

**FEELING THE HEAT:
WORKERS' EXPERIENCES OF
JOB STRESS IN THE VICTORIAN
COMMUNITY SERVICES SECTOR**

by
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Abstract

This thesis examines work stress in the Community Services Sector (CSS) in Victoria. Psychological injuries are extremely high in the CSS (WorkSafe Victoria), and yet there has been no research specifically addressing this issue in the sector. Further, there has been little research that examines workers' perspectives of work stress. The thesis thus focuses on the 'missing voices' of workers by outlining what workers have to say about work stress, its causes and its effects. In order to place this research into both its historical and socio-political contexts, the genealogical roots of work in the CSS are examined and the impact of neo-liberalism on the sector critically assessed.

The thesis is a qualitative study utilising a constructivist methodology from within a broadly feminist framework. Forty one workers participated in the study through focus groups, individual interviews and by written responses. A thematic analysis was used to explore the data. The CSS is a predominantly female workforce with women making up over 80% of employees and hence a feminist theoretical analysis was appropriate and invaluable.

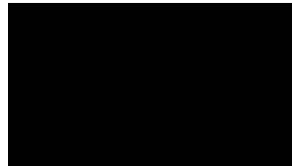
The research uncovers the structural and systemic factors operating in the CSS that are responsible for high levels of work stress. Two models operate concurrently in this sector: a charity volunteer model overlain with a neo-liberal quasi-market business model. This juxtaposition of these seemingly opposed paradigms, it is argued, is of central importance to understanding the bases of psychological injuries (work stress) to workers in this sector. The paradoxical nature of these models operating concurrently is the elephant in the CSS room. Revealing the specific dynamics of this relation is a necessary pre-condition for bringing about change and reduction of work stress within the sector.

Victoria University

Student Declaration

“I, Lorraine Jessie Harrison, declare that the PhD thesis entitled ‘Feeling the Heat: workers’ experiences of job stress in the Victorian Community Services Sector’ is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.”

Signature:



Date: 12 April, 2013

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I used the editorial services of Kerry Biram (AE) in accordance with the IPED 'Guidelines for editing research theses'; her work was restricted to technical copyediting and proofreading. This type of advice is covered in Standards D and E of the Australian Standards for Editing Practice.

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Chapter One: Setting the Scene

1. Introduction

This research is the germination of the seeds sown during my twenty years' experience working as a social worker and from my voluntary occupational health and safety (OH&S) and union delegate roles. I completed a Bachelor of Social Work in 1988, a Masters in Clinical Social Work in 2000 and much of my employment has been in the Community Services Sector (CSS) in metropolitan Melbourne. During my considerable time in the sector I observed an increase in work pressures, a decrease in supportive work environments and a subsequent increase in the number of stressed workers in this sector. Furthermore, within my OH&S worker role I observed a lack of understanding and interest in addressing workplace stress on the part of managers and organisations. Workers are arguably the most important element in sustaining the often difficult and challenging work being undertaken in the CSS in Victoria.

Work in this sector contributes significantly to the functioning and sustainability of a healthy civil society. Unfortunately, a widespread sentiment often expressed across the sector is 'if it's too hot in the kitchen then you need to get out'. This tough line needs to be reformulated. If it is too hot in the kitchen, why is this so and how can we reduce the heat for those working in the kitchen?

The thesis will therefore, directly tackle these issues. It will elucidate the complexities surrounding work in the CSS and more specifically its relationship to occupational stress. The overarching research question is then: What are workers' perceptions of job stress and what processes do organisations implement in order to ameliorate job stress in the Community Services Sector in Victoria? The research also addresses workers' ideas for reducing work stress in this sector.

WorkSafe Victoria (2007–2008) stated in their 2007–08 Annual Report that the Community Services Sector had the highest work cover claims per industry division, higher even than the manufacturing sector (which was the second highest). The Australian Services Union (2007a) identified current high turn-over rates, burn-out and work stress as major concerns in the social and community service sector. Similarly, the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) (Victorian Council of Social Service 2009 p 25) confirms the high staff turnover in this sector. As will be shown in this thesis, the turnover rates are in part a consequence of work stressors within the CSS: stressors such as poor working conditions, high workloads, audit responsibilities and lack of validation.

At the outset it is important to recognise the amorphous nature of the sector and the difficulty of establishing any clear-cut definition. There are different definitions of 'the community sector'

and as stated by the Victorian Government (2008 p 22) ‘there is no official or standard definition of community organisations or the community sector’. Furthermore, this workforce sector does not fit neatly within the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ABS 2006). In the Victorian Government Action Plan document (2008) it was noted that the estimated size of the community and non-for-profit sectors in Victoria was around 120,000 organisations. The Australian Services Union uses the term ‘social and community services’ (SACS) sector as well as the term Non–Government Organisations (NGOs). O’Connor, Smyth & Warburton (2000) use a more descriptive term for the Community Services Sector (CSS) as health, education, community services and general welfare services. Lyons (2007 p 23) maintains ‘[T]he community sector or community welfare sector consist of non-profit organisations that provide community services and/or advocate on behalf of disadvantaged groups’.

Community sector organisations have historically been located under the frequently used umbrella term ‘Not-for-profit’ (NFP) sector. The Community Services Sector in Australia developed from the establishment of charitable and voluntary not-for-profit organisations in the early colonial days. This early history is important and will be further explored as it has strong links to the current high work stress levels in this sector today. Another umbrella term commonly used is ‘The Third Sector’. Simply speaking, there is the business (private) sector, the government (public) sector and the third sector. Lyons (2001 p 5) states, ‘[A]t it’s simplest, the third sector encompasses all those organisations that are not part of the public or business sectors’. The term ‘third sector’ is regularly used by the international research community (Lyons 2001). Importantly, Lyons (2001 p 195) notes that ‘[t]he low level of awareness and interest in the third sector in Australia stands in sharp contrast with many other parts of the world’.

The term ‘Community Services Sector’ (CSS) is a more current term used and it will be used as the key reference point in this thesis. It should be remembered, however, that there are many names used for this sector and researchers utilise a variety of terminology. In this thesis the CSS refers to organisations that deliver community or general welfare services.¹

Examining the issue of stress in the workplace, Blewett, Shaw, LaMontagne & Dollard (2006 p 4) state the ‘epidemiological evidence indicates that job stress is rapidly emerging as the single greatest cause of work-related disease and injury’ and WorkSafe Victoria (2009 p 1) notes that ‘stress is the second most common cause of workplace compensation claims in Australia, after manual handling’. Work stress is therefore an important OH&S issue and there are a multitude of consequences, including the high cost to workers, the employer and society.

¹ A formal definition is included in the literature review.

Dollard (2001a p 6) quotes the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) definition of job stress: 'Job stress refers to the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and injury'. A second definition put forward by Duffy (2008 p 31) defined job stress as 'the reaction people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope'. These definitions are notable in their attribution of work stress to a mismatch between worker and work requirements.

Canvassing relevant research about work stress however, highlights the domination of medical and psychological discourses, particularly in regard to intervention. In fact, Blewett, et al. (2006) note that the language in the research needs to change from 'psychological injury' to 'job stress' in order to de-medicalise 'psychological injury'. Here the importance of management and organisation structures cannot be over estimated. Both play a crucial role in opening up or limiting the capacity of workers to shape their work practices at the everyday level.

The research lens in respect to work stress in general is growing, changing and evolving as it emerges as a significant health and social issue. Dollard, Skinner, Tuckey and Bailey (2007) have highlighted the need for the development of an Australian national research agenda and action plan for the prevention of psychosocial risk and promotion of wellbeing at work. Dollard (2003 p 3) states that 'the Victorian WorkCover Authority declared stress as a *significant* cause of 86 deaths since 1985, *including* 15 suicides'.

There is extensive research on work stress from a psychological perspective, including stress experienced within the human service industry.² This research has commented on issues such as vicarious traumatisation, compassion fatigue, stress, burnout, depression and intention to leave. (See for example Barak, Nissley & Levin 2001; Coyle et al. 2005; Lloyd & King 2004; Lloyd, Chris, King, Robert & Chenoweth, Lesley 2002; Stanley, N, Manthorpe & White 2007; Tham 2007). However Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll (2001 p 228) point out, 'most research models focused solely on the individual level of analysis and therefore divert attention from serious examination of the social order within organisations'. The primary focus of a good deal of the research has been on describing the symptoms as opposed to examining the causes of work-related stress. Maslajn and Jackson (1982, cited in Dollard 2003 p 16) argued by contrast, 'burnout results not from the bad apples, but from the "bad kegs" the apples are in'. In a similar vein, Lonne, McDonald and Fox (2003 p 3) note the '... increasing concern expressed by social

² Human services are defined ... as social services designed to meet human needs that are required for maintaining or promoting the overall quality of life of the prospective service populations. A social service is a systematically organized communal response, namely 'human services' refers to institutionalized systematic services rather than sporadic help given by family members, friends or occasional 'good Samaritans' (Zins 2001 pp 6-7).

commentators, academics and practitioners about the negative effect of corporatised human service agencies, managerialist approaches and market ideologies and practice’.

In the Australian context, there is an emerging research literature incorporating an occupational health and safety perspective. Here the primary prevention of work stress focuses upon organisationally directed change (Blewett et al. 2006; Duffy 2008; LaMontagne 2001; VicHealth 2006). The Victorian WorkSafe authority has developed resources to assist organisations deal with work stress with a focus on organisationally directed change (WorkSafe Victoria 2007). Recent research has supported the idea that organisational change is the primary and most important change agent needed in the prevention of job stress (Blewett et al. 2006; Dollard 2003; Dollard, LaMontagne et al. 2007; Dollard, Winefield & Winefield 2001; VicHealth 2006). However, the evidence indicates that the principal focus remains on the individual worker and how to assist the worker ‘de-stress’. Most strategies currently in play focus on individual change and inherently have an individualising and individual pathologising effect. The Vic Health (2006 p vii) report on workplace stress in Victoria found that ‘the situation is currently dominated by individually-focussed understanding of the problem as well as individually-focussed interventions’. It is therefore important to explore how workers view the causes of job stress and how they see their workplaces dealing or not dealing with job stress.

Lonne (2003p 286) argues that ‘[t]he overwhelming conclusion of the research is that structural work stressors, rather than personal characteristics, are the most influential factors affecting the incidence and intensity of burnout’. Burnout will be more fully explored in Chapter Two, but it is generally accepted as a response to prolonged work stressors. Lonne briefly mentions possible reasons why service professional organisations are not tackling the organisational changes in work stress prevention: fear of litigation, increased workers compensation claims, management apathy and professional anxieties about competencies and workload issues. Blewett et al. (2006 p 53) also discuss factors that may contribute to organisational inaction ‘... not least being the lack of organisational level interventions because of their complexity, and that work organisation change invariably means that management has to change, share power and/or spend money’.

This thesis also addresses the impact of what has been termed economic rationalism or more recently, neo-liberalism upon work and workers³ in the Community Services Sector. It examines how the dominance of market-oriented approaches in public policy have influenced work stress outcomes.

Wright (2003b p 155) in a critique of economic rationalism states:

At a macro level, there has been significant analysis and widespread criticism about the imposition of a business ideology and market driven services onto the welfare

³ The term ‘worker’ in this thesis refers to paid employees who work within the CSS and are not in a current management position.

sector. Evidence abounds that the market place is a harsh, unsympathetic and divisive place. It is a place developed upon the assumption that people are motivated by self interest and it promotes the pursuit of individualism and profit at the expense of social justice and humanitarian goals.

On a broader scale research from the USA, Britain and Australia (Briskman & Meutzelfeldt 2003; Dominelli 2004; Harris, J & Mc Donald 2000; Ife 2000) has examined the negative effects on workers of this new managerialism and market-driven welfare framework. According to Lyons (2001 p 151) '[n]on-profit organisations are generally laggards in the level of pay and other conditions they offer their employees'. CSS organisations are predominately not-for-profit entities and within the field there is an acute awareness that there are extremely tight budgetary constraints. In addition, in line with the current neo-liberal ideology that the private sector does it best, both state and federal governments have encouraged the entrance of for-profits to compete with the NFPs, via tendering, for a share of the government welfare sector contracts.

Other major concerns for researchers are the consequences of policy changes resulting from global political and economic formations and the flow-on effect on Australian federal and state government policy directions. As state and federal governments are the major funding source for the CSS, their policy directions are pivotal. Organisational restructuring, such as downsizing, often results in increased workloads for those left on the job. Increased insecurity due to short-term contracts and casualisation of the workforce and struggles around life and work balance are some of the more obvious flow-on effects of neo-liberalism. Pocock (2003), a leading academic in the field of work-life balance, has suggested that long working hours are producing stress for workers as well as having a negative impact on workers' personal lives and families. Sauter, Brightwell, Colligan, Hurrell, Katz and LeGrande (2002) highlight the knowledge gaps in research about the changing organisation of work and the safety and health of working people. There are several writers, such as Richard Sennett (1997, 1998b, 2006), who have also begun to draw attention to the plight of workers in this neo-liberal economic driven global world.

Despite the fact that there are a number of substantial studies on the changing nature of the workplace in a period of globalisation, there is a major gap in the literature with respect to the CSS in Victoria and Australia-wide. There is limited research that is specifically focussed on job stressors in the Victorian CSS. It could be argued that there is in fact minimal academic literature about the CSS in general. There has been, however, seminal Australia-wide work completed by Blewett et al. (2006) researching job stress and its causes, impacts and interventions in the Health and Community Service (H&CS) sector. This latter research highlights the importance of primary intervention in which organisational changes for reducing job stress are a major focus. Dollard et al. (2007) have also completed a literature review from 1999 to 2004 into job stress in the international and Australian H&CS which yielded 25

overseas studies and ten Australian studies. These studies, both internationally and in Australia, did not cover CSS workers per se, but like earlier studies have explored job stress mostly in relation to government workers, nurses, clergy and police.

Researchers have approached the issue of workers' stress from a range of angles. It is apparent from a survey of the literature that there is a need to obtain a clearer picture of how workers in the CSS experience work stress and its causes and how they view current organisational responses to work stress.

It is patently obvious that what is missing in much of the literature to date are the viewpoints and understanding of workers within the CSS themselves. This thesis seeks to address this gap by focussing on the workers' narratives about work stress in the CSS.

A key aim of this thesis is therefore, to understand how workers are currently experiencing job stress in agencies across the CSS. Workers offer the strongest lens through which potentially valuable and rich data and insights can be explored and extrapolated. A related aim is to ensure that this research will contribute to the ongoing development of policies, strategies and programs in job stress prevention and stress reduction in this sector.

The assumptions guiding the rationale of this thesis are supported by Kinman and Jones (2005) in their work on lay representations of workplace stress. They suggest that workers' perceptions have the potential to inform organisational policy and procedures concerning work stress management. Kinman and Jones cited only three studies on lay representation of occupational stress in general and two of these studies focussed solely on senior managers and managers. This thesis aims to contribute to our understanding of the interaction between lay persons' experiences and construction of work stress and the policy frameworks that have been developed to prevent and ameliorate work stress, through a detailed exploration of the experiences and perception of the 'frontline' workers. As previously stated there is minimal research into work stress in the CSS, let alone research driven by the narratives of workers themselves.

An exploratory study of workers' perceptions and experiences across the CSS will, therefore, add knowledge, increase understanding about job stress, and give voice to workers' views which have previously been rendered silent. As Kinman and Jones (2005 p 102) state, 'although stress has now become part of everyday language of the workplace, little is known about lay representations of the concept'. This research will significantly add to our knowledge of such representations. It is anticipated that this in turn will lead to a reduction in work-stress inducing practices in the sector, and a targeting of interventions that speak to workers' experiences. Recently the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), with WorkSafe Victoria funding, offered education and training on workplace bullying and violence and job stress within several sub-sectors in the CSS. It could be argued here that the cart is leading the horse, as there has been no research gathering an understanding of workers' perceptions of work stress and its

causality in the CSS. Hence, such strategies in the absence of an evidence base may be inadequate, due to the limited understanding of workers' experiences and, more importantly, workers' needs. The approach to researching work stress proposed here will fill the vacuum and produce valuable knowledge for the production of educational material and strategic development. Finally, the research will add to a growing volume of knowledge on work stress and stress prevention strategies in general.

This thesis thus explores what the workers in the CSS think and experience. This is a bottom-up approach. The aim is to engage in dialogue with the workers themselves in regard to their perceptions, experience and knowledge of job stress in the CSS in Victoria. In particular the thesis explores the participants' stories and their views on how occupational stress might be reduced. This research has been approached from what is broadly speaking a constructivist epistemology, using a qualitative methodological approach. Community workers were invited to be interviewed face-to-face, over the telephone and or attend one of four focus groups across Victoria in regards to their experiences, knowledge and understanding of job stress in the CSS in Victoria.

This then, is new research in respect to the exploration of work stress in the CSS. Future studies will have the opportunity to build on this initial study. This research has a small to medium sample size: fifteen workers were individually interviewed and nineteen workers attended one of four focus groups held across Victoria and there were seven written responses. Future research may cover a larger sample size, possibly using mixed methods. This may provide a greater scope for making generalisations across the sector. Furthermore, while this research focuses solely on workers' voices it may be productive at some future point to conduct a comparative study of management perspectives.

Chapter Two presents a review of the relevant extant literature. The chapter explores the many facets that make up and impinge on this sector, including its definitional challenges, historical legacies, issues pertaining to the gendered nature of the workforce, union involvement and strategies, and neo-liberal policies from the 1980s onwards. All are viewed and examined with an eye to their relevance to the key issue in this thesis of work stress in the CSS. Part two of the literature review covers relevant work stress research, including relevant models and their various implications for the reduction and prevention of work stress.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approaches used in the research study. It includes the selection of participants, questions, data collection and data analysis procedures. In this chapter there is an explanation of the theoretical approaches chosen and why these approaches were selected. In part the approach emanates from a broadly feminist perspective, which fits well with the predominately female workforce within the CSS. The ABS Census of Population and Housing (2009) figures for 2006 for example, shows that 81.2 percent of workers in the social/welfare field in Victoria are female.

Chapters Four and Five present the study's findings and analysis by detailing what workers have to say about work stress within the CSS. These chapters seek to give direct voice to the concerns and difficulties faced by workers. Moreover, they also present the workers' ideas for change within the sector. The causal links to work stress, the systems and structures that overlay, surround and are embedded in the CSS, are subjected to critical analysis.

Chapter Six reflects back on the overall thesis and discusses the implication of the workers' perspectives for policy development and action with respect to the changing nature of work in the CSS.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

1. Introduction

This qualitative study explores workers' understanding of job stress in the Community Services Sector (CSS) in Victoria. Specifically the researcher sought to examine whether workers see job stress in this sector as a significant issue, what they see as the causes of work stress and how they experience agencies' actions to ameliorate it. This thesis describes and analyses workers' perceptions of job stress in the sector, management responses to workers' concerns and outlines their suggestions for reducing work stress in the industry. The literature review developed from both initial reading and from reflexive reviewing throughout the research journey.

According to the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS 2010 p 101)

Community sector workers are engaged in complex, difficult and demanding work, but are generally undervalued, underpaid and often work in relatively poor conditions. The female dominated sector is one of the lowest paid in Australia.

This statement presents a rather stark and depressing description of the current situation for workers in the CSS. These substantial issues are a recipe for workers' stress levels to rise and can result in a psychological injury and workers compensation claims. Compensation claims for work stress have been on the rise in Australia in general. There was an increase of 62 percent over a seven year period from 1996 and 2003, whereas all other claim types over that same period dropped (Dollard, Skinner et al. 2007). Furthermore, stress claims in Australia are notoriously high in female dominated industries such as primary school teaching and community service work as noted by Guthrie & Jansz (2006 p 495). The important question here is why are there such high numbers of mental stress work cover claims in these fields and specifically the CSS sector?

