談大綱

問題中的「它」表示所帶給社工的困境和壓力：

- (1) 請問你的社工領域年資時間多久？輔導的對象及社會工作內容分別是什麼？
- (2) 這些不同的工作內容（單位），有哪些令你的印象最深刻？一路走來讓你覺得成長最多或是最大的體會是什麼？
- (3a) 曾經發生過哪些事件或狀況，經常讓你覺得最棘手，也覺得特別辛苦的？
- (3b) 那些事件或狀況，主要令你難以面對的關鍵是什麼？
- (3c) 什麼樣的人或事會讓你感覺到「它」的出現？
- (4a) 如果要用一個具體的形象來代表「它」，你會用？
- (4b) 「它」的出現，讓你最不舒服或是最不喜歡的影響是？
- (4c) 「它」的出現，在你身體上／行為上／思想上／情緒上造成什麼的影響？
- (4d) 「它」的出現，在你的實務工作上造成什麼的影響？
- (5a) 有哪一次，你並沒有（或比較不會）受到它的影響，是因為什麼外在環境的改變？或是你自己有什麼樣的不同這？
- (5b) 這個過程中，有做了什麼樣的事情而支撐你持續面對這個困境？
- (5c) 你嘗試了什麼方法令自己在工作壓力中釋放出來？
- (6) 現在想起這些困境或是經歷過這些後，對你的意義是什麼？
- (7) 在這些過程中，在你身上，你所堅持的是什麼？希望得到的是什麼？
- (8) 你覺得有哪些原因或行動，驅使你在社會工作領域中長時期服務？
- (9) 你會用哪一些方法或者是座右銘去鼓勵自己？