Frequency rates⁴ for serious workers compensation claims in 2004–05 for the Health and Community Services (H&CS)⁵ Industry were 12.2 and for the community care services (CCS) sub-sector they were 14.9. However by 2009–10 the frequency rate for CCS sub-sector had risen to 16.2 while the total H&CS had fallen to 9.9. Between 2004–05 and 2008–09 the whole H&CS frequency rate for serious claims decreased by 17 percent while the CCS sub-sector frequency rate for serious claims increased by 3 percent (Safe Work Australia 2012a p 71). Furthermore, in 2009–10 the CCS had 17 percent of employees in the H&CS yet 28 percent of serious claims (Safe Work Australia 2012a p 68).

⁴ Frequency of serious claims per million hours worked.

⁵ The H&CS industry covers hospitals and nursing homes, community care services, other health services, child care services, medical and dental services and veterinary services – ABS, 2009.

The Victorian State Government Office for the Community Sector was established in 2008 and has developed the Victorian Government Action Plan: Strengthening Community Organisations. Action plan item 13 focuses on the recruitment and retention of staff in the community sector. Earles and Lynn (2009p 106) note that the average turnover in the CSS Australia wide in 2005-06 was 23 percent, whereas the all-industry average was only 10 percent to 12 percent. Importantly, there appears to be minimal research on exploring why the workers are leaving the sector in significant numbers. The major focus on recruitment, without a concomitant attempt to address the reasons for workers leaving, suggests that the recruitment focus will be of limited value.

This literature review chapter consists of two parts: Part one starts with a discussion of the community sector and its place in the world of work. It examines the history of the community sector in Australia. Secondly the review explores the relevance of gender in respect to the CSS and work stress. Thirdly, research on the influence on state and federal governments of neo-liberal political rationality from the mid-1980s onwards is examined. The resultant negative effects upon the CSS, especially in terms of increased worker stress are reviewed. Fourthly, relevant literature on the role of unions in the development of the sector is examined. Lastly, there is an exploration of more recent research into work stress in this sector of the workforce. It is important to note that the research into work stress has in the main focussed on the broader health and community sector (H&CS), not the CSS as defined below.

Part two covers the models of work stress pertinent to the CSS and reviews relevant stress prevention models. The literature review concludes with a summary of how the history of the sector has created a unique set of circumstances and problems for those working in the CSS workforce today.

2. Part One: The Community Services Sector

2.1 The Community Services Sector in Context

2.1.1 Definitions

As discussed in the introductory chapter there are a number of definitions and terms used to describe the community service sector (CSS). This has presented challenges and difficulties in extrapolating to the CSS from the literature. The State Services Authority Review (Victorian State Services Authority 2007 p7) stated:

There is no commonly accepted definition of the NFP (Not-for-profit) sector. The academic literature refers to a variety of terms such as the 'third-sector', the community sector, the non-profit or the charities sector. These terms can be misleading as they have contested technical meanings and describe classes of organisations with overlapping boundaries.

Lyons (2001 cited in Oppenheimer 2003) notes that the third sector is very broad and covers a wide range of non-profit as well as co-operative organisations. Most frequently, the CSS is called the not-for-profit (NFP) sector, other times it is termed as the 'third sector'. The first sector refers to the commercial or private sector while the second sector relates to government organisations.

The hierarchical definition of different sectors does imply that the CSS is the lowest, perhaps least worthy, of all sectors contributing to society. As stated by Lyons and Passey (2006 p 90) 'The policy of Australian Governments, both [sic] Commonwealth, state and territory, toward those organisations that comprise a third sector of the organised economy is patchy and piecemeal'.

Oppenheimer (2003 p 135) states 'Only in recent times has recognition emerged of the third sector as an integral and legitimate area of study'. Furthermore, Oppenheimer (2003 pp 135–6) points out that the lack of studies of the third sector in Australia is due in part to an 'indifference to the concept of volunteer work as 'real' work and a corresponding lack of understanding of the role played by the non-profit or third sector in Australia in the twentieth century'. She notes that 'the traditional focus has been on the role of governments and business and the interplay between these two sectors'. More recently, Brace-Govan (2010 p 25) states 'there is a general lack of information about the Third Sector particularly when compared to the for-profit sector'.

In this research the main term used is Community Services Sector (CSS). This is how the term is currently discussed in the industrial arena as well as being the term currently used by researchers, especially in government reports. However, the term 'community sector' is also used, as this is the term used in research, especially in the past. A clear and concise description of the community service sector is given by WorkSafe Victoria (2010a):

The community services sector covers a wide range of non-government, not-for-profit organisations that rely on high levels of volunteerism and provide a multitude of welfare services, including: childcare, disability, domestic violence, drug and alcohol, education, emergency relief, family support, housing and homelessness support, legal support, mental health, multicultural and youth. Community sector organisations range from small, informal community groups through to large organisations, often complementing government services in health, education, employment and welfare.

Each state and territory has some variations in its definitions, terminologies and development of the CSS, however, much of the research has an Australian-wide lens. This review aims therefore, to disentangle some of the complex issues, including the discourse surrounding the 'community service sector' and its relationship to work stress.

The complexities, confusion, blurred and overlapping boundaries have data collection challenges as well. Vaughan (2006 p 10) notes that 'one of the major data issues stems from the lack of agreement as to the constituents of the community services sector and hence the lack of

clear methods of identifying the community services workforce in data collections'. Meagher & Healy (2005) also comment on data problems with respect to research into care workers in Australia using Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data. The ABS does not collect statistics for the not-for-profit community sector per se, which makes independent data on its exact size and workforce composition problematic. The closest category from the Australian New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) is the Community Care Services (CCS) which is a sub-sector of the Health and Community Services (H&CS). This industry-based classification and specifically the sub-section called 'non residential services' is very large and misses important sub-sector data. Earles and Lyn (2009 p 107) discuss the problems in understanding the workforce issues because of 'a lack of uniformity in how the sector is defined'.

A further factor adding to the complexity of this sector is the policy direction of both state and federal governments which has sought to open up the Not-for-profit sector and have it compete with the for-profit sector, via tendering processes. This entanglement of the for-profits into the Not-for-profit arena initiated in the 1980s has added challenges for researchers, agencies, unions, peak bodies and the workers themselves (paid and voluntary). Some of the rhetoric, especially the promotion of the sector as a career, is based upon the vocational and caring elements entailed in the work. It is hard to equate this type of rhetoric with agencies focussed on making a profit. Wagner and Spence (2003 p 119), quoting ABS 2001 figures, state 'Since 1996, the non-profit sector grew by 10 percent; the for-profit sector grew by 32 percent and the number of government organisations stagnated'.

2.1.2 Work Stress Claims

Before beginning the exploration of work stress in this sector, the contextual setting in which the CSS is situated requires comment. McDonald and Marston (2001 p 2) state 'The contemporary environment in which the non-profit community sector is located is extremely turbulent, unstable and highly contested'.

Numerous official documents have reported the issues in relation to the health and wellbeing of community sector workers in Victoria. For instance, the risk of psychological injuries is unacceptably high in the Victorian community sector (Duffy 2008). The community sector has consistently been one of the highest claim sectors for WorkSafe Victoria and subsequently was included as a priority area for targeted action in the 2006–08 Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) report (Victorian Council of Social Service 2007b). The Health and Community Services (H&CS) sector has ranked top in making claims related to job strain⁶ (LaMontagne et al. 2006) and women have traditionally dominated job strain related claims (LaMontagne et al. 2006).

⁶ Job strain is the combination of high job demand and low job control which can lead to job stress (LaMontagne et al. 2006).

At the national level it has been reported that the Community Care Services (CCS) lodged 27 percent of serious compensation claims in 2008–09, although it has only 18 percent of H&CS total employees. Serious claims⁷ for mental stress were much higher at 12 percent in the CCS than the H&CS industry average of 8 percent (Safe Work Australia 2011a). Nationally (Safe Work Australia 2010a) in 2007–08 Community Care Services, had the second highest serious claims for mental stress at 13 percent, whereas the industry average was 8 percent. The 2008–09 serious claims for mental stress for the Community Care Services groups was 12 percent and the industry average was still 8 percent (Safe Work Australia 2011a). Furthermore the Community Care Services sub-sector has the highest incidence rate of serious claims (20.9 per 1000 employees) of the total H&CS industry (Safe Work Australia 2010a, p 57). This figure has had little fluctuation over the last eight year period. These statistics, especially the mental stress claims, paint a poor health picture for the workforce. Keegel, Ostry & LaMontagne's (2009) research into job strain exposure versus stress-related workers compensation claims in Victoria using 2003 data found that the Health and Community Services sectors both had elevated claim rates and job strain prevalence.

2.1.3 The History of the Community Services Sector – a Charity and Voluntary Model

The CSS has its origins in the early settlement days of the colonies of Australia in which the term 'public charity' described welfare services. The early public charities (from the mid-1800s to early 1900s) set the scene for the development of the CSS as it is today. British immigrants brought with them traditions of charity and collective membership and in the main it was the wealthy colonists and the churches that provided welfare-type services (Fels 2007). Lyons (2001, p 100) notes that 'colonists and their wives were encouraged to form and support Non Profit Organisations to provide services'. This highlights the notion of charity as separate from 'work'; the voluntary labour of the wives was not work in the sense that men's labour was work.

According to Melville and McDonald (2006) an important feature of the nineteenth-century social welfare in Australia was the significant influence of religion and the church's pastoral care activities within charities. Dickey (1987) documents the establishment in Melbourne in 1845 of a Presbyterian Female Visiting Society which in 1851 changed its name to the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. It attracted the respectable matrons of Melbourne. Those who did this work were middle class female volunteers who often worked within religious organisations.

Given this background, it is not surprising that there are problems and challenges inside the sector, especially as the work is often viewed as a vocation rather than an industry. This has an

⁷ Serious claims cover a death, a permanent incapacity or five or more days off work due to injury – Work Safe Australia (*Key Work Health and Safety Statistics, Australia* 2012).

effect on workers' vulnerability of job security, poor pay and conditions (Briggs, Meagher & Healy 2007; Thorpe, Petruchenia & Hughes 1992; Victorian Council of Social Service 2007a). Thorpe & Petruchenia, (1992 p 182) state 'accompanying traditional values held in Australian society, not least by the workers themselves, is that social welfare work is done for love, not money, and is an extension of voluntary charitable work'.

Writing in a similar vein, Meagher (2007) and Carson, Maher & King (2007) explore the notion of a 'care penalty' – a cultural devaluation of care work which is accompanied by poor industrial protection. Carson, Maher and King (2007) for example researched the community services workforce using interviews, a large scale survey and case studies. They noted (p 110) that 'the work of caring is undervalued'. Meagher & Healy (2006), in their aptly-named paper 'Who Cares Volume 2: Employment Structure and Incomes in the Australian Care Workforce', explored the concepts of a care penalty in which care workers are paid a lower hourly rate of pay. In concrete terms lower wages are justifiable and duly received for this type of work. There is a penalty for choosing to work in a caring role. Furthermore, as noted by the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (2008b) there is a connection between the historical devaluation of care work and how both state and federal governments are able to implement strong cost control strategies such as limited wage rises.

It is argued by various researchers that governments and agencies have taken advantage of this altruistic and vocational discourse to exploit workers in their recruitment strategies and subsequent employment conditions. In a US study of workers in welfare occupations that used the National Longitudinal Study of Youth data England, Budig & Folbre (2002 p 458) state, 'the low pay may be made up for by the intrinsic fulfilment of the jobs; altruism is its own reward'. Wagner and Spence (2003) examined four separate studies of paid staff that covered 170 workers in 157 non-profit organisations. These studies used both qualitative and quantitative analyses to build a picture of the organisations in terms of the individual, the team, the organisation and the political contexts. They stated (Wagner and Spence, 2003, p 130) 'In some organisations, impoverished working conditions were seen as a test of workers' commitment. A willingness to self-exploit for the 'greater good', the 'needy client' or heavenly rewards was occasionally implied as qualification for community work'.

England, Budig & Folbre (2002) further argue one of the assumptions underpinning the care penalty is the view that it is seen as a function culturally associated with women and thus devalued. England et al. (2002 p 457) state 'The 'devaluation thesis' asserts that our culture devalues women relative to men and in something akin to guilt by association, any activity done largely by women is valued less than that it otherwise would be'.

Examining the issue further Meagher (2007 p163) states 'one longstanding problem that has contributed significantly to poor industrial recognition of care work in Australia is that some care workers do not have a strong sense of themselves as 'workers' in the sense of rights-

bearing industrial citizens'. Charity work goes hand in hand symbolically with the concepts of mothering: all caring, all sacrificing and all giving.

This history is the foundation upon which the sector is built; a foundation developed in the main by volunteers, especially women. As the New South Wales Council Of Social Services (NCOSS) (2001 cited in Leonard 2002 p 32) comments, 'government funding is moving away from direct human services through paid workers, and is being channelled into large volunteer programs in the third sector in which there is a reliance on unpaid volunteers'.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2001 p 2) in the Community Services Industries nationally, volunteers marginally outnumbered paid employees in 1999–2000; '276,334 volunteers to 269,022 paid staff'. Volunteer numbers increased 110 percent between 1995 and 2000 in the community sector (Briggs, Meagher & Healy 2007 p 517). This widespread use of volunteers poses challenges for the workers to put forward industrial claims for better pay and conditions (Leonard 2002). The volunteerism and charity-oriented history of the sector has created a cultural norm in which workers in general accept much lower pay levels (Pegg 2009).

It is in the 1950s to late 1960s that we find the origins of the modern Community Services Sector, including women's groups and consumer representative organisations (Briggs, Meagher & Healy 2007). The sector grew with the help and encouragement of state funding, some private contributions and church-based support.

From after the Second World War until the mid-1970s was the era of the Keynesian welfare state model (Watts 1999a). 'In the period from 1945–1975, the State was both powerful and central to nation-building and to economic and social policy' (Watts 1999b p 55–56). The Liberal–Country Party reign from 1949 to 1972 saw a policy direction of subsidising not-for-profit organisations to provide and expand the range of social services (Lyons 2001). Lyons (1998, 2001) notes that from the 1970s, with the advent of this strong central welfare state and the development of a second wave feminist movement and its influence, the creation of new non profit, community-based organisations was encouraged in order to provide a range of social services.

According to Briggs et al. (2007 p502) 'the Whitlam Labor government (1972–75) expanded community service spending programmes and employment; the Fraser Coalition government (1975–83) did not, actually cutting some programmes. Thus the expectations of the new more professionalised community service workforce were raised and then tested'. This disbanding of programs affected the CSS workforce.

Nevertheless the development of state provisions of services remained part of a broad political consensus until the mid-1980s when state governments reduced their direct service provision under the influences of economic liberalism (Melville & McDonald 2006; Vicary & Henley 1999).

2.2 Gender and the CSS

Lee's report for the Australian Services Union (ASU) (2007b) states that in Australia the sector currently is running at over 81 percent female workforce. In Victoria the Australian Services Union (ASU) (2009) states the workforce is 86.6 percent female with over half (51.6 percent) in part-time work. Sheen (2010 p 4) discussed the social risks of precarious employment for women and noted that 'the trend in women's employment in Australia is increasingly in part-time, casual work with 58 percent of part-time jobs also casual'.

Historically in Australia the CSS has worked under a charity model of welfare with high levels of predominately female volunteers. Furthermore, there has always been a strong presence of religious based organisations. Charity and religion, and hence this sector, has always relied upon the free and/or cheap labour of women.

The Council of Social Service (The National State and Territory Councils of Social Service (COSS) 2009) submission to the Industrial Relations Commission modernising awards process draws a connection between the significant undervaluing of the worker and the work in this sector to a gender bias. It (2009 p ii) recommends that 'the Australian Industrial Relations commission recognise the historical undervaluing of the community service sector employees and their work, and takes steps to rectify this through the modern awards'. The government submission (Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations 2010 p 58) to the Equal Remuneration Case by the Australian Services Union (ASU) for the social and Community Services Sector with Fair Work Australia acknowledges 'the undervaluation of what has traditionally been women's work'.

Much of the discourse about the sector has historically been entwined with it being seen as a woman's vocation, linked symbolically to mothering. The stereotype of the all-nurturing, all-sacrificing and naturally self-fulfilling mothering roles and behaviour is ever present. Hence there is a societal expectation of greater altruistic behaviour from women, whether it be accepting lower pay or giving their free labour as volunteers in the CSS.

As shown in the research into the CSS in South Australia by Carson, Maher and King (2007) described above, there is a tension between the imposition of entrepreneurial business-like approaches to contracting, tendering, and organisational management, and the expectation that people employed in the sector would be motivated by dedication to the wellbeing of others. There are also a number of challenges facing the Australian Services Union, its industrial officers and delegates, when they try to fight for better pay, terms and conditions in an industrially disengaged workforce. This in part is about the tension between workers engaging in industrial action to improve poor pay and conditions versus giving all of their energies and focus to the demanding work with struggling clients.

It is often noted that women's care work is regarded on an industrial front as somehow less important and valuable and hence deserves cheaper pay rates (Briggs, Meagher & Healy 2007; Meagher 2007). One of the initial struggles of the Australian Services Welfare Union (ASWU)⁸ was representing predominately female workers in a male industrial landscape. Guthrie and Jansz (2006) highlight that women are often paid less than men and work in gender segregated areas which reduce their industrial power. The historical male dominated industrial scene in Australia has its genealogy in the historical Harvester decision of 1907. The Harvester decision established a national minimum basic wage based on what a male breadwinner needed to support himself and his family. In setting the female wage rate at less than half the male rate it not only enshrined the notion of a male breadwinner economy, it also entrenched gender pay inequality. The judgement simultaneously devalued women's work, disadvantaged single women and privileged single men. Hence what is seen to be 'women's work' has never been given equal status and importance compared to men's work. Women's work has always been accorded less social significance. It is often defined as unskilled or semi-skilled, (irrespective of the actual skill involved) and hence of less economic value.

In workers compensation claims women also face significant disadvantages. For example they already receive lower wages and subsequently their wage supplements are lower (Guthrie & Jansz 2006).

Bailey & Van Acker (2007 p 55) comment, 'the Howard Government's [1996–2007] social conservatism and neo-liberal philosophy appears to have had a profound impact on gender issues by maintaining a hostile stance to feminist imperatives'. For example they note that the Office of Status of Women budget in 1996 was cut by 40 percent. Given that the CSS workforce is over 80 percent women, the subsequent effects on this female dominated sector cannot be denied. During this time there were threats to women's specific community agencies such as Women's Health Services, Domestic Violence Services, Council of Single Mothers and their children, and the Women's Information and Referral service. For example in Victoria in the early 1990s in the western region there was pressure at one stage from the federal government of the day for the Women's Health Service to amalgamate with the Western Region Centre Against Sexual Assault. This depleted already stretched resources, especially the human resources. It took away from face-to-face service provision and created instability for both agencies and their workers; it added stress.

⁸ The ASWU was the original union name until it amalgamated into the Australian Services Union.

2.3 Neo-Liberalism (Economic Rationalism)

2.3.1 *The Introduction of Neo-Liberal Policies in the CSS*

Neo-liberalism (economic rationalism⁹) is an economic philosophy that many governments throughout the world, including in Australia, have embraced. The macro policies of neo-liberalism have had a considerable effect upon the CSS in Australia and overseas. The principles of neo-liberalism include cuts to public spending, opposition to wage and salary increases, a belief that welfare spending should be limited, a taxation focus on consumers rather than businesses, an acceptance of higher levels of unemployment, a deregulated private sector and removal of public controls over business (Serr 2001).

The term neo-liberalism is often used interchangeably with terms such as economic rationalism, neo-classical, neo-liberal, libertarian economics, market capitalism and market liberalism. As Van Gramberg and Bassett (2005) comment neo-liberalism plays out in more than the free market arena; it extends into politics and how governance and policy are created. Hase, Phelps, Saenger & Gordon-Thomson, (2004 p 3) state 'neo-liberalism involves the dominance of the market in society to the point where it becomes an end in itself'. According to Bryson (1996, p 35) 'Economic rationalism/liberalism assumes that economic efficiency is to be attained through enhancing the so-called free play of the market'. Nyland (1995) states that in the economic theorists' view the third sector plays a subsidiary role to the primacy of the state and the market. Furthermore, neo-liberal economists see this sector in terms of pricing it within a capitalist economic framework and not for its social change potential. The period from 1987 to the present is the period of the neo-liberal globalising influence according to Lipsig-Mumme and McBride (2007).

A number of critics argue that the impact of neo-liberal policies can be seen quite starkly in the growth of insecure, precarious and intensified forms of employment. Evans, Richmond & Shields (2005), in their examination of the not-for-profit sectors in Anglo-American democracies, comment on the deteriorating working conditions for workers including workload issues and the need to do more with less. 'Work load problems, stress, work/life conflict, job insecurity, lower pay and benefits and a high level of dissatisfaction are all warning signals' (Evans, Richmond & Shields 2005 p 90). They are warning signals of increased instability within the sector which can lead to increased work stress.

Similarly, Caulfield, Chang, Dollard and Elshaug (2004,) draw the link between the pressure of neo-liberal practices resulting in fewer workers having to complete the same amount of work (job intensification, increased work pressures, and longer hours) resulting in increased work

⁹ Economic rationalism is an older term and neo-liberalism is a more current term.

stress. The term used is ‘over-employment’: that is, those who are left with employment must work more hours, whether or not these hours are paid.

Karasek’s (2004) model of work stress incorporates the external economic and social environment as well as an organisational focus in work stress development. As Dollard, Skinner et al. (2007 p 25) state:

Most systems do not consider external influences such as economic, legal, political, technological, and demographic forces at the national and international level. This omission is all the more important since emerging up stream psychosocial risks such as globalization, changing labour markets, precarious contracts, new forms of employment contracting practices, lean production, and outsourcing are widely believed among psychosocial experts to strongly influence the job characteristics and nature of work (i.e. work intensification, job insecurity, work load) and the social and organizational context of work (i.e. poor work–life balance, increased bullying, and violence).

Levi (2006) uses the term ‘imported stress’, which refers to outside stress and not internal workplace or working conditions, for these factors.

In Australia in the early 1990s, according to Vicary and Henley (1999) the South Australian Liberal government introduced economic liberal policies. These involved new funding models which contained new forms of authority and regulation, or command and control, in which labour became more flexible as part of the new arrangements. Conditions and jobs of community workers were negatively affected. Flexibility in labour terms equates with casual employment in which one of the major outcomes for workers is unstable employment and income insecurity and which can lead to increased worker stress. This situation is replicated in Victoria.

2.3.2 Impact of Neo-liberal Policies on CSS Funding

Neo-liberalism had its historical beginnings around the mid to late 1980s and it is still dominant today (Briggs, Meagher & Healy 2007; Bursian 1995; Van Gramberg & Bassett 2005; Western et al. 2007; Wiseman 1995). In Australia there has been an ideological consensus on neo-liberalism rationalism by both major political parties. The major focus of the Hawke/Keating Labor governments from 1983 to 1996 was consistent with the economic imperatives of the free market (The National State and Territory Councils of Social Service (COSS) 2009). This resulted in a mixed-economy welfare sector: public, not-for-profit and for-profit agencies were all providing welfare services. In economic terms a quasi-market was developed and the end result was competition between the NFP and the for profits.

The CSS is largely reliant on state and federal government funding and hence directly experiences the effects of government policy. Barraket (2006) noted that in Victoria 80 percent of the community sector funding came from government. Australia-wide Community Services

figures (South Australian Council of Social Service 2010 p 11) show that 32 percent of community sector funding is from the Commonwealth Government, 32 percent from state/territory government and 14 percent from local government. In another context, Evans et al. (2005 p 74), whose research focussed on Canadian not for profits, stated that:

The imposition of Neoliberal governance structures on non-profit service providers has served to compromise their autonomy and advocacy function, while commercialising non-profit operations and imposing burdens that have strained organisational capacity. Market-based regulation has moved many non-profit service organisations away from their community oriented focus and towards a “business model”. In various forms, the state has introduced quasi-markets or at minimum required NPOs to engage in more competitive practices with negative consequence for non profit mission, culture and labour management practices. The result is a growing level of instability within the sector.

The authors suggest that the evidence is comparable across international settings.

Such economic and political imperatives and frameworks continue today: organisations in the CSS have to continue to provide more with fewer government dollars. The Australian CSS experienced significant reductions in funding from the state and federal governments during the 1980s to 1990s. As Melville (1998 p 46–47) stated ‘the community sector is being subjected to major structural reshaping characterised by a decrease in funds accompanied by an increase in demands on services from the community’. Melville notes that the competitive tendering and contracting processes caused considerable strain from these policy directions as well as distrust and inequality rather than a mature partnership between government and community sector organisations. Weeks (1996 p 62) stated ‘all non-profit organisations in Australia are experiencing an inhospitable economic climate’. Weeks was specifically referring to the increased pressure on community services due to the severe global economic recession in the 1990s, and Australian government deregulation policies and subsequent effects of higher unemployment, increased casualisation of the workforce and greater part-time work. These changes have led to a process of de-professionalisation (replacing qualified staff with less-qualified staff). Insufficient funding has meant that agencies prefer employing low-paid, low-skilled classifications of workers in the care field of work (Meagher & Healy 2006).

One of the few studies which has directly focused on the working conditions in the Victorian community sector was completed by Bursian (1995). This exploratory study included interviews with representatives from peak bodies and unions, as well as individual workers and managers involved in six programs. She looked at the impact of economic rationalist policies on workers and concluded (1995, p 3) that ‘the application of the economic liberal reform program to community services is seriously downgrading workers’ working conditions’. Bursian notes that the Health and Community Services Department (H&CS), which accounted for 27 percent of all Victorian Government expenditure at the time, was required to find 54 percent of all savings –

savings of \$500 million between 1992–1996. This meant that more complex demands were being placed on agencies and workload issues, such as more clients and fewer resources, were having a serious impact on staff.

One of the major changes was the introduction of competitive tendering. In Victoria, it was called ‘compulsory competitive tending’ (CCT). This had the effect of setting up quasi-markets, with the not-for-profits and for-profit organisations competing for government funding. Hancock (2006) comments on the Victorian Kennett led Liberal government’s sweeping neo-liberal reform agenda for this sector. Deregulation, marketisation of services, introduction of contracting out and new partnership arrangements for delivery systems were introduced at this time.

Lyons, (1998 p 17) comments that ‘non-profit organizations find that not only are they told to compete for funds along with for-profits, but they are probably not as efficient and should grow more like business or die’.

Competitive tendering had, and still has, a considerable negative impact on community organisations and their workforces. Neville’s (2000) research on the implementation of competitive tendering in the Australian social welfare sector concluded that it has had a detrimental impact on this sector in three main areas: loss of autonomy, reduced collaboration and learning, and increased administrative costs to agencies. Contracts were awarded to those organisations which could ‘devolve high levels of responsibility onto low paid workers’ (Meagher & Healy 2006 p 11).

Mowbray (1995)¹⁰ notes the Industry Commission’s focus on thrift and control including concepts of measurable output based funding (number of clients, number of beds, and number of hours of care) in which quality is not a factor and competition amongst agencies for government money is encouraged. This can be stressful and demoralising for workers who believe quality of care cannot be corralled solely into minutes of care. As well, the smaller agencies have fewer resources available and possibly less expertise to compete on a level playing field in the tender processes. The tendering processes leave the smaller organisations with a more short-term focus as they cannot absorb the loss of contracts as well as the larger charity and religious agencies can.

Kelly (2004) makes the connection between compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) and high staff attrition rates in the sector. One reason for this is non-recurrent funding where staff are employed on short-term contracts and in reality must move on to new jobs and agencies on a regular basis. These workers have less stability in work and income, and less accrual of benefits such as sick leave, long service leave and annual leave. One can conclude that short-term contracts of employment can make workers less likely to complain and challenge oppressive

¹⁰ Mowbray researched the Federal Industry Commission (IC) enquiry into charitable organisations and the Economic Planning and Advisory Commission (EPAC) enquiry into the future of the Australian Welfare State.

working conditions and stressful working environments. This situation thus makes for a more compliant workforce.

Adding to the research focussing upon the incorporation of neo-liberal strategies into the community sector, Egan and Hoatson (1998) have investigated state and federal neo-liberal ideology on the impact of subsequent policy directions: policy directions, in effect, that left services in a perpetually under-resourced state. They analysed women's specific community services in Victoria in the late 1990s under what was known as the 'Contract State'. The Victorian Government tendered out services that had previously been provided by the state government or funded through local governments. These researchers found that the outcome of competition and lack of adequate resources made services ripe for developing unhealthy work environments that lead to burnout and major staff conflict across a host of organisations. Weeks' (1996) research into women's specific community services also notes the heavy workloads on both staff and committees of management and the inadequate employment conditions and low wages.

The ASU research (Australian Services Union 2007a) states that the 1990s was the time in which state, territory and federal governments began implementing competitive tendering for funding and increased accountability requirements. These changes add additional work to already over-stretched workers and the competitive nature of tendering increases insecurity of work tenure and reliable wages.

Compulsory competitive tendering also brings with it funding formulas and accounting models that leave less room for professional judgement and autonomy (Wright, F 2003). As documented later in this review, this restriction on professional judgement and a lack of autonomy plays a role in work stress. This work situation aligns with the Demand–Control–Support model of work stress. This model suggests that high work demands but lack of autonomy and control together with low supports create psychological distress (Dollard et al. 2000). This is especially relevant for those workers (e.g. psychologists, social workers) who see themselves as 'professionals' and have been trained to believe in their ability to make professional judgements and decisions. Workplaces characterised by high demand and low autonomy take control away from workers. They also challenge aspects of the workers' allegiance to ethical principles of their relevant profession and professional bodies. An accounting model is about numbers and balance sheets, not ethical standards of practice. Also, perhaps less overtly, this professional training brings the expectation of rights to autonomous decision making and this is challenged in a more business model of operation (Wright, F 2003).

2.3.3 The Rise of the Corporate Managerialism

Melville (1998) suggests that a consequence of these new neo-liberal policies is the rise in what she termed 'corporate managerialism' in the community sector. In her view corporate

managerialism includes increased accountability, a standardisation of social programs and a focus on outputs. Wright (2003b p 155) suggests that 'managerialism is the process through which competition and contractualism are imposed onto the human services. Organisational and management skills and theories prevail in this environment'. Lyons (2007) clearly sees the term 'economic rationalism' as synonymous with 'managerialism'. Munro, (2004 p 1078) using the term 'new public management' states:

The 'new public management' (Hood, 1991) assumes that the hierarchical bureaucracies of the welfare state are inherently inefficient and therefore tries to introduce some of the efficiencies of the market by adopting a cluster of practices from the private sector.

Wright (2003a) discusses the development of the 'welfare marketplace' in Australia in the late 1980s. This is a welfare marketplace in which corporatisation, privatisation and contracting out prevail in the welfare sector. Similarly, McDonald and Jones (2000 p 7) see the 1980s and 1990s as a time of the 'onslaughts of managerialism and marketisation'. Harris (2003) talks about the McDonaldization of social work in which there are four principles: efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. These categories appear better suited to a factory environment than to the human services where workers are dealing with real life experiences of economic hardship and a wide range of health problems and crises. Considine (2003, p 63) sees the move 'towards the development of quasi-markets based on the involvement of private firms and non-profit organisations can be viewed as the most radical change to state-society relations since the advent of the modern welfare state'.

Wright (2003a) and Ford (2004) have both commented on the negative effects upon workers who bear the brunt of the drive for efficiency and subsequent cost containment in the human service industry. This scenario has end results in which fewer staff are left to deal with increased workloads and subsequently less attention is paid to the impact of deteriorating employment conditions in the drive to keep costs down. Wright (2003a p 152) describes the practice environment as 'chaotic, isolating, harsh and controlling'.

Blewett, Shaw, LaMontagne & Dollard's (2006) extensive study into job stress in the H&CS and the challenges to reduce job stress, notes the impact of government competitive funding arrangements and their clear link to under-resourcing and the outcome of unreasonable work demands. In Spall and Zetlin's research (2004 p 285) on the sustainability of the CSS, they comment that 'the planning of quasi-market strategies largely ignored issues of capacity of the existing service delivery systems and organizational capacity to implement reforms'. Spall and

Zetlin (2004) argue there has always been some fragility within this sector but quasi-market reforms have heightened the problems.¹¹

The dominance of the neo-liberal agenda leaves the so-called third sector languishing. As Lyons and Passey (2006 p 101), who have carried out significant research into the third sector comment, ‘... both major parties remain deeply wedded to versions of neo-liberalism, and where no political leader is interested in the third sector’. Lyons (2007) argues that opportunities for growth and survival of the third sector lie within the private sector due to its philanthropic character. As successive governments have instigated business management systems stemming from neo-liberal marketing models, the sector lies more and more outside the direct concern of the government. This, Lyons argues, is unlikely to change despite government rhetoric and its putative interest in this sector.

Lyons and Passey (2006) note government policies are either exploiting the commitment of the already underpaid staff and volunteers or treating the agencies as for-profit services. Carson, Maher & King (2007) note the view of key sector players that government funding bodies rely on a charitable CSS to have lower overall costs due to expectations of benevolent/philanthropic motives of workers. The sector also relies on public donations and fund raising components. The accounting language used refers to this as ‘value-added resourcing’. As stated in the government submission to the Equal Remuneration Case before Fair Work Australia (Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations 2010 p 63),

The not-for-profit sector has become more ‘professionalised’ than it used to be, and the line between the not-for-profit sector and the business sector increasingly blurred.

This language highlights how the focus has changed from the content of the NFP sector to the processes, and hence the costs to the community sector of this approach, can be ignored.

2.4 Unionism in the CSS

2.4.1 Historical Antecedents

Currently the Australian Services Union (ASU) is the key union in the non-government social and community services (SACS) industry. There is a second union, the Health and Community Sector Union (H&CSU), whose focus is wider than the CSS. The latter’s coverage within the CSS is limited to some workers from disability, psychiatric services and drug and alcohol services.

The Australian Social Welfare Union (ASWU) was formed in 1976 and covered social welfare workers (Briggs, Meagher & Healy 2007).¹² The concept of social welfare workers

¹¹ Fragility relates to financial viability, capacities of committees of management, capacity to meet compliance needs, accountability demands etc ... Spall and Zetlin, 2004.

¹² Although Davis noted the formation of the ASWU union as being in 1974 (Davis 1987).

included social workers and welfare workers, as they often – although not exclusively – worked in the community sector. The ASWU was formed in 1975 after a split within the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) which was originally registered as a union (Mendes 2005). The split came about over arguments as to whether the association needed to focus its energies on building the professionalism of social workers or on industrial (union) matters. In the early 1990s, with the push for integration of smaller unions into larger unions, the ASWU became part of the ASU.

The former National Organiser of the ASWU Fran Hayes commented that the initial goal of the union was to cover all social welfare workers as they had common interests, common problems and, most importantly, the majority had very poor working conditions and salaries (Thorpe, Petruchenia & Hughes 1992). She pointed to a political environment in which both state and federal governments had strong opposition to increasing their social welfare spending including core costs of salaries and improved working conditions.

Another important factor noted by Fran Hayes was that prior to 1992 the union had the equivalent of only two full-time workers to cover the whole of Australia and that it had a membership of around 2000.¹³ According to Briggs, Meagher & Healy (2007 p 501, 498):

Workers in social and community services have long experienced some of the worst working conditions in Australia.

and:

until the 1990s many workers employed in these organizations were excluded from the most basic right of Australian ‘industrial citizenship’ – award coverage and the suite of minimum wage rates and employment conditions, otherwise available to over 90 percent of the Australian workforce.

Bursian’s (1995) research reported similar findings: excessive workloads, poor job security, poor rewards including low pay, inadequate resources and often inadequate working environments.

Importantly Davidson, the then ASWU Secretary, pointed out in his 1984 report at the Annual General Meeting of the NSW branch of the ASWU (cited in Briggs, Meagher & Healy 2007 p 511) that

It [the award campaign] also undermines the survival strategy of the traditional charities, also under strain from the recession. These organisations have failed to use their considerable political power to campaign heavily for increased funding to the welfare sector as a whole. Their strategy is to ‘corner the market’ of charitable contributions from big business and government by keeping labour and costs to a

¹³ The interview conducted by Thorpe & Petruchenia did not note an interview date; however it must have been in or before 1992.

minimum ... Such organizations form a powerful employer block which will unite in opposition to award claims.

Charities, especially religious organisations, are still one of the biggest players in the CSS.

The long and difficult struggles of the ASWU to obtain a Social and Community Workers Award are well documented by Briggs, Meagher and Healy (2007). Union action started in the 1970s but as Lyons (2001) points out it was only in the 1980s that many staff working in community service organisations began to be covered by award systems. Many of the workers in non-government community organisations did not receive award coverage until the 1990s. The majority of workers across Australia in the social and community services (SACS), after much industrial struggle, came under respective state awards in the 1990s; the exception were qualified social workers in Victoria (Barraket, J 2006; Briggs, Meagher & Healy 2007). Barraket et al. (2007 p 504) describes these awards as ‘a patchwork of relatively threadbare state awards’.

As pointed out by a number of researchers (Briggs, Meagher & Healy 2007; Thorpe, Petruchenia & Hughes 1992) a further challenge in securing a united front in fighting for reasonable standards of pay and conditions came from workers themselves within the sector and/or as volunteers in sub-committees of the ASWU. Tension existed as to whether the sector should be seen as industry or welfare/charity. That is, some workers absorbed the discourse about their work being a vocation and did not see themselves as community sector industry workers. Davis (1987), in writing about the union’s history, stated that the union’s overall purpose was to fight for decent wages for its workers as well as for welfare recipients. Davis (1987, p 67) quotes from the Victorian Annual Report of the ASWU 1978–1979:

The central problem about organising welfare workers into an industry organisation is the nature of the industry in which they work. Firstly, it is difficult to organise given our wide dispersion and multiplicity of employers. But more important is the identification that workers have with both professionalism and with welfare or charity.

This statement highlights some of the major challenges confronting workers and their respective unions with respect to improving wages and working conditions today. The extensive range of sub-sectors, as well as the fairly unregulated professional, para-professionals and non-professional demarcation lines, present significant challenges and difficulties for the sector and its workforce. As well, there is the disparity in wages and working conditions between sub-sectors. For example, similarly qualified workers can experience considerable differences in pay rates between aged care, housing and homelessness, and drug and alcohol services. This in part is a result of each agency determining the classification of each position. When funding from state and federal governments is set so low and agencies commit to completing tenders with this low funding, then workers have no choice but to accept positions for which they may be overqualified. The important point of note here pertains to trying to collectivise workers about

their needs, including improving working conditions and work stress reduction in an industry that is so diversified in area of client focus, agency structures and geography. By way of comparison, this was less an issue for nurses in their major campaign for better pay, terms and conditions in the 1990s as their jobs and respective titles were codified (i.e., registered nurses and enrolled nurses), their places of work were similar (local, city and regional hospitals) and they were generally not run by charities nor did they have high numbers of volunteers working closely with the paid workers.

Davis' (1987) research into the ASWU noted a challenge faced by the union delegates when they tried to engage their colleagues in fighting for better wages. Delegates were told by fellow workers that they felt uncomfortable about fighting for better wages when on a daily basis they were confronted with clients who were much worse off than themselves. In comparison it is doubtful that doctors as a cohort, through their union, the Australian Medical Association, would show a similar concern about their patients when fighting for improved pay and working conditions. Clearly there is a connection to the expectations of the workers in this charity and voluntary model.

Fran Hayes (cited in Thorpe, Petruchenia & Hughes 1992 p 184), as the National Organiser of the ASWU, commented in an interview about unionism and community workers:

Most community workers saw maintenance of their (often radically oriented) organisations, rather than maintenance of their own salaries and working conditions, as their major priority, and many saw the two as mutually exclusive concerns. Most of their organisations were funded for short periods at a time, by state or federal government bodies, and it was a common belief that any organisation which 'rocked the boat' by union demands would lose its funding next time around.

Briggs et al. (2007) argue that major players in the industrial arena such as the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and other unions found it difficult to recognise care work as legitimate work and hence a legitimate domain of union struggles. This is because, it is argued, that work of this kind is frequently seen as an extension of duties (unpaid work) that women do within the family and volunteers do for free. Clearly this is in part because of the historically male-dominated union movement and subsequent culture that has evolved within Australia.

As recently as 2010 the Australian Services Union (ASU) has run a national 'Respect the Worker' campaign. The main objective of this campaign was to obtain better pay rates that would be in line with work of similar value and content as well as commensurate with qualifications and experience. This campaign highlights the fact that the battle for decent pay, terms and conditions within this industry is far from over some thirty-six years on from the establishment of the union. Concurrently, the ASU has also submitted an historic claim for equal pay rights for the community sector workforce with the federal authority Fair Work Australia. On 1 February 2012 Fair Work Australia (2012) granted award wage increases that

ranged from 19 percent to 41 percent in the social, community and disability services industries throughout Australia (the SACS industry). Such a large increase recognises the historical undervaluing of this work.

In summary, prior to and during the early 1990s many workers in community service organisations were excluded from the most basic rights of Australian industrial awards (e.g. award coverage and suite of minimum wage rates, reasonable hours of work, paid overtime, permanency of employment, compensation for retrenchment, prevention of hasty and unfair dismissals) resulting in some of the poorest working conditions in Australia. Furthermore, as outlined thus far in this thesis, little has changed since.

2.4.2 Unions and their Occupational Health and Safety Watch

Occupational health and safety (OH&S) is inextricably linked to the union's overall work in supporting workers in regards to their issues and concerns. The chronic underfunding of the community welfare sector is a major OH&S issue according to the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) (2008, cited in Australian Services Union, Victorian Authorities and Services Branch, 2009). In OH&S preventative language, issues such as funds are deemed as 'upstream elements'¹⁴ that should be taken into account when examining workplace safety. In this case it is the inadequate funding levels provided by state and federal governments that constitute an OH&S issue and need action (more funding) to be part of the solution. For example, increased funding can mean more staff employed to share the workload, funds to improve working conditions and assist in the overall improvement to the working environment and culture. An important problem in respect to OH&S in the CSS was highlighted in Wagner and Spence's research (2003). In one study they found a disturbing lack of knowledge regarding the implementation of occupational health and safety legislations and associated practices by 50 percent of managers.

Moreover, Caulfield et al (2004 p 161) discussed Dollard, Forgan and Winfield's research into correctional officers that found 'improving working conditions through job redesign, monitoring psychological disorders and risk factors, and improving psychological health services resulted in positive outcomes such as lower work stress claims and higher utilisation of employee assistance schemes'. Wagner and Spence's (2003) research in non-profit agencies adds a further dimension to the complexity of issues in this arena by exploring 'paucity management practices' occurring due to poor resources of this sector.¹⁵ Paucity management leads to a trade-off where workers accept poor working conditions (income, caseloads, working

¹⁴ The term 'upstream elements' in work stress literature refers to causes of work stress originating from outside where the actual site of the work stress is manifesting.

¹⁵ 'Paucity management, a set of strategies used by paid managers and workers to operate effectively and ethically under resource-poor conditions', (Wagner & Spence 2003 p 119)

hours and quality of working environments) for increased decision making and policy development, and increased autonomy and diversity of work. Wagner and Spence (2003 p 132-33) conclude:

To date the research found that organisations are compensating mostly by way of trading-off working conditions for other aspects of the working environment, and by expecting managers to do everything.

The Australian Services Union commissioned a national survey of over 2100 workers in 2007 (Australian Services Union 2007a, 2007b). The resultant reports noted that psychological injury (work stress) was one of the main occupational health and safety (OH&S) issues within the workforce. Workers, moreover, expressed a strong desire to work in less stressful work environments. Workers wanted additional staff to cover workloads, including relieving staff to cover permanent staff on leave and improved working conditions. They saw this as necessary in part due to the increased complexity of client needs and the toll this exacted upon workers. This report also found massive turnover of staff, figures reaching 50 percent staff turnover in two years. As Earles and Lynn (2009 pp 106–107) state:

There are also anecdotal indications that the inability to fill or backfill positions with appropriately skilled people is increasing workloads for existing staff and affecting staff morale and agencies' capacity to deliver timely and high-quality services.

2.5 Work Stress Research in the CSS

What research has been done in the CSS has been conducted primarily by the relevant peak bodies, such as ACOSS and its state counterparts, government authorities and the main union, the ASU. There has been limited academic research. Most importantly there is little work stress research directly focussing on the CSS by any relevant bodies. Most of the work stress research has looked at workers under the broader category 'human service professions'. Although workers in the CSS are often bracketed under this term, it also includes government workers, nurses, emergency service personnel, etc. The pay, terms and conditions for workers are considerably better in government agencies.

The majority of the research in this literature review, both internationally and in Australia, was focussed on medical professionals (nurses, doctors, ambulance officers). There was for example, a comprehensive research project looking into the issues of job stress in the Health and Community Services (H&CS) sector in 2006 (Blewett et al. 2006) which was funded by Work Safe New South Wales. There was a sprinkling of studies with references to Aboriginal workers; however it was unclear whether they worked directly for the government or in the CSS.

Given that the CSS is predominately a female workforce it is important to mention Messing's (1997 p 41) research because it specifically focuses upon issues of gender bias in OH&S research. She states:

There are structural barriers to understanding the occupational health of women: (1) women and their work have been excluded from consideration by scientists in occupational health; (2) data collection has been gender-insensitive; (3) data analysis has been gender-insensitive; and (4) health outcomes analysed have not included effects from women's jobs.

Messing's more recent work (see for example Messing et al. 2003) notes there are still fewer studies about women by occupational health scientists. This gap is of concern, if only because as highlighted by Noblet & LaMontagne (2006 p 346), 'Occupational stress is quickly becoming the single greatest cause of occupational disease ... and can have far-reaching consequences for both the worker and the workplace'.

A review of occupational stress interventions in Australia from 1993 to 2003 found that the majority of interventions were individually focused despite research alluding to risky work environment stressors. All of the reviewed studies were solely conducted in the public sector (Caulfield et al. 2004). This critique on current work stress literature feeds into the larger arguments, tensions and challenges around social change models versus individual change models of work stress. Psychological models often tend to focus on the individual, whereas sociological models examine systems and structures.

The early research on work stress in the USA by Kahn and colleagues which continued into the 1960s and 1970s focused on personal attributes and subjective characteristics rather than situational characteristics. At the same time in the Scandinavian countries a social democratic political approach was the focus, in which occupational stress was seen as a social and political problem as much as a health problem (Dollard 2001a).

Lewig & Dollard (2001 p 180) comment that 'the discourse on work stress cannot be viewed from a purely scientific perspective but must take account of broader ideological, social and political processes'. This thesis therefore includes analysis which explores work stress outcomes emanating from Australian governments' neo-liberal political policy direction from the mid-1980s onwards.

Dollard, (in an interview with Ford 2004 p 4) states that 'Much of psychology focuses on psychological perceptions, coping and reactions and misses important upstream issues which in turn affect organisational processes'. Similarly, LaMontagne, Sanderson and Cocker (2010) comment that the general strategies for the prevention and control of job stress in Australian workplaces disproportionately focus on individual-level interventions with inadequate attention to the reduction of jobs stressors.

Systems and structures are central to work stress, yet most of the interventions have focused on the treatment of the worker herself. Caulfield et al. (2004 p 152) discuss that there have been calls for this to change since the 1990s. They go on to state: 'work stress depends primarily on the way that jobs are constructed, constituted, and managed'. As pointed out by many researchers (see for example Blewett et al. 2006; Clarke, S & Cooper 2000; Dollard 2003), stress interventions aimed at changing organisational culture or structures may involve considerable effort, time and costs.

Working from a similar concern, Noblet and LaMontagne (2006 p 346) state:

reviews of job stress interventions suggest that the common approach to combating job stress is to focus on the individual without due consideration of the direct impacts of working conditions on health as well as the effects of working conditions on employees' ability to adopt and sustain 'healthy' behaviours.

Following in this trend a United Kingdom review of research on organisational stress management interventions over ten years (Giga et al. 2003) noted that the vast majority of studies reviewed have developed intervention strategies aimed specifically at the individual. However, they note that since 2000 there has been a growing awareness of the need to identify and address environmental stressors. Also noted was the prevailing business culture that supports a more worker-directed focus to job stress. Sauter, Brightwell, Colligan, Hurrell and LeGrande (2002 p 24), reviewing the situation in the USA, note that:

historically ... the job stress field has looked at individual and job characteristics in relation to individual-level measures of health (e.g., illness symptoms), whereas economic and organizational behaviour research has focused more on organizational parameters in relation to productivity and other measures of organizational effectiveness.

LaMontagne, Louie, Ostry & Shaw (2006 p vii) completed an in-depth analysis of 90 internationally published studies on job stress interventions and 'conclude that systems approaches to job stress are more effective than other alternatives, and that benefits accrue both to individuals ... and to organisations'. A systems approach to job stress prevention involves primary, secondary and tertiary interventions. Primary intervention involves a pro-active look at systems and structures within the organisation for potential changes, such as in working conditions, to reduce work stress. Secondary interventions are the more ameliorative and focus on stress management programs. Tertiary intervention is reactive and deals with the treatment and management of symptoms or disease with a focus on getting the injured worker back to work.

Importantly, as Lonne (2003 pp 291-2) comments,

It is fundamentally a management responsibility to establish and maintain an organisational climate and culture that deals openly with work stresses, vicarious

trauma and burnout and does not individually label those staff who experience these phenomena.

Mayhew's (2000 p 4) work on preventing violence within organisations makes the point that

Management style and organisational culture can influence the propensity for internal violence. It is often difficult to make a clear distinction between bad management that contributes to violent culture and inappropriately coercive management behaviour.

Violence in a workplace is a police matter; however it also causes much work stress for the victim and negatively affects colleagues.

A number of other researchers have also supported the idea that organisational change is the primary and the most important change agent needed in the prevention of job stress (Blewett et al. 2006; Dollard 2003; Dollard, LaMontagne et al. 2007; Dollard, Winefield & Winefield 2001; Kobayashi et al. 2008; LaMontagne, Keegel & Valance 2001; VicHealth 2006). However, LaMontagne et al. (2007 p 277), in a systematic review of the literature evaluating job stress interventions over 15 years (1990–2005) states that 'individually focussed (low rated) approaches continue to dominate'.

Working along similar lines, Noblet and LaMontagne (2006 pp 347–8) state that the individual orientated approaches have been 'widely condemned' and are 'ethically unsound'. In Australia employee assistance programmes (EAP), which are generally agency funded, are heavily promoted. These researchers noted EAPs are used extensively by agencies to address work stress. However these programs are about the worker adapting to whatever is causing the problem and not about reducing the stressful work environments (Arthur 2000). Dollard (2001b) comments that a reasonable conclusion is that it is politically expedient to focus at the individual level rather than the organisational level in respect to work stress interventions. As LaMontagne et al. (2006 p 49), in their extensive research on a systems approach, comment, 'job stress is a contentious issue'.

In Australia we had a change of federal government in 2007 and there has been a flurry of government reports in relation to the third sector. As stated in the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (2008b p 10), 'in the Health and Community Services the excessive workload, cost cutting and changed management structures have increased the challenges for workers'.

In summary there has been limited research into the CSS, especially with regard to work stress. What has been done, in the main, has focussed on the H&CS and Human Services. Much of the work stress research has focused on the individual workers per se. A number of eminent researchers have pointed to a systems approach as the most effective way to reduce job stress. It is the systems and structures that create the stress in the first instance, and it is within the systems and structures that interventions must happen. Within this three-tiered systems

approach, the major intervention needs to be primary intervention in which systems and structures are the focus for action.

Several researchers have highlighted the important point that costs are a significant factor in the approaches that are taken to intervention in occupational stress. The situation in the CSS, in which funding shortages are pervasive, adds increased challenges in regards to work stress intervention and prevention.

2.6 Summary – Part One

As noted in the government submission to the Equal Remuneration Case (Fair Work Australia 2010 p 63), ‘the Community Services Sector today is reflected in its complex industrial landscape and history’. This literature review, in researching possible contributing factors to the current work stress situation in the CSS, follows a link back through to the establishment of Australia as a colonial colony. This was the beginnings of the charity and voluntary model, with its vocational and altruistic narrative and subsequent expectations of workers’ behaviours towards welfare work. These characteristics were and are still part of the makeup of the CSS. Equally important is the significance of women’s involvement throughout the history of the development of the community sector. The search moves briefly through the establishment of the relevant union and draws out the union involvement in workers’ struggles including fighting to improve wages and working conditions, both of which contribute to work stress.

An important and significant politically motivated driver is neo-liberalism. This new global economic direction has brought major changes and reshaped the industrial landscape in Australia and overseas. It has had a direct impact on the CSS and the potential for worker stress.

3. Part Two: Work Stress Theories and Models

Part Two explores what is currently known about work stress and relates this to the CSS workforce. It is an exercise in extrapolation as the literature’s major focus to date has been on the broader human services and human service professionals and specifically research into the health and community services. Workers in the CSS have not been a major target of work stress research. In part this research is an attempt to fill this gap.

So far this literature review has drawn a picture of the CSS historically, politically and industrially. It demonstrates the strong connection between historical, political/economic and industrial factors and work stress outcomes in the CSS workforce. This section outlines the different work stress theories and models and specifically their relevance and fit with the CSS. Work stress research is extensive and has a long history. It is curious however, that the CSS has not been a target of much work stress research when the numbers of workers compensation claims for psychological injury are so high in this area.

An Australian National Survey of work-related injuries was commissioned by Safe Work Australia and completed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2005–06 (2009 pp vii, 5).¹⁶ In the summary of findings on the H&CS industry it was noted that ‘compensation data only captures six in ten serious injuries occurring in this industry with those involving mental stress particularly undercounted’. Secondly, it was noted that ‘Exposure to mental stress accounted for a higher percentage of injuries to H&CS workers than for all Australian workers’. Thirdly, they noted that two-thirds of workers in this industry who incurred a work-related injury did not claim workers compensation and it was suggested that job insecurity may have been a significant deterrent here.

3.1 Work Stress Theories and their Relevance to the Community Services Sector

There are many different theories in relation to the causes of work stress. To an extent, the theories overlap and complement each other. Dollard (2001b) has noted the following groupings: stimulus/response combinations; interactional versus transactional models; sociological versus psychological paradigms; and those with environmental versus individual emphases. According to Dollard (2001b p16), interactional theories focus on ‘the structural features of a person’s interaction with their work environment’ while transactional theories focus on ‘the cognitive processes and emotional reactions associated with the person’s interaction with their environment’. Two models that come under the interactional theory umbrella are the demand–control–support model (DC/S) and the Job Demands-Resources model of burnout. These will be detailed due to their relevance to the CSS workforce. As well, the Effort Reward Imbalance (ERI) model as part of the transactional models group will also be discussed. Issues inherent in psychological models compared to sociological ones will also be examined.

Karasek’s (1979 p 287) Demand-Control theory of work stress proposed that ‘job strain occurs when job demands are high and job decisions latitude is low’. Karasek and Theorell (1990 p69) expanded the ‘original demand/control model to include social support as a third dimension’. They also recognised that work environments are complex and there may be many factors that contribute singly or interactively to work strain.

Siegrist (1996 p 29) shifted ‘the focus of analysis from control to reward’ compared with the DC/S model, when he developed his Effort Reward Imbalance model. The focus of the ER-I model, he said (Siegrist, 1996, p 27) ‘is on reciprocity of exchange in occupational life where high-cost/low-gain conditions are considered particularly stressful’. He argued that this approach was particularly justified due to changes in the labour market such as lowered job

¹⁶ Note some RSEs (relative standard errors) were between 25 and 50 percent in this Safe Work Australia research.

security and casualisation. A study of over 11,000 Dutch workers (de Jonge, Bosma, Peter & Siegrist, 2000 p 1319) substantiated the relevance of both the DC/S and the ER-I models, but found that the ER-I model produced ‘relatively stronger effects’.

The Job Demands-Resources model was originally used to examine burnout in non human service fields (Demerouti, Nachreiner, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2001). Demerouti et al (2001, p 500) defined the core dimensions of burnout as ‘emotional exhaustion and depersonalization’. Their study of workers in three fields (human services, industry and transport) aimed to demonstrate that burnout is a phenomenon that occurs in all occupations, not only the human services. They (Demerouti et al, 2001 p 501) defined job demands as ‘those physical, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort’ and job resources as ‘those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that may do any of the following: (a) be functional in achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands at the associated physiological and psychological costs; (c) stimulate personal growth and development’. Organisational resources include job control, participation in decision making and diversity of work. The JD-R model expands the DC/S model by recognising that job demands and job resources, rather than control or social support per se, can mitigate job strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Bakker and Demerouti (2007 p 309) completed a ‘state of the art overview of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model’ and concluded that it ‘encompasses and extends both [DC/S and ER-I] models and is considerably more flexible and rigorous.

Dollard, LaMontagne, Caulfield, Blewett & Shaw’s (2007) extensive review of the literature on job stress in the Australian and International Health and Community Services Sectors notes the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model as a comprehensive and significant approach to understanding the complexity of work stress. They (Dollard et al, 2007 p 420) say:

The JD-R model proposes that work environments can be categorised according to job demands or job resources. ... The main hypothesis to be drawn from the model, relevant to this paper, is that high job demands predict adverse psychological and physical health consequences, and that low job resources will, by definition, increase job demands and will therefore foster burnout and health consequences.

This model clearly has relevance to the CSS in which there are high demands/workloads with limited job resources to complete the work. The New South Wales Premier’s Department (2003) identification and risk management strategy with regard to occupational stress in general acknowledged high workloads, low levels of job control and lack of personal recognition and reward as indicators of stressful work and subsequent hazards. As previously documented, high workloads and lack of personal recognition and reward are significant factors occurring in the CSS. These negative work issues fit well in the Effort, Reward and Imbalance (ER-I) model of work stress.

In a large scale Australian study by Kendall, Muenchberger and O'Neill (2003 p52) the authors state:

The importance of work supports in both the prevention of poor mental health and the promotion of good mental health was found repeatedly. In particular, the quality of the work environment and the relationships amongst co-workers was crucial.

Dollard et al. (2000) researched a public sector welfare agency with a focus on psycho-social job strain using the Demand–Control–Support model' (DCS). This simply is a model in which one explores the demands on the worker (high or low), how much control (autonomy) they have and how much or how little support they receive from colleagues and supervisors. Researchers using the DCS model view job strain as primarily located in the structural or organisational aspects of the work environment. Here the focus is on job redesign as the key element to improving worker wellbeing and productivity. The model hypothesises that workers are at the highest risk for psychological or physical disorders when their duties combine high demands, low control and low support from supervisors and or co-workers. Dollard et al. (2000) conclude that the increase in demand for human service industries, with the current political context of government cutbacks in resources to this industry, puts workers at high risk in terms of increased health problems, specifically psycho-social health problems.

Lloyd & King (2004 p 752) note that 'burnout is usually thought of as the outcome of chronic stress'. They cite Maslachs' 'burnout inventory' which describes burnout as 'a complex phenomenon which consists of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment Burnout is commonly associated with human service workers, specifically in relation to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job, from working with a constant load of clients with complex needs. Although Dollard, et al. (2003 p 286) comment 'very few studies have addressed the issue of burnout and work stress in non-government, not-for-profit and for-profit organisations'.

Burnout in professions such as social work is often seen as inevitable. However as Thompson, Murphy & O'Neill (1996 p 663) suggest, 'the question should not be: What is the weakness in this employee? but what is the weakness in the organization that allows this to happen?' Duffy (2008 p 31) commented: 'In the community sector stress is commonly known as burnout.' As Dollard (2001a p 7) states: 'Empirical tests of the burnout model reveal that strain results more from operational and organisational aspects of the job than from dealing with difficult clients'. This could not be more relevant to the CSS when looking at factors in the development of strain in the burnout model. It is important to note that in the research literature, these two terms have distinct meanings. However in the general parlance of workers and the broader community, burnout and stress are synonymous. Work overload, lack of control,

insufficient reward, breakdown of community, absence of fairness and value conflict are all rife in the CSS.

Lloyd & King (2004) highlight concerns about the diminishing morale and increasing burnout among mental health workers and the question of the long-term sustainability of intensive community services. These researchers state that due to the levels of stress and burnout there is a need to consider staff, as well as client, outcomes, in assessing the long-term effectiveness of service models. This is a salient point as much of the narrative about service provision does not include even a cursory focus on the needs of the human resources: the workers.

The 2010 VCOSS platform document (Victorian Council of Social Service 2010) for the 2010 Victorian state election states that workers in this sector deal with difficult and demanding work, yet are still generally undervalued, under-paid and experience regular poor working conditions. In this same year the Hon. Lisa Neville, Victorian State MP, noted (Neville 2010 p 1): 'benefits to a low paid, predominately female workforce'. These statements from the main funder of the sector, the government, acknowledge the poor situation for workers in general in the CSS. As documented, there appears little positive change occurring and the current work stress claims in this sector remain high.

In the Australian Services Union (2009 p 3) submission to the Victorian State Government 2009–10 budget it is claimed that 'the Community Sector is experiencing a workforce crisis. While this crisis has many contributing factors a core reason is poor pay and conditions'. According to ACOSS (2009, cited in South Australian Council of Social Service 2010 p 3), staff turnover rates in the Community Services Sector Australia-wide have approximately doubled from 2003–04, when they were 16.3 percent to the 2008–09 figure of 29.1 percent. More recently, Pegg (2009) notes the elephant in the room in the Productivity Commission 2009 report in the contributions of the NFP sector in which there is no mention made of recruitment and retention of workers, job security or wages in strategies to improve efficiency and effective operations in non-profit organisations. Keenan (2009) mentions twenty years of neglect in respect to workforce planning and development for the community sector. Carson and Kerr (2010 p 82) comments on the piecemeal approach to workforce sustainability, 'organisation by organisation', and the urgent need to adopt an integrated and consistent employment framework across the sector.

Alongside recruitment strategies, there also needs to be a focus on developing strategies about retention of staff, including strategies to reduce burnout amongst workers within a work stress prevention approach. Stanley, Manthorpe & White, (2007 p 295) studied depressed social workers and concluded that 'unless retention also forms part of this strategy, the effect may be to simply create a younger workforce which burnout early'.

Barak, Nissly & Levin, (2001) completed a meta-analysis of antecedents to retention and turnover in the human services field in America over a twenty-year period. They noted the limited amount of research that has been conducted. The research concluded that stress, burnout and lack of job satisfaction are important contributors to turnover. Lloyd et al. (2002) mentioned a lack of systematic research on stress and burnout among social workers. Furthermore, they noted the connection between stress and organisational factors such as lack of funding, personnel shortages, high worker turnover rates, lack of linkages to other work units, attitudes of other health professionals and working in a bureaucratic environment. Coyle, Edwards, Hannings, Fothergill & Burnard (2005) reviewed research from 1966 to 2000 with relevance to stress and social workers, including in particular a focus on social workers in the mental health area. This systemic review which covered the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States of America found 52 relevant studies although it focused on only 19 of these. The salient point here is the limited number of studies over a 34-year period. Importantly, they comment that there were no studies focussing on evaluating stress reduction. The question arises here as to whether there is a hint of paralysis in diligently researching work stress reduction. Duffy's (2008) research on the OH&S education needs in the Community Sector in Victoria indicated that stress is one of the top three OHS issues that needs addressing in this sector. Duffy draws a link between inadequate funding and its negative effect on improving OHS standards in this sector. Keegel, Ostry & LaMontagne's (2009) research, collated from 2003 data, highlighted the elevated workers compensation claims as well as heightened job strain in the H&CS sector in Victoria.

Other writers draw attention to the importance of language in constituting the nature of the problem to be addressed. Kleinman (2007) for example, discusses language and how powerful groups (government as the funders and employers) often use language to disguise harming less powerful groups (workers) by drawing on a culturally acceptable rhetoric. In the CSS for example, the major focus on work stress intervention is upon the individual. The effect is to pathologise the victim, rather than draw attention to the dysfunctional nature of the labour process itself. For example the VCOSS (2009–2010 p 025) annual report states:

Occupational health and safety (OHS) is a big concern for community sector organisations, whether it's about how to safely lift a frail, sick, or injured service user or how to make sure staff cope with the often high-stress environment they work in.

The discourse however unintentionally, focuses on the individual worker being made more 'stress proof', rather than addressing the structural causes of work stress emanating from within work environments. As stated by Blewett et al. (2006 section 6 p 54), 'the evidence base of causes of work stress in the Health and Community Services sector is strong and clearly identifies work organisation factors'.

3.2 Work Stress Interventions and Prevention Models in Community Service Sector

Whitehead's (2007 p 475) research makes note of Karasek's fourth work stress intervention in which there needs to be an acknowledgement of the effects of macro-political policy outcomes that effect work stress in workplaces:

There are entry points for interventions to influence the outside pressures imposed on workplace organisations. Market conditions and rules about competition, national labour relations programmes which influence employment rates, job security, wages, national levels of unemployment, etc, potentially have a huge impact on the psychosocial stress experienced in individual workplaces, even though these macro-policies are outside one organisation's control (promoting health macro policies).

Global neo-liberal policy directions from the mid-1980s are a good example of external economically driven policies that have had a significant effect on workplaces and subsequent work stress outcomes for workers across the world.

Dollard et al. (2006) note the mismatch of demand and resource allocation in the H&CS and how this emanates in part from the legal, socio-political and economic context and how this is linked to the strain evidenced in the sector. Longitudinal data from a study in 2004 demonstrated a link between work stress, compensation claims and lack of resources on the job (Dollard 2004 cited in Ford 2004). A 2004 review of the occupational stress interventions in Australia over the previous ten years notes the lack of published intervention research and suggests one possible reason is the fear by organisations that such research could lead to increased recognition and subsequent compensation claims (Caulfield et al. 2004).

There has been important research raising concerns about the actions taken by commonwealth, state and territory governments. Legislative changes have been implemented that in essence attempt to reduce the costs of compensable stress-related claims by imposing special legislative thresholds on such claims. According to Guthrie, Ciccarelli and Babic (2010) all this does is shift the injured workers into the Medicare and Centrelink areas. These researchers see this as a cost reduction approach by Australian governments which they call the 'back-end' approach. Most importantly this action has serious implications for work stress intervention. As Guthrie et al. (2010 p 110) state, 'Limiting access to stress claimants through legislative exclusions is a reductionist approach that does not encourage interventions at the organisational level that may prevent or reduce the development of stress disorders among workers.'

According to the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (2006b p 20) 'social welfare professionals have an alarmingly high incidence of mental stress'. Furthermore it was suggested that 'the Health and Community Services along with education and personal and other services would be the best areas in which to implement preventive actions'.

Comcare¹⁷ (2008) recognises that stress and psychological injury are often symptoms of organisational problems which need organisational solutions. Comcare's (2009 p 5) central message is that 'a holistic systems approach to the management of work-related psychological injury is more effective than individual interventions alone'.

In this literature review a systems preventative approach to job stress has been described and outlined as a comprehensive and beneficial work stress preventative model. However as LaMontagne (2001) points out in an overview of the international work stress evaluation literature, tertiary intervention programs, not primary prevention, are most common, even though integrated primary prevention strategies have the best preventative potential.

LaMontagne et al. (2006 p 82) conducted research in Victoria and comment:

Intervention efforts in health and community services and other sectors with elevated job stress claims should be continued and expanded to integrate primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions in a systems approach.

It is well documented that work stress is a significant concern globally and yet there has been little research on evaluating intervention strategies. It is argued that a systems approach (primary, secondary and tertiary) is effective. The major dilemma which surrounds the interest in research focussing on a systems preventative approach in the CSS is the general inadequacy of the funding to the sector. The literature shows that there are significant consequences from this funding shortfall, especially poor working conditions and their link to work stress and high work cover claims for psychological stress injuries.

4. Part Three: Summary – Where Have We Been; Where Are We Now

It is clear from the work stress literature that poor working conditions play a significant role in creating job stressors (see for example Keegel, Ostry & LaMontagne 2009; LaMontagne, Sanderson & Cocker 2010; Noblet & LaMontagne 2006). LaMontagne et al. (2010 p 32) state 'Job stressors are working conditions that increase the risk of job stress and job stress increases the risks of mental and physical illness, as well as poor health behaviour'. Poor working conditions are part of a poor work environment and work cultures in agencies, and appear to be an industry norm in the CSS.

In 1988 Surbey (1988) wrote a handbook relating stress and poor working conditions in the welfare sector and it is apparent that not much has changed 25 years on. The Australian Services Union News (2010) states that workloads, stress, bullying, harassment and occupational violence are the most significant OH&S issues in 2010 in the CSS. WorkSafe Victoria (2010b slide no. 5) points out that the community services industry is one of the highest-claiming

¹⁷ Comcare is the federal government rehabilitation service for the federal public servant workforce.

industries in 2007–08 data. They also state that work-related stress is a key risk in community services. Even though Safe Work Australia targeted Health and Community Services as one of the priority industries in its National OHS Strategy 2002–2012, the Community Care Services sector recorded a 3 percent increase in serious injury incident rates according to the latest data from 2007–08 (2010b).

Community Services occupations in 2006 accounted for 3.3 percent of the total workforce nationally and the whole Health and Community Services labour force was only 9.3 percent (2009). It can be argued that this small percentage has a bearing on both state and federal governments in terms of genuine priorities in development of policies and subsequent remedial action. Furthermore, a significant dilemma for governments of all persuasions is their reliance on the CSS having in-built cost containments such as the free labour of volunteers and the low wages paid to the predominantly female workforce. This highlights the challenges in seeking pay equity and raising the bar for better working conditions in an industry known for people giving their free and or cheap labour.

Kosny and Eakin's (2008) study touches on a connection between empathy and possible elements of emotional blackmail and a link to the marketisation of social services. That is, the poorly funded agencies have some sort of reliance on workers' commitment, values and even preparedness to take risks for the clients. This client-centred discourse can leave workers exposed to occupational health and safety risks. The vocational aspects of the work and sector can lead to work stressors.

There is however, a most important overarching socio-political framework which has had far-reaching ramifications with respect to the nature of work and social governance in general in recent years. Global changes that have significantly affected work life in many countries and the implementation of neo-liberal policies have intensified pressures on an already stressed sector. Dollard et al, (2007 p 439) noted in regards to future research: 'The lack of focus in research on the broader legal, socio-political, and economic context has meant that up-stream interventions that focus on legal/policy changes have been avoided.' This thesis makes a modest contribution to filling this lacuna. Within the CSS, neo-liberal policies nationally and state-wide have, it is argued, a damaging effect on workers.

As detailed in this literature review CSS organisations have been chronically underfunded since their inception. Reliance on state and federal funding has meant that the CSS is quite vulnerable to neo-liberal austerity programs and cutbacks. This chronic underfunding is a significant problem for agencies in the sector and it has serious negative flow-on effects including poor working conditions for workers. Poor working conditions (e.g. high workloads, inadequate supports) as the literature shows can and does lead to work stress. Comcare (2008) states that work pressure accounts for around 50 percent of psychological injury (work stress) claims. The Comcare guide (2009) gives examples of organisations such as the Australian Tax

Office, the CSIRO and the Australian Federal Police, who are taking proactive action for the prevention of psychological injuries. These organisations are large government entities that have sizeable budgets, substantial human resource departments and a strong union presence compared to many community sector organisations. As Vicary & Henley (1999 p 339) note, 'Dependence and inadequate funding are long-standing characteristics of the non-government community services sector'.

Structural barriers are a key difficulty both internally and externally in the CSS throughout Australia and elsewhere, as Vicary and Henley (1999 pp 340–1) comment:

These barriers are both internal and external. The internal barriers are those of disorganisation, divergence and lack of identity, while the external barriers are those of state agendas driven by economic considerations and implemented by administrative and managerial reform. While these reforms include participation in some processes, the determination of policy remains with the state.

A good starting point for base line change in terms of the CSS was stated by the Council of Social Services network (2009 p 13) in its submission to the proposed Compact between the Australian federal government and the not-for-profit sector: 'There is also a need for cultural change, in which the work of the community sector is recognised and respected.'

Another important driver for change is the financial situation. The National Health and Safety Commission noted in 2003 (cited in 2006b pp 11, 8) that the cost of workers' compensation claims for stress-related mental disorder in Australia is estimated at \$200 million every year. ASCC also stated that: '... most of the evidence points to aspects of the work environment which contribute to the experience of stress in the individual'. LaMontagne, Sanderson & Cocker (2010) quote the Safe Work Australia estimate of \$209 million for new 'mental stress' claims lodged in 2006–07.

As Lonne (2003 p 303) point out, this is a politically delicate exercise:

The political sensitivity of these occupational health and safety issues should not be under-estimated. In a human services environment that is severely resource constrained, dealing holistically with occupational stress can be viewed as too expensive and therefore to be left in the 'too hard basket'.

I shall return to these concerns in later chapters which discuss the linkages between micro-economic organisation of working arrangements in specific organisations and wider social and political narratives and practices. In the following chapter however, I outline the research methods and methodological approaches chosen to complete the research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

1. Introduction and Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the research design and methodologies utilised in the thesis. Included in this chapter is the rationale for the research method, a description of the research sample, and an outline of the methods used in data collection and analysis. The chapter also covers modes of synthesis, ethical considerations, and a brief commentary on the limitations of the methodology. The chapter details why a constructivist epistemology is adopted as the key research approach. Integral to the thesis are the ‘storied realities’ of the workers themselves. Hence this chapter outlines why a constructivist approach using thematic pattern analysis was adopted and presents reasons why an examination of workers’ stress must be informed and supported by feminist and structural social work theories.

1.1 Overview of the Research Design

The purpose of this study is to explore workers’ understanding and experiences of work stress in the Community Services Sector (CSS) in Victoria. Hence the research is designed to explore and gather workers’ stories about this important issue. This exploratory study seeks to generate new ideas and understanding of work stress in the CSS from the perspective of workers themselves. A major focus, then, is on hearing and analysing what the workers themselves are saying about the nature of work stress in the sector.

As Dollard (2003 p 10) states ‘understanding of stress is further confounded by the fact that the concept of stress is not value free’. Viewed through this lens, occupational stress can be seen as a social and political issue as much as a health problem. Workers’ views are thus deemed important, indeed central.

A qualitative methodology (see below) is used throughout. The major research question is: What are workers’ perceptions of job stress in the sector and what processes do organisations implement in order to ameliorate job stress in the Community Services Sector in Victoria? Workers’ ideas for improving work stress were also canvassed.

The contextual setting for this research is the CSS in general. Participation in the research was sought from both regional and urban areas as well as from any sub-sector within the CSS. As stated in preceding chapters, there has been minimal research with a) a focus solely on the CSS, b) work stress research specific to the CSS and c) work stress research with a focus on what workers have to say about occupational stress.

A selective and ongoing review of the literature was conducted to inform this study. The areas of focus in the literature review were: relevant historical research about the CSS, including

global and Australia-wide research on the effects of economic rationalism and its impact on the sector; research into work stress theories, work stress intervention and prevention strategies; and work stress research with specific relevance to the CSS.

Specific research with a focus exploring actual workers' viewpoints about work stress aided in the development of the questions for the interviews and focus groups. Specifically, Gillespie, Walsh, Winefields, Dua & Stough's (2001) research into occupational stress in universities and its focus on staff perceptions of the causes, consequences and moderators of stress, and Kinman and Jones' (2005) research into workers' representations of workplace stress informed the development of this research. The former involved 22 focus groups in universities across Australia and the latter utilised semi-structured interviews with 41 individuals from a range of occupations. Both these research projects successfully captured the essence and meanings of exploring what the workers had to say about work stress and its consequences.

Similarly, the research design for this study incorporated two traditional methods used in empirical social work research, specifically interviews and focus groups (Carey 2009). According to Carey (2009 p 113) 'Semi-structured interviews contain a combination of both pre-planned and unplanned questions, with the latter allowing the interviewer some discretion to create new questions in response to participant's answers'.

According to Linhorst, (2002, cited in Carey 2009 pp 129–30) the potential relevance of focus groups is that 'the method can support social work's unique person-in-environment perspective, the capacity of focus group research to be combined with other methods such as one-on-one interviews ... and the educational, therapeutic and empowering potential of focus group meetings for participants'.

After prolonged drafting and piloting of potential questions, a final set of four questions was settled on and used alongside probing questions that aided unpacking and expanding upon answers that were unclear. Two colleagues who were familiar with the research proposal were engaged to evaluate the range of questions drafted as a further critical eye to finding appropriate and balanced questions. The four questions asked in all methods of data collection were:

1. What has prompted you to participate?
2. Can you talk about your personal experience of occupational stress and how your agency responded?
3. What are your ideas/views for reducing job stress in the community sector?¹⁸
4. Have you anything else you would like to say in regards to work stress?

¹⁸ The questions asked about the community sector and not the Community Services Sector due to realisation of a sector name change occurring post development of the questions.

These four questions had a clear link to the overall research question: what are workers' perceptions of job stress in the sector and what types of processes do organisations implement in order to ameliorate job stress in the Community Services Sector in Victoria. Workers who declined, or missed the option of having an interview or attending a focus group, were invited to answer the same four questions in writing and email or post their responses back to the researcher. The same open-ended questions were used in all the data collection processes. The set questions were open-ended to allow for the opportunity of in-depth answers.

2. Rationale for Using a Qualitative Research Method

The contextual setting for this research is in the interplay between workers and their organisational setting in which occupational stress occurs. As Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll (2001 p 225) state, 'qualitative methodologies expose meaning rather than impose it and they make no *a priori* assumptions about the nature of the data collected'. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008 p 80), the fundamental assumptions and key features of a qualitative stance

include (a) understanding the processes by which events and actions take place, (b) developing contextual understanding, (c) facilitating interactivity between researcher and participants, (d) adopting an interpretive stance, and (e) maintaining design flexibility.

In a general sense the power of social science research is in its exploratory and descriptive nature. As Tisdale (2004 p 14) states, 'watching other people live their lives, asking people about their experiences, and using words to tell others' stories are hallmarks of social science research methods'.

Furthermore, as Denzin and Lincoln (2008 p 14) comment:

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

In respect to situating this research in an epistemological and theoretical framework, the perspective is a constructivist one in which the role of the researcher is interpretive. A constructivist epistemology is one in which meaning is constructed as a result of the interaction between human beings and their world (Jones, Torres & Armino 2006). What is important is 'the meanings and interpretation people ascribe to or make of [their world], for it is these constructions that mediate their behaviour' (Guba & Lincoln 1982, p 239).

A qualitative method fits well within constructivist epistemological assumptions about knowledge, as Bloomberg and Volpe (2008 p 80) state:

Qualitative research is grounded in an essentially constructivist philosophical position, in the sense that it is concerned with how the complexities of the socio-cultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood in a particular context and at a particular point in time. The intent of qualitative research is to examine a social situation or interaction by allowing the researcher to enter the world of others and attempt to achieve a holistic rather than a reductionist understanding.

In addition, as Corby (2006) notes, a constructionist approach is a preferred option for social work researchers in that the goals are consonant with those of social work in which there is a strong attempt to view the world from the client's perspective. Semi-structured interviews are very much a constructionist method. According to Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll (2001 p 216), 'social construction emphasises the importance of understanding the process through which individuals construct their social reality'. Contextualised vocality is thus a crucial ingredient to such approaches. Interpretive theory, Carey (2009 p 152) states,

embodies and supports the core principles of both life history approach, and qualitative research in general – emphasizing and allowing participants' vocal accounts to take precedence, while also contextualizing and framing these perspectives within a theory.

D'Cruz & Jones (2004 p 51) have also tried to spell out the epistemological assumptions of an interpretivist paradigm. They state: 'Knowledge arises from interpretation and insight and is grounded in empathetic communications with the subjects of the research.'

A broadly based feminist epistemology also underpins this research. A basic tenet of feminism has long been that 'the personal is the political'. Feminist research includes a number of tenets that are important within this research: it recognises that neither research nor what is studied is value free; it sees context as crucial; it is concerned with examining the relationships between the social and the personal; and it recognises the need for change (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000). Reinharz (1992) has commented that generally accepted within feminist research literature is the idea that personal experiences are a valuable asset to feminist research. As documented in the literature review chapter, the CSS historically is a female workforce and its workers have, and still are, experiencing poor working conditions. This reason alone makes research into the CSS very much a feminist issue. If, as Mohanty (2003 cited in Denzin & Lincoln 2008 p 319) states '... feminists need to consider questions of power, equality, and justice in ways that address context and recognition of questions of history and experience', then the highly feminised nature of the CSS workforce demands such attention. Pugh (1990 p 109) notes, 'A feminist approach makes you aware of relationships of power, of who gets what and why.'

The researcher's theoretical perspective is therefore informed by a body of knowledge referred to as feminist/structuralist theory. Structural Social Work theory was developed by Maurice Moreau. Moreau in collaboration with Leonard (Moreau & Leonard 1989 p 1) states:

The political and theoretical basis of the Structural approach rests on a contemporary Marxist analysis profoundly influenced by feminism. This 'feminized' Marxism does not prioritize class over all other exploitative social division, as orthodox Marxism argues. Rather, it is an analysis which places alongside each other the divisions of class, gender, race, age, ability/disability and sexuality as the most significant social relations of advanced patriarchal capitalism.

Structural social work theory focuses on 'the interplay between the agency of individuals, and structures' (Weinberg, 2008 p 1).

According to Carniol, (1992 p 1), Moreau's Structural Social Work theory includes:

... maximizing client resources; reducing power inequalities in client-worker relationships; unmasking the primary structures of oppression; facilitating a collective consciousness; fostering activism with social movements; and encouraging responsibility for feelings and behaviours leading to personal and political change.

Carniol (1992) discusses Moreau's work on 'unmasking structures'. This is particularly relevant to this research on work stress in the CSS where the aim is to draw on workers' narratives in order to unmask the structures that create work stress. Hence this thesis turns the structural social work lens onto the workers. The literature on the human services field in general has a strong emphasis on secondary and tertiary interventions in which the approach is to treat the symptoms expressed by the worker rather than the systems and structures that play a major role in creating the stress in the first place. This thesis focuses upon 'unmasking' systems and structures in the CSS in respect to work stress, from the perspective of the workers. Hence, it seeks to detail what workers have to say about agency structures including management, and their specific dealings with job stress.

The predominantly female workforce of the CSS does experience quite specific forms of a gendered disadvantage and discrimination. The approach adopted here seeks to demonstrate and illustrate how and why this occurs.

Gender segmentation and gender segregation of the workforce and gender divisions within the family have been objects of feminist analysis for a long time. Within structural theory, gender oppression is seen as comparable to other forms of oppression such as class, race and sexual identity (Weinberg, 2008). As Stanley and Wise (1993 p 211) state:

Constructionism, there should be no doubt about it, is fundamentally inscribed within feminism; and a defining element in all feminist theorizing is its treatment of gender as socially constructed and of feminism as the remaking of a changeable and non-essentialist gender order. All feminisms are by definition constructionists...

2.1 The Framework

Within the framework of a qualitative research approach, the methods used in this study were a combination of semi-structured interviews and focus groups. It was felt that this approach would provide room to explore and capture the workers' experiences, knowledge and viewpoints about work stress in some depth. In general, qualitative research is usually associated with depth and detail. As Jones et al. (2006 p 188) state, 'strength of qualitative research is the opportunity to delve into the complexities of life'. Cho and Trent (2006, p 238) note that the emphasis in qualitative research is on constructing texts in which rich descriptions are salient and in harmony with analytic interpretations'.

A key task for the researcher was to give a voice to workers through interviews and focus groups. It was also an accessible and relevant method for gathering research data. There is a silence surrounding workers experiencing work stress in the CSS as evidenced in the limited research found in the literature review chapter.

Interviews provide detail about an individual's understanding and experience. Focus groups use group interactions to produce data and insights. Focus groups also open up the possibility of reaching understanding that often remains untapped by more structured methods.

According to Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005), some of the benefits of focus groups are: they are excellent when a researcher needs to obtain in-depth knowledge of sensitive subject matters; their flexible nature aids the discovery of hidden or unexpected information; their most visible strength is in the interactions of group members which assist in producing information; and they are known for having an empowerment experience for the participants.

Importantly, it was felt that this approach had empowerment potential for the workers themselves. It offered the possibility that telling the stories could lead to a therapeutic effect for participants (Tisdale 2004). More specifically, through focus group interviews, there was the potential of empowerment via workers sharing and hearing from each other about job stress, its sources and CSS agency responses. These processes assisted in normalising, demystifying and to some extent, de-stigmatising workers who have become stressed due to the nature of their workplace.

In these scenarios workers, together with the researcher, have the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of work stress while at the same time attain general knowledge about agencies' level of commitment to addressing job stress. Similarly, interviews can be seen as an empowerment process by providing an avenue for sharing experiences and views on this research topic. Both feminist structural social work theory and research emphasise the empowerment of participants as both a legitimate aim of research, and a potential measure of validity (Cho & Trent, 2006).

As Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005 p 4) comment, ‘qualitative methods ... place interpretation process as the centre of their practice. The interpretative process refers to the way that people interpret and give meaning to events and things’. The challenge in this research has been to capture and draw out the essence of meaning in what the workers’ narratives are saying about this often-silenced health issue called work stress in the CSS. A primary concern of qualitative research is to develop rich descriptions from which locally interpreted meanings can be elucidated (Cho & Trent, 2006).

There is a growing awareness of work stress as a significant issue at a research level and as Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005 p 5) state, ‘Qualitative data are more powerful in allowing an understanding of the context issues that have become the concern of public health in recent years’. The authors noted the success of qualitative research in the health sphere. Furthermore, as documented in the literature review chapter, mental health, including psychological injuries sustained by the workforce in general, is a significant issue.

3. The Research Sample

Purposive sampling was used in this research in line with the idea that ‘the logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation’ (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008 p 69).

Furthermore, as Lunenburg and Irby (2008 p 177) state:

The purpose of qualitative research is to obtain an in-depth understanding of purposively selected participants from their perspective. Thus, if you conduct qualitative research, you should purposively select participants who meet criteria that will provide a sample that is likely to yield the type of information you need to achieve your purpose.

In this research the purposive sampling criteria was designed to select workers who were employed in the CSS in Victoria and who had interest in the issue of occupational stress in this sector.

Initial contact was made with many peak sub-sector organisations that make up the community sector field.¹⁹ This approach was taken to inform the peak bodies of the planned research, gather relevant background data and views about the research proposal, as well as requesting assistance to distribute information on the research project to their respective agencies. Most of the contacts were with workers in senior and/or policy positions. The researcher was generally directed to these personnel in the initial contact with the agency. This approach was successful in raising awareness of the project.

¹⁹ The CSS is made up of various sub-sectors and many agencies come under a sub-sector representative organisation.

Though general in nature, the conversations with senior staff provided the researcher with rich contextual background knowledge and understanding about the current state of play in various sub-sectors of the CSS, as well as links for the future dissemination of the research findings.

This approach also enabled significant gathering of background knowledge about the many and varied sub-sectors that make up the CSS. As well as the rich views and opinions expressed about this research topic, these contacts were helpful in gathering potential leads to be followed up at a later date, such as relevant contact with other CSS parties. The contact was usually made by telephone. This form of communication offers a greater potential for information gathering and sharing as well as its potential for empathy and connectedness through the instant interactive nature of spontaneous dialogue.

All but one organisation expressed a willingness to distribute material to their respective membership. Contact was made with peak sub-sectors bodies and CSS agencies, including: Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres (ANHLC) network, Central Centre Against Sexual Assault Network, children and family services, community legal centres, Council for Homeless Persons (CHP) and other housing/homelessness areas, disability (physical and mental health) agencies, domestic violence services and other women's specific services, employment agencies, refugee services, Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VADA) and youth services.

Calls and subsequent requests were made to both metropolitan and regional organisations. Requests included seeking support to send out a pro-forma brief description of the research project and a flier to their memberships and networks. The information was also put up on agencies' websites.

The relevant unions were contacted and an article and flier was given space in the Australian Services Union (ASU) and the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) membership newsletters as well as placed on relevant websites. The peak Victorian union body, Victorian Trades Hall Council, including its Workers Occupation Health Centre, were contacted and an informal interview ensued with the highly experienced OH&S doctor at the trade union clinic. The peak community service organisation, Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), assisted in promoting the research, including promotion on their website. Professional bodies such as the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW Victoria branch), assisted in distributing relevant material to their membership.

Contact was also made with relevant university departments in metropolitan Melbourne that provided training for welfare, youth work, community development and social work studies. The reason for targeting universities was that students may have been concurrently studying and working in the CSS.

Regional and local newspapers were contacted and brief articles about the research were placed in their respective papers. Contact was made with various radio stations, including the national and regional services of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), as well as a metropolitan community radio station 3CR. Interviews about the research took place with 3CR and various regional ABC radio stations.

In addition, relevant organisations such as WorkSafe Victoria, the State Government Office of the Community Sector, specific work cover insurance agencies and research academics working in the work stress area were contacted about the research proposal in order to spread the word about the research and gather feedback on the ideas and plans.

The second stage of the research process involved responding to contacts made by workers. Demographic information was gathered during the initial call with the prospective participant. Information gathered included the participant's first name, gender, the sub-sector within the CSS in which they were working and the type and title of their work position. The specific employer agency was not identified to ensure confidentiality and allay any concerns about issues of employment security. The researcher was aware of, and sensitive to, the need to protect and safeguard the participants' earning capacity.

The age of the worker was not asked as it was felt that this is often a sensitive issue, especially for older workers in an era of age-related discriminatory practices in the employment arena Australia wide. Most important was the recognition of the sensitivity of the topic, and the stigma, including shaming and blaming, that can come with acknowledging that one has experienced job stress. (See Appendix for participant demographics).

The invitation to potential research participants included any paid workers who were currently working in a CSS agency; for example, direct service workers, policy workers, education workers as well as administration staff. In much of the literature relevant to human services, administrative staff are frequently left out as a data source. The focus has been on the front line workers; however administrative staff are also vulnerable to workplace stressors.

It was made clear in the promotional material that paid workers were the focus in this research and not persons in a current management position as this research was about gathering the narratives of the workers per se. This must have been clear as no telephone calls from either volunteers or workers in management positions were received. It was felt that the managers, even though it can be argued that they too are workers, have the dual role of being a worker as well as having to manage/oversee workers. In addition, this was particularly important in running focus groups as workers may have felt constrained, exposed and vulnerable in sharing their viewpoints with managers present. The views and needs of managers no doubt are similar to workers at times, however their roles as managers can be in conflict with the needs of workers and this research had a specific focus on workers.

Managers have been the most frequent research participants in annual research by the Victorian Council of Social Service and its national counterpart the Australian Council of Social Service. Their methodology is to send out questionnaires to all agencies and encourage them to participate in the research. These questionnaires are sent to the managers and it is usually someone in a managerial position who fills them out. It is felt that workers' own viewpoints were often missing in this research. Workers are an important data source for a richer analysis, especially in researching worker stresses. As stated, the central focus of this research is on workers speaking for themselves, and not management and others speaking for and about them.

In addition, this research did not include volunteer workers from the CSS, even though their numbers are large; this research is specifically focused on paid workers. There are connections between paid and unpaid workers, however there are major differences in a formal employment sense between volunteers and paid workers. Volunteers are not reliant on the work for an income and they do not have to adhere to the same accountability requirements. In general, volunteers have fewer obligations, responsibilities, pressures and consequences and they can choose to leave without the formal requirements necessary from paid workers when they resign from a workplace.

All contacts from interested workers, whether received via email or telephone, were responded to swiftly. The research proposal was explained, questions about the research were invited and a brief screening process occurred.

The screening process entailed several questions about the type of agency in which the caller was employed as well as the type of work in which they were engaged. The screening process was also used to check that the worker was not currently in a management or voluntary position. If the worker stated they were interested in being a research participant and fitted the purposive sampling criteria, an information sheet and consent form were emailed or posted out. Also callers were also offered time to decide whether they would like to participate and could be followed up in a few days' time. However most callers decided during the call whether they would like to participate or not. The acceptance rate was around 90 percent of those who made an initial contact.

Open office floor plans are a common feature in many work environments today and they do not enhance privacy. Hence workers were offered after-hours follow-up calls to continue discussions about the research if required. The researcher was aware of potential confidentiality difficulties for callers due to the nature of the research topic. A few of the callers took up this option.

As workers from across Victoria were invited to participate in this study, in order to practically accommodate interested workers, telephone interviews as well as face-to-face interviews were offered. It was not practical to do face-to-face interviews with country workers and they were offered telephone interviews. However, if the worker had plans to be in

Melbourne, a face-to-face interview was offered. The subsequent sessions took place, as far as practicable, where and when it was convenient for the worker.

Participants also had the option of taking part in one of the four focus groups that were made available. Two focus groups were provided in a central Melbourne location in order to allow for metropolitan workers to get to a centrally located focus group. These groups were organised for late in the day to allow workers to come along after 5.00 pm. Two other focus groups were provided in regional Victoria.

After checking with the peak sector body VCOSS about their experiences of holding regional focus groups, the locations for these were set. One session was held in the north-west region in Victoria and the other one was located in the south-east region in Victoria. The exact location of the regional focus groups is not given for reasons of confidentiality. All focus groups were held after 5.00 pm on a week day in order for workers to come along after the day's work was completed. It is acknowledged that many workers today complete after-hours shifts and individual interviews were scheduled at times convenient to the participants, including after children had retired for the night.

As well, a limited third option was made available for workers to participate. This was to submit their answers in writing to the set questions asked in the other two data collection methods. This allowed workers who could not participate in either an interview or a focus group to participate. Also some workers approached the researcher after the other research collection methods had concluded. I was keen to gather as many responses as possible to inform the research.

The researcher shared the planned questions at the beginning of each process. This was done to give the participants some clarity and certainty about what would be asked as well as to lessen anxiety, unknowns and discomfort. Within a feminist practice approach the aim was to reduce some of the power of the interviewer by sharing the plans and agenda, with the view to hearing any concerns with the format at the start of the process.

In this research every effort was made to include participants where possible and the researcher's feminist practice principles have been put into action throughout the life of this project and thesis. The processes in constructivist qualitative research, as Corby (2006 p 59) points out, impose certain ethical and analytical demands:

the conception, design, writing up and dissemination of the research lies with those carrying it out. The constructionist school of research is concerned to elicit the views of service users and to interpret them, but it is not necessarily aimed at involving them more fully in the research process.

In summary a total of 41 participants engaged directly with the research, 32 females and nine male workers. Coincidentally this gender breakdown roughly matches the gender ratio figures in the CSS. In this research there was 78 percent female and 22 percent male, whereas the 2007

figures from the Australian Services Union (2007b) found 81 percent of the workforce was female.

4. Data Collection Methods

As previously stated, the data collection methods were semi-structured interviews, focus groups and workers' written responses. Utilising three different contextual methods in gathering workers' data did allow for richer depth in data collection and analysis. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008 p 195), an interview 'fosters interactivity with participants', 'elicits in-depth, context-rich personal accounts, perceptions and perspectives', 'explains and describes complex interactions and processes' and 'facilitates discovery of nuances in culture'. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008 p 195) suggest a focus group 'fosters interactivity and dialogue among participants, describes complex interactions, clarifies and extends findings yielded by other methods, [and] allows for increased richness of responses through synergy and interaction'.

Workers in the interviews did indeed share more about their personal experiences of work stress. It appeared they also felt a sense of relief in talking about their painful and difficult work stress experiences. In the focus groups there was more containment in sharing of personal experiences of work stress and this is understandable given the exposed contextual reality of group discussion. It was found that the written responses provided clear, concise and reflective answers to the set questions. Perhaps this was due in part to the situation in which participants have more choices in regards to how much time they spend on thinking and reflecting on the questions as well as their written answers. However the conversations in the focus groups resulted in participants 'sparking off' each other in the discussions of the causes of work stress.

It was decided to use the four lead questions which have already been mentioned. This number was chosen because it was felt that fewer questions gave the interviewees a chance to settle into answering in more depth. Also this small set of initial questions gave room to probe, using additional clarification questions when necessary for gathering a deeper understanding. Also having fewer questions took pressure off the interviewer and interviewee and helped the process to be of a reasonable length and not arduous to either party. According to de Marrais and Lapan (2004) too many questions interfere with getting clarification and deeper meaning.

4.1 The Initial Pilot Stage

Initially a face-to-face pilot interview was conducted in order to evaluate the quality, clarity, relevance and understanding of the pilot questions by the interviewee. This pilot interview resulted in the number of questions being reduced. It appeared that the interviewee's answers encompassed pending questions and subsequently repetitiveness occurred in answers. The

outcome was some re-designing of questions as well as reducing the number of questions. Initially there were nine questions which were reduced to four. Having too many questions made the interview arduous and exhausting for the interviewee, especially in terms of length of interview process. This initial pilot interview took place in the worker's home.

The pilot interview was also used as a self-evaluation tool for testing the researcher's interviewing approach, techniques and skills with the view to making improvements where necessary. Secondly, there was the need to test the digital recorder, especially its range and clarity in picking up the dialogue. At the end of the pilot interview the interviewee was invited to share how the experience had been for her. It was an important first step and highly valuable.

The researcher also took part in other research as a participant, partially in order to experience what it is like being a research participant as well as observe current approaches and methods used by researchers. This was done prior to interviewing the participants in this research. A main aim was to re-orientate myself to the many facets of being an interviewee, including the feelings of vulnerability, anxiety and exposure, especially about being recorded. I wanted to increase my understanding, sensitivity and empathy by experiencing being an interviewee. I did not want this research to be a bad experience for participants or for myself. From a feminist theoretical standpoint this is about exploring power relationships in a practical way, via being the interviewee as opposed to being the more powerful interviewer, in order to maximise sensitivity to this reality. This process did indeed assist the researcher to gain a greater understanding of power differences in the interview process and be sensitive to not promulgate power, especially in face-to-face interviews.

4.2 Stage Two – The Interviews

There were a total of fifteen semi-structured interviews, nine face-to-face interviews and six telephone interviews. A digital recorder was used during all interviews and its proposed use was explained in the initial telephone contact. This approach gave the potential participants time to reflect on allowing a recording of their interview and allowed for the option of note taking only. Written consent to record the participants was obtained before each interview. A general consent form was also signed prior to workers participating in the research and feedback was encouraged about any aspect of the research processes.

Thirteen female and two male participants were interviewed individually. Two female workers had full-time administrative positions. There was one worker in a training position and another who was designated as a project coordinator. There were 11 workers in direct service provision work. Workers from a range of sub-sectors in the CSS were included. There were workers from domestic violence and centres against sexual assault, disability services, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) services, multipurpose agencies, and the highest number

came from housing/homelessness work. Two workers came from church-based services. The final interview was with a worker from one of the relevant unions. This interview was requested by the researcher as she was particularly interested in general (non-identifying) information on issues and concerns shared by workers specifically about work stress through the union call centre and from their industrial officer's experiences. The aim here was to hear and gather potentially rich secondary data from the one source.

According to Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005), in-depth interviews should be approximately 90 minutes and usually one-off. These interviews usually finished within a range of one and quarter hours to one and three quarter hours. Most interviews finished around the one and half hour's time frame. Some post-interview dialogue and debriefing occurred with the interviewees. This was not recorded.

One of the positive aspects of interviews is that they provide opportunities for discovering the subjective meanings and interpretations that people give to their experiences which then allow new understandings and theories to be developed during the research process. Interviews enable greater possibilities of important sensitive information and experiences and opinions and 'people generally find the experience rewarding' (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005 p 72). In this research the interviews gave workers a chance to debrief about their experiences of work stress. At the end of each interview a final, non-recorded, question was asked about how they had experienced the interview. This gave the participants the opportunity to share and evaluate the process, including evaluation of the interviewer. As well, the researcher was checking that the interviewee was not distressed by the subject matter and or the interview processes.

After one face-to-face interview and another over the telephone the researcher followed up both workers the next morning as they were crying and distressed at various stages of the interviews. The option of a referral to a counsellor was discussed but not taken up. As well during the interviews there was ongoing checking to make sure the participants wanted to continue with the interview. Considerable time in the interviews was spent with the workers sharing thoughts about their specific experiences of work stress, especially how it came about and what happened to them. It was apparent that workers were keen to share their experiences of job stress. Given the stigma attached to showing signs of or reporting work stress, it is not surprising that participants took the opportunity to debrief in the confidential setting of a one-to-one interview.

The researcher herself sought debriefing after the interviews as the subject matter and the sharing of the workers' experiences was at times sad, painful, disturbing, distressing and difficult to contain. As Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005 p 56) state, 'Interviewers should not be passive and distanced, but actively involved in encouraging the respondent to talk and converse about the research issue under discussion'. While the researcher found some of the interviews draining, the courage and strength shown by workers was inspirational too. Hearing the

workers' distressing stories in regard to job stress in the CSS confirmed that this research is important work.

4.3 Stage Three – The Focus Groups

The focus group questions were similar to the interview questions, but the prompts were marginally different. The researcher wanted consistency across data collection processes in order to assist in the extrapolation of workers' data into themes. The first focus group in essence was the pilot focus group and subsequent small changes were made for the following focus groups, for example, the same questions were asked, but in a slightly different order.

Four focus groups were held, with an overall total of nineteen participants. The initial metropolitan group had six participants – five women and one man. The second metropolitan group had seven participants – five women and two men. The third group held in the south-east region had two male and two female participants. The final group held in the north-west region had two female workers from the same agency; one had stated in the initial contact that she was about to leave the job and indeed by the time the focus group was held she had resigned. There were three late apologies from workers for this focus group. In respect to the regional areas, additional targeted calls were made to the larger agencies in both areas as part of the promotion of the research. The aim was to disseminate additional information to workers regarding the research and for recruitment purposes as the numbers were small. This was not particularly successful as the numbers remained low in regional groups.

From discussions with regional workers, and upon reflection, possible reasons for the low numbers include the more conservative, less positive union orientation and the smaller 'fish bowl'. More people know each other in regional areas and lack of anonymity may have been a concern. One worker shared her views about the conservative nature of the environment and some of the challenges obtaining work in country regions. In one group it was commented that many workers knew each other and there was some job swapping occurring due to the limited pool of work in their local regions.

Further, attending and sharing in a focus group about work stress may expose the worker to being seen as a 'stressed out' worker who has an 'individual weakness' in terms of employability; there is a stigma surrounding work stress. There are issues of exposure, vulnerability and confidentiality. This in part does come from some general assumptions about work stress, and a large part of work stress research does focus on pathologising the individual worker. Lewig and Dollard (2001 p 187) found that the media portrayal of work stress is one of 'environmental causality' but 'individual responsibility'. In other words work stress is caused by systems and structures within the work environment, but the focus is on workers being responsible to avoid the stress and individually resolve its effects.

In respect to the focus groups, in total seven workers came from church-based agencies (one drug and alcohol worker, one outreach worker, one youth worker, one crisis worker, one case management worker and two housing/homelessness workers). Three workers in total came from a housing/homelessness area (including the above-stated church-based), three came from women's services, two came from youth services, two came from a mental health service, and one came from a disability service and one from a service that assisted refugees.

A further breakdown into metropolitan versus regional sub-sectors has not been given in order to preserve confidentiality. It would be much easier to pinpoint workers in regional agencies due to smaller numbers of organisations. The names of the towns where the regional focus groups were held are also not shared for this reason.

The agenda for each session was shared at the beginning of each focus group, which included presenting the planned questions. As well, the pre-planned ground rules were shared at the start of each session. A round of first names and the type of area in which participants worked was the initial warming up exercise. The researcher was aware that most workers had come straight from their workplaces and hence time was a finite resource.

Processes were put in place to ensure that all participants were given a chance to share their views and experiences. This was done by requesting that the questions were answered by each person initially taking a turn. There was some relaxation if conversations were flowing, but the facilitator did at times bring the group back into responding to the set question. Also the facilitator encouraged the quieter members to share and prompt questions were utilised where appropriate. Furthermore, the last question allowed for additional comments in regard to anything else the participants would like to share about work stress. This gave participants a chance to add possibly the more 'percolated thoughts' as well as thoughts gathered after hearing what others had to say.

There was more diversity of opinion shared in the two metropolitan groups than in either regional group. In the regional groups most of the workers knew each other, whereas this was not the case in the metropolitan groups, although in the first metropolitan focus group two workers came from the same organisation. Each of these workers was informed that another worker was coming along from their respective agency; they each stated they knew this prior to the telephone call. After the two metropolitan groups, participants stayed longer to chat and have refreshments than they did in the rural groups.

In the two regional groups, participants left fairly quickly after the formal session finished. They also appeared more rushed, and refreshments were utilised prior to and during the group processes. The tyranny of long distances covered in regional areas was raised several times by participants in one of the two regional groups. Furthermore, it struck the researcher in the last focus group that it may have been more difficult for both workers as they were coming from the same organisation, although one worker had recently left the organisation.

Once again, at the end of the focus groups, participants were invited to share their experience of being in a focus group. This also added to the researcher checking that participants were okay and not distressed by any of the questions and responses or by the process in general. All participants gave positive feedback, including during the refreshments shared at the close of the formal recorded session. A concerted effort was made to provide quality focus groups. For example, all participants were informed of the purpose of the focus group and how they would be conducted; a safe and comfortable environment was provided (neutral venues were booked); thoughtful ground rules developed and maintained and quality food and drinks provided. Three recording methods were used (two recorders and one manual note taker), and a range of participants attended (from various professions and workplaces across the CSS).

The researcher is an experienced facilitator as are the two assistants who attended both metropolitan focus groups, and one each attended the regional groups. As discussed earlier, the approach was from feminist research principles in which listening carefully to group members' experiences, trying to understand their experience and reflection upon all aspects of the research processes was never far away from the researcher's mind.

4.4 The Written Responses

As previously stated, some workers were also invited to answer the interview questions in writing. Seven participants submitted written material. One worker was from the family violence area, another from family and youth support area, two were disability support workers, one worker worked in several services (drug and alcohol/homelessness, employment, education and training), one worker from the drug and alcohol area as well as the disability area, and one from a community health centre. The written responses added rich data for analysis. Workers had more time to think about the questions, reflect on them and then write their responses.

4.5 Security Processes in Respect to Collected Data

All data collected was made secure in the researcher's office. Copies of transcripts of interviews were sent to the workers' home addresses for confidentiality reasons. All interviews were offered in locations chosen by the participants to maximise their convenience, confidentiality, comfort and safety. All focus group transcripts given to participants were in summary form; no names of workers or agencies were in the document. In summary, all participants were provided with an explanation of the planned research and why the researcher had embarked on this work and the intended outcome of the research process. Each participant was guaranteed anonymity and assured his/her feedback would be kept confidential. In respect to focus groups, participants were encouraged to share only what they felt comfortable with and to keep in mind that total

confidentiality is not guaranteed in any group setting. All participants were provided with the assurance that at any stage they could withdraw from this research process.

The research incorporated participants' feedback from calls, emails, interviews and focus groups throughout the research project. As Dollard et al. (2003 p 92) comment, 'Limitations in the scientific methods have led to more active participatory design utilising multiple testing points, continuous feedback from participants, and are problem driven rather than merely theoretical driven.'

5. Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis

This research is about workers' construction of knowledge and as a researcher working with a constructionist paradigm, data analysis comes from an impressionistic and thematic analysis (Corby 2006). According to Carey (2009 p 155), 'When undertaking analysis the researcher attempts to generate explanation, understanding and meaning from research findings.'

Thematic pattern analysis was used to analyse the data. As Dawson (2006, cited in Carey 2009 p 165) states, 'this type of analysis is highly inductive as themes emerge from the data and are not imposed upon it by the researcher'. Aronson (1994 p 1) identified the practical steps involved in thematic analysis as collecting the data, listing common 'patterns of experience', identifying all the data that relates to these patterns, combining the patterns into themes and sub-themes, gaining a comprehensive view of all the data from these themes and developing a valid argument.

The rich source of data from the interviews and focus groups was transcribed verbatim by the researcher personally. This was done in order to use the transcribing process to further soak in the data in a cognitive and emotional sense. The written responses were collated and used alongside the verbatim recorded data from interviews and focus groups. The software NVIVO was used to assist with categorising information, collating the themes and in the final synthesis processes.

A search for key trends and themes was conducted amidst transcripts of interviews and focus groups and the workers' written data and links to the overall research question. The workers' narratives and their understanding of work stress, including its causes and effects, form the basis of the data analysis. In particular there was a search for workers' beliefs about work stress, where it comes from, how it manifests within the CSS and ways to reduce work stress.

The process of coding began with reading each transcript a number of times to gather a greater understanding of the emerging patterns. From this close reading a number of broad themes emerged. This process brought together 'components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone' (Leininger, 1985, cited in Aronson 1994 p 1). All of the relevant data relating to each theme was then collated. From this

the themes were refined and extra sub-themes incorporated. The data was again checked to ensure that important aspects of what the workers had said had not been excluded and that all relevant statements had been extracted from the data. Finally the themes were examined to ensure that they were coherent and consistent. Alongside the analysis of the workers' voices, this research was strongly informed by the literature reviewed at the beginning and throughout the research and thesis journey. As Carey (2009 p 166) notes, 'literature is interwoven with any findings to generate a discussion or critical discourse'. He further points out (2009 p 165):

this approach looks to combine data collection and analysis; but, as is so often the case with inductive approaches in practice, analysis can also be generated around background reading undertaken prior to the collection of data.

In summary the approach was a qualitative thematic analysis informed by workers' voices regarding work stress in the CSS. The analysis also entailed extensive and ongoing exploration of the research literature.

6. Issues of Trustworthiness

The term 'trustworthiness' refers to the general reliability and validity of qualitative data with the aim of controlling any issues of potential bias that may creep into the design or conduct of a qualitative study. According to Guba & Lincoln (1998, cited in Bloomberg & Volpe 2008 p 85), issues of trustworthiness in qualitative studies can be obtained through credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability processes. Guba & Lincoln (1992, cited in D'Cruz & Jones 2004 pp 74-75) explain these four qualitative issues of trustworthiness compared to their quantitative equivalent, that is, 'credibility (for internal validity), transferability (for generalizability or external validity) dependability (for reliability) and confirmability (for objectivity)'.

One technique adopted in this research with respect to credibility was to first provide a copy of the interview transcripts verbatim to all interviewees. As well, feedback on the transcripts for potential errors and evaluation was invited. A summary of the main points in the focus groups was offered to all participants, including welcoming feedback for errors and evaluation. Names and workplaces were left out of these transcripts; however the sub-field of work was included. No negative feedback was received. As well all interviewees and focus group participants were asked how the interview or focus group had been for them.

Sager & James (2005 p 129) note that

[one] strategy used to increase data credibility was reflexivity. This is a process of self examination whereby reflection on bias, theoretical predispositions and perspectives, and how this had influenced data collection and analysis takes place using a personal diary to record thoughts, feelings and ideas.

Robson (1993) suggests peer debriefing as a further technique to enhance credibility.

In this research a personal diary was used to reflect on each interview and focus group. As well, discussions with supervisors, two academic mentors and fellow students throughout each step of analysis allowed reflection on potential biases. Bloomberg & Volpe (2008 p 86) discuss how credibility requires 'methodological validity' or the matching of the research questions and techniques with the explanation that is developed. One way this was done in this research was by triangulating the data from the interviews, focus groups and written responses. The data was also analysed for any discrepant or discordant themes as a further measure of credibility.

Dependability is concerned with whether findings are consistent and dependable with the data collected (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008). In this study the data analysis tool was thematic analysis. The consistency in the coding of the themes showed that the findings were consistent and dependable with the data collected. Many direct quotes given by the workers are included in the data analysis chapters and subsequent analysis was drawn from narratives. This matching process of direct quotes and analysis forms part of the dependability processes. To further demonstrate dependability, two transcripts were separately coded by a third party using the same criteria as the researcher. There were only slight differences which were reconciled with further analysis.

Confirmability is about reflexivity and illustrating how the data can be traced back to its origins (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008). Bloomberg & Volpe discuss the idea of an audit trail as a way to assess the findings of a study. An audit trail was used in this study. Throughout this study there have been ongoing discussions about all aspects of this research with supervisors and colleagues as a way of incorporating inquiry auditors to help address the researcher's own biases.

Liamputtong & Ezzy (2005 p 21) comment: 'feminists have explored the reflexive nature of the research encounter, underlining the significance of the researcher as an inseparable part of the research process'. As a feminist researcher, reflexive practices are an important and integral component of this research. As part of the reflexive practices the focus groups were conducted by the researcher as well as two experienced facilitators. This approach provided additional support mechanisms for the participants if needed. This approach aided debriefing, evaluating all aspects of the focus groups including the researcher as facilitator. It was a helpful reflexive practice tool. D'Cruz & Jones (2004 p 14), writing on social work research, draw on the idea of a critical researcher as '... someone who is able to draw flexibly and inclusively on a range of research practices according to their appreciation of the situation in hand and the social dimensions of their knowledge making'. The researcher in this research was an experienced worker coming from the CSS. This enabled a critical approach to be enacted in many aspects of the research. The researcher had an in-depth understanding of the CSS.

As Schram (2003 cited in Bloomberg & Volpe 2008 p 87) states, 'Depth, richness, and detailed description provide the basis for a qualitative account's claim to relevance in some broader context'. The themes and workers' narratives emanating from the data analysis do provide rich information about workers' experiences of job stress in the CSS.

7. Ethical Considerations

As previously stated, the researcher is social work trained and belongs to the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and adheres to the AASW Code of Ethics (AASW 2011). The researcher completed Victoria University's standard ethics report and proceeded with data collection after receiving confirmation and approval from the university's Ethics Committee. The researcher has deployed careful procedures to ensure the safety and confidentiality of participants are met. For example, all participants received information about the research prior to the interviews. The researcher commenced with the interviews only after participants' consent forms to participate in the study were received. All participation was voluntary and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any stage and that confidentiality would be respected.

In respect to partiality and locating the researcher, the researcher took the time to explain about her background as a social worker, including the many years of service in various positions in the CSS to all prospective participants. It was felt important to share her 'recent insider' status. Also shared was the reason why this research was embarked upon. As a researcher one hopes for openness and rich material from participants, therefore ethically modelling the same behaviour is important.

Furthermore, all participants were asked if they were interested in the outcomes of the research and it is planned to provide access to results for those participants who have expressed an interest. There are plans to invite participants to a relaxed informal gathering to share about the research outcomes after submission. The researcher offered all participants in interviews and focus groups a copy of the data recorded. Interviews were documented verbatim, including any comments made by the researcher.

Integrity, honesty and fairness have been at the forefront in all interactions with participants in this research. Feminist researcher Berger (1993, cited in Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005 p 23) spoke of the term 'conscious partiality' and its goal of forming 'non-exploitative relationships with research subjects'. In this research any contact made by a worker was promptly responded to and every effort was made to include all interested workers in this research, for example allowing written responses to the research questions if they had missed participating in the other two research processes. The research subjects were engaged with as active and reflexive beings.

The researcher is sensitive to representing others and has been open in many ways to an evaluation of this as documented in the feedback channels utilised. In regards to occupations, no worker who wanted to participate was rejected on any grounds of difference, for example, administration, front line staff and other professionals. The researcher has worked hard to contextualise the research in all facets of the research journey, for example in initial promotions of the research proposal, with participants and in the reading and literature review chapter. In regards to accountability to communities, specifically in this case to the workers in the CSS, there will be efforts made to provide access to the research and especially the outcomes through various means.

According to Carey (2009), social work dissertations in respect of ethics include: respect, honesty and trust with participants, treating each participant as an equal rather than as an object of observations or study, and avoiding harm and risk to participants. These practices have guided the researcher in all her endeavours to do with this research. For example, the researcher was aware of the potential employment risks for current workers in sharing about work stress issues and concerns; hence she offered individual interviews in which privacy can be assured. However there was also the option of attending a focus group in which workers had the opportunity to hear and share with other workers who were also interested in this research topic. Ground rules were developed in which ethical issues were covered, for example a request that what is shared in the group stays in the group.

Furthermore, every effort will be made to contact all who participated in this research to inform them of the completion and results post thesis examination, where the thesis in its entirety can be accessed through the Victoria University Library and an invitation to an informal gathering to share about the results of the research.

In conclusion, the most important ethical commitment was to the participants in this research and every effort, alongside the ongoing evaluation, was made to avoid harm and produce important research for the benefit of workers in the CSS (Jones, Torres & Armino 2006).

8. Limitations of the Methodology

A standard general limitation of a qualitative study is its smallness in respect to sample size; hence generalisations can be problematic. As Corby (2006 p 63) comments on criticisms emanating from an objectivist's point of view on a constructionist paradigm,

... this form of research is seen as weak because it is not concerned with providing proof, the samples it uses are usually small and reliance on the researcher's qualitative analysis is not considered sufficiently scientific.

However, as Lunenburg and Irby (2008 p 178) note:

... sample size in qualitative research is typically smaller than in quantitative studies. This is because you will be striving for in-depth information in qualitative research. It is more important for you to spend sufficient time with a small number of participants than to work superficially with a large number.

Forty-one participants in a qualitative study is an appropriate size sample for the purposes of this research. Perhaps though, implementing a second interview process with a small percentage of the participants may have yielded greater depth to the analysis. This would have allowed clarification of statements and further exploration of themes that some participants had not expanded upon. As Lather (2003, cited in Jones, Torres & Armino 2006 p 130) comments, 'recycling categories, emerging analysis and conclusions back through at least a subsample of the respondents improves face validity'. Resources and time were constraints here.

As previously mentioned, anonymity and confidentiality can be issues for regional workers and the numbers at regional focus groups were small. Had more one-to-one options been available, or the possibility of written responses been promoted to these workers, there may have been a greater take-up by workers. There were four telephone interviews, one written response and no face-to-face interviews with regional workers.

Another limitation of this study is the issue of subjectivity and potential researcher bias. The researcher is a social worker who has worked in the CSS for over 20 years. This extensive experience does bring personal biases, assumptions and perceptions. In order to work with the researcher's personal subjectivity, ongoing engagements with an experienced researcher and clinician from this field have been utilised throughout this research and thesis.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis – Part One

1. Introduction

Chapter Four explores workers' experience and understanding of work stress in the CSS. It is necessary to unpack the many complex and interconnected layers in the CSS to explore work stress in this sector. The chapter begins with a discussion of the gendered nature of this work space which was a strong theme throughout the data and seen to contribute to the exploitation of this workforce. This predominately female workforce is still connected to the historical charity and voluntary model dating back to early settlement in Australia. According to Smyth (2008, p 5) the blossoming of this charity and voluntary model came about in the 1930s to 1940s. Most importantly the effects of this model on the paid workers are explored, including the vocational, altruistic, loyalty and idealism expectations of the gendered workforce.

From the mid-1980s onwards the policies of neo-liberalism²⁰ negatively impacted upon the Community Services Sector and its workforce. The neo-liberal agenda, with its belief that the free market 'does it best', has influenced policies of Australian state and federal governments over the past three decades. This chapter analyses how workers experience the impact of such policies on the sector and its predominantly female labour force. The effects of the so called 'new managerialism' are elucidated from the workers narratives, as are the accompanying political imperatives of 'compulsive competitive tendering' (CCT) and auditing.

Chapter Four moreover explores power structures and relations within sectoral agencies from the vantage point of workers. This section highlights workers' perspectives about management and governance structures such as boards and committees of management. The implications and consequences of work structures in the CSS are examined through workers' personal experiences and understanding of work stress in the CSS.

2. Lady Bountiful in the Community Sector

2.1 A Gendered Space

The CSS is a highly gendered space in both the paid and unpaid domains. The social and community services (SACS)²¹ workforce in 2006 was 87 percent women (Allebone 2011 p 9). According to the Australian Services Union (2009) in Victoria the percentage of female workers in the CSS is 86.6 percent. The latest statistics on volunteers for the NFP Aged Care Residential

²⁰ As noted previously, the terms 'economic rationalism' and 'neo-liberalism' have been used interchangeably; however the more current term is 'neo-liberalism'.

²¹ Social and Community Services (SACS) was the name of the award that covered CSS workers; the award is now called the *Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010*.

Services showed that in 2008–09 there were 108,030 female volunteers and 19,342 males. It is reasonable to suggest, given the overwhelming female volunteer figures in the Aged Care Residential Services, that female volunteers largely outnumber males across the sector.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011 p 32) it is estimated that 325,000 volunteers assisted community service organisation in 2008–09 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010). It is very much a female workforce in the CSS, in both paid and unpaid work.

There is much more to this issue, however, than simply the raw numbers of women in the sector. There is importantly, an exploitative aspect to the way the work is seen as ‘women’s work’ that is evident in both paid and unpaid work. There is a strong connection between altruism, the expectations of few or no rewards and the gender of the workforce (England, Budig & Folbre 2002; Wagner & Spence 2003). Everyone involved in this field – consecutive state and federal governments, CSS peak bodies, the agencies themselves, society in general and even the workers, get caught in these exploitative connections and relationships.

Historically women have been the larger group of volunteers and the ones who deliver charity. As well as caring work being traditionally women’s private work, this adds to caring work in the public sphere not being seen as real work and hence being devalued. A worker in a focus group commented,

I just keep thinking this is about woman’s work, this is the work woman have done over the centuries for nothing, invisibly. (W20, female, 20 years CSS)

As Allebone (2011) points out, there is a lack of respect for caring and emotional work in general because it is seen as predominately women’s work. The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council report states (Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council 2008a p 37) ‘... it is widely acknowledged that care-giving remains devalued in both social and economic terms’.

As a worker in a focus group noted:

It is hard to just keep doing something that clearly has no value. I can [receive] more value in making a little widget on a factory line somewhere than for helping somebody to live the best life they can. (W39, female 20 years CSS)

A male worker in a follow-up telephone discussion spoke about the devaluation of the work and clearly saw it in part due to the work being seen as an extension of women’s traditional roles at home. Hence the work itself is devalued. (W11, male, 13 years CSS)

As noted by Nolan (2003), employment models and wage setting structures in Australia were historically based until the 1950s on the model of the male breadwinner. The ‘caring’ work was done by wives (women) and was unpaid. There is a direct link between these cultural ideas surrounding gender roles and the historical divisions that permeate the CSS today.

There are inherent challenges emanating from gender role socialisation norms. There is a greater expectation that women will nurture and support others, before acting on their own needs (Carson, Maher & King 2007). Many workers shared their concerns about clients and how this resulted in them not taking action on issues that were creating work stress and directly affecting them. Thus the client's needs were put first. Worker needs (their needs) were seen as less important or even of no importance. As one worker in a focus group stated: *it's a complete inability to put ourselves first ever (W39, female, 20 years CSS)*. The client-centred discourse that pervades the sector (Kosny & Eakin 2008) is based largely on preconceived gender expectations for women which subsequently lead to exploitation of them as workers. The federal government acknowledged in their submission to the Equal Pay case before Fair Work Australia (Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations 2010) that there is a gender bias that undervalues the worker and the work being completed in the CSS.

For instance, one worker who is a strong unionist shared her experience of being dismissed and not putting her needs first:

This can be largely attributed to my own approach, the 'let's not make waves' approach, the strong impulse not to cause disaffection within the ranks which could have had a negative impact on the agency's operations, and hence on client welfare. (W28, female, 16 years CSS)

From the data it is apparent that work stress can result from the expectations of women and their acquiescing to this gendered expectation of being all-giving and all-caring. There is clear imbalance here between what workers experience – the devaluation, the poor rewards, the lack of nurturing – and the extensive rhetoric about the 'caring and sharing' CSS. As one worker in the initial focus group commented, *but we're not a caring sharing sector, that's right, abusive yes. (W23, female, 15 years CSS)*

Furthermore, the discourse that clients come first is also utilised by governments. In the federal government's submission regarding the current Social and Community Sector case before Fair Work Australia, Allebone (2011 p 9) notes the thinly veiled argument that clients would suffer if CSS workers received increased wages. They argue that services would have to be cut in order to pay for these wage increases, that the clients of the CSS would suffer and by inference that this would be unfair. This becomes its own justification – if clients may suffer, then workers should not expect improved pay and conditions. Similar arguments about the potential suffering of citizens have not been put when governments have argued about wages and conditions in male-dominated sectors such as emergency services (for example, police and fire fighters).

Interestingly, from a total of nine males, there were three male participants in this study who were also union delegates, compared with two women union delegates from 32 female participants. In other words, 22 percent of participants were male yet they were 60 percent of

those who were union representatives. This is a small sample, but it reinforces the willingness of men to be more engaged in standing up for their rights for decent pay and working conditions. Women are more willing to take on board the altruistic and charity idealisation of the CSS. Throughout the focus groups and interviews it was the women who most commonly reported feeling that they would let the clients down if they pushed their needs, including work issues that were causing them stress. This indoctrination links back to the early settlement days of Australia in the late 1800s.

The CSS has always been predominately a female workforce and there is a clear link to the challenges of reducing work stress in this sector. The pay, terms and conditions, as documented in the literature review, have not improved at anywhere near the level of the other two sectors: the private and the government sectors.

One worker in the disability field spoke about the poor pay, restrictive nature of the classifications and job structures, the short-term contracts and the strong gender disadvantage:

Also there's an issue around hierarchy within the community sector that [is] unspoken about, and while we're all supposed to be warm and fuzzy and, you know, everyone embraces everybody, the reality is that [there] are some jobs that have been utterly neglected. They are the jobs, the dead-end jobs that go nowhere, they have nothing in them for anyone really ... and the other thing is that, the hours that are offered to people are so bad, and you know ... these rotten [individual contracts] ... and systems that divide and conquer people and are just ... bury people's conditions. It is ... I believe a major cause of particularly women's poverty as women are forced into these kinds of jobs, and you're expected to work for three and four agencies all under different conditions; in one agency I've just left, I didn't have a pay rise for five years. (W34, female, 19 years CSS)

The Australian Services Union, on behalf of workers in the CSS, has argued successfully in its submission to Fair Work Australia for pay parity based on gender pay inequalities. Gender has always played a major role in the historical and current CSS. As well the charity and voluntary model has had a long history in welfare and subsequently in the development of the CSS. This model is also linked to high work stress in the CSS. As discussed in the literature review chapter there are high levels of psychological injury claims emanating from the CSS (Guthrie & Jansz 2006).

2.2 Charity and Voluntarism

The historical beginnings of welfare work in Australia were charity and volunteering. These still play a significant part in the CSS today (Leonard 2002). As documented in the literature review, there are complex issues as a result of the CSS work being seen within a charity and voluntary model and hence workers giving their labour for free or at a low cost (Leonard 2002). One

worker stated: *the charitable notion [is] enshrined in [the] sector*. She went on to say, *burning martyrdom, you know and I think we have got to get over that*. (W12, female, 19 years CSS)

Two other workers commented on their work being connected with charitable services to God:

I think there is a cultural shift that has to happen within organisations and I think it is hard for those organisations that have come out of a church based because their mission statements are always about our sharing a vision of a kind and loving god ... It is just because it comes from there, it comes from that helping position, the organisation comes from that history, that background we are here to help, we [are] here to service and we are here to do whatever needs to be done for the clients because the clients need it, but they don't then necessarily follow through on, well, what about the staff? (W39, female, 20 years CSS)

Another participant agreed:

I know what you mean about 'doing god's work'. I think that a lot of organisations in this sector, I mean, they might be like church organisations or ... faith-based organisations and there's this solution that you do it because you've got a vocation. (W26, female, 7 years one agency)

Another worker shared her views about the large church-based organisation and its management ethos of 'we should be in it for the love of working with people'. She added: *the Board's core base [is] church/parish members and there are lots of volunteers in the agency*. She went on to state that *our CEO is a bit into empire building [of] the agency at ever[y] level, the agency aren't looking after their staff, they aren't looking after our management ...* (W14, female, 22 years CSS). This worker commented that she took holidays and extended sick leave to cope with workplace stress and is currently, after a long time of working in this agency, planning to find work outside the sector.

As noted by the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council 2008a p 7) report,

... the community services industry relies on a great volume of volunteer and unpaid labour to deliver its key services. This approach creates unique management dynamics for the managers seeking to manage unpaid and paid workforces simultaneously.

Although their focus was about management issues, there are inherent dilemmas for paid workers too. A major difficulty is fighting for decent pay and terms and conditions when the sector and specifically the agency have large numbers of volunteers who give their labour for free. Furthermore, as the report notes, this specific labour anomaly is unique to the CSS.

Statistics on the volunteer numbers from the ABS Community Services (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010) for 2008–09 show that in total, volunteer numbers are 325,440 (in both for-profits and not-for-profits) in comparison to 570,646 paid employees. Fifty-nine percent of the

paid workers (336,032 persons) are employed in the not-for-profits. These volunteer numbers are significant and show a strong reliance on free labour in this sector. Hence there are tensions, expectations and pressures for paid workers to over-extend, to give more since volunteers are doing it for free.

There are inherent difficulties for paid workers around standing up for their needs whilst working alongside people giving their free labour (Baines 2004). As one worker in a church-based service noted, *our agency has a huge amount of volunteers that do it all for love and this was reinforced by the original CEO, you know, every time you would say the pay is a day late or whatever, if you mentioned the word pay or anything to do with conditions ... we used to get the lecture about all the wonderful volunteers that do it for the love.* (W14, female, 22 years CSS)

One paid worker in an organisation that had over 70 percent volunteers discussed the huge workloads and subsequent high stress levels and the expectations upon all workers to do many more hours and enact roles than were not included in their paid job descriptions. For example, this worker was expected to attend volunteer recruitment nights, contribute to fund-raising and even share cleaning of the offices.

You were expected to go and ... give up one of your nights to do that ... the expectations were huge and there was no acknowledgement of the workload and I couldn't see and when I worked it out with my [external] supervisor, I mean we couldn't work out what I could drop, there was nothing I could drop and continue to do the work that was needed for the clients and for the counsellors sake, and yet I was still sort of being made to feel that I wasn't pulling my weight because I wasn't organising, by the fund raiser and then the CEO, because I wouldn't run a stall ... or I wouldn't do a particular fund raising thing, and it was just crazy. (W6, female, 5 years one agency)

She also commented, *so I suppose [as] it grows there was some concern between paid and unpaid co-ordinators, there was a bit of tension around that stuff* (W6, female, 5 years one agency). This worker stated that this particular organisation ended up with many workers becoming extremely stressed, resulting in many resignations, including her own.

The same respondent also touched on the tensions, challenges and different expectations and to some extent lack of control of volunteers as opposed to paid workers. She stated:

If there were quadruple the number of paid staff it may not have been enough that would [have] made a huge difference, because if your workforce are volunteers [they] can come and go as they like, they can take leave as they like ... it makes the job a whole heap harder. It's very hard to say these are the rules, you know, so you write the manual and you hope people abide by them. (W6, female, 5 years one agency)

CSS volunteers are not bound by the same obligations, rules and boundaries that paid workers must adhere to, such as notice to resign, meeting key performance indicators or

adhering to professional codes of practice. These inherent disparities result in tensions between paid and unpaid workers who must work together but are not on a level or even similar playing field. As the quote above demonstrates, management can and does play one off against the other.

The entangled ingredients of charity and volunteerism together with the strong gender aspects indirectly contribute to work stress. At a basic level this mix of paid and unpaid workers complicates working relationships and adds tensions and strains. As Allebone (2011 p 12) states, 'the historical undervaluation of care work and the driving down of wages in the SACS sector is primarily the product of its roots in voluntarism and its highly feminised character'.

2.3 Altruism

One aspect from workers' data is the altruistic expressions enunciated by agencies which are then taken on board by workers. The expectation that workers will give above and beyond what would be expected in other sectors of the workforce is often assumed. As stated in the Community Services and Industry Council Literature Review (2008a p 21), 'What in other industries might be characterised as overwork, in community services might be construed as a high and commendable level of commitment to the service, program or agency'. Agencies espouse altruistic rhetoric and subsequently expect altruistic behaviour from their workers. Unfortunately it is not a two-way street. The consequence for workers is significant disappointment and stress. They experience a lack of support and action on workers' growing burn-out (work stress). Hearing some of the workers' comments, one could think there is some naivety shown by the workers, but the dominant altruistic discourse sinks into the very soul of the workers. This is compounded by the historical charity and voluntary model that still, today, encourages workers to do more than their standard work. One worker notes:

In my experience the pressure which has contributed to work stress for me has been both internal and external. As the sector will continue to try to get the most out of workers and as a worker I have been guilty of pushing myself past a point of what is healthy for me. Whilst I own this experience I certainly don't think it is unique. (W19, female, 8 years CSS)

One long-term worker notes the nature of organisations that state altruistic intent:

organisations that ... have these [stated] incredibly high altruistic values, need to take these same values and apply them to their staff and to be seen to [be] doing it and to pursue it vigorously because if it's not ... if their teams aren't experiencing that, they're not going to be able to offer the continuity to their client families without them just burning out, and burn out they do! (W7, male, 15 years CSS)

There is a profound irony here that the very same agencies and their managers, who espouse altruistic motivation, are not responding in kind toward their workers. Alessandrini's (2002)

research on not-for-profits contends that some of the larger non-profits, including religious organisations, exploit the moral high ground in marketing and public relations activities and that image management is paramount. Morris (2011 p 4) in her paper acknowledges the reliance and dependence of small non-government organisations (NGOs) on goodwill:

their worlds can be quite focussed and are hugely dependent on the good will of the staff, leaders, board members and consumers for their daily achievements in service and in making a difference.

Another worker commented on the nature of workers who tend to be attracted to work in CSS:

I guess the issues that are really common within the community sector is the workload that you get. I think the sector attracts a certain type of person who can be quite ... giving in their nature and tend to be doers who take on more and more and more, and I think because ... there is not the funding for enough staff or for enough resources that people tend to be taking on more and more in their roles and because you're dealing with vulnerable people ... you don't want to be saying no to taking on something when it might result in somebody not getting ... the support or the attention that they need so ... our workloads were fairly heavy. (W9, female, 4 years CSS)

A regional worker in a large agency of over 100 staff commented that:

... in our agency, like, there is four of us go to rallies ... we are welfare workers and I know it is our job but ... we are here because we think we will make a difference and all the other stuff you know, or they're just all too busy, or it is just a culture and they will leave it up to everybody else ... yeah, they are very good looking after lots of other people but not particularly good at looking after ourselves ... (W14, female, 22 years CSS)

Similarly, another worker noted

... that's why political action is so difficult in this sector; people want to care; I'm too busy caring to care for myself ... but we can't go on strike because that would upset people, right? (W8, female, 30 years CSS)

In the face of the extremely low pay and poor working conditions in comparison with other sectors of the workforce, this lack of self-caring is telling and significantly, the workers appear well aware of it, especially since the substantial and sustained union led 'Equal Pay for Equal Work' campaign. Workers inevitably get caught up in the altruistic rhetoric and subsequent expectations of behaving in self-sacrificing ways. One worker, who put in a vast amount of unpaid hours and became quite stressed and ill but held on for a long time before resigning, stated *I am the voice of the clients. I was advocating for the clients. (W6, female, 5 years one agency).*

The CSS is highly influenced by the charity and voluntary models and the closely aligned rhetoric of altruism which leads to unrealistic expectations of its workforce. The Allen Consulting Group (2008 p 18) found:

In many cases, employees are asked to work overtime, take on larger case loads, without commensurate pay increases, in order for the organisation to continue to provide the services it is required to provide. The strain this puts on employees means that staff stress levels rise and subsequently the turnover is high.

2.4 Idealism and Loyalty – Missing Reciprocity

A further layer of complexity within the CSS is the over-riding idealistic discourse of respect, values and social justice. These notions, espoused as guiding principles by CSS organisations, are notably missing when it comes to the agencies' own workforces. This disparity is a major source of stress for workers.

I think that some of the stuff that people struggle with the most is how they can be working for these agencies that purport to have ... a value base around things like respect and dignity and ... empowerment and, like, those kind of stuff, but then they don't feel like that is how they interact with their workers at all. So they might have a really good kind of framework for ... how they work with clients but not at all how they work with their ... staff. I think that is really a consistent thing in the whole time ... that I worked in the sector but also since coming here as well, it keeps coming up. ... There is that overall kind of stress difficulties. (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 years union work)

This is clearly a paradoxical situation and it is hardly surprising that it causes workers stress and grief. Workers strive on a daily basis to deal with clients in a positive, respectful way and they come home, so to speak, to their agencies to be treated poorly.

One worker who experienced a significant work stress injury shared her story about the lack of loyalty shown by her agency over a serious work stress incident. Their subsequent blaming of her while she was on sick leave exacerbated her condition and hindered her recovery as she had shown significant loyalty to the organisation and to her manager. She states:

It took a lot of time for me to work out that as a person and a worker I'm quite loyal and I used to be very loyal to the organisation and very loyal to the manager ... I used to stand up for her, that is what you do, you're loyal and you're appropriate and it was after, oh that you know, ... the thing that kicked it for me was when I got sicker. (W9, female, 4 years CSS)

Workers talked about a lack of reciprocal loyalty; loyalty flowed upwards to managers and the agency but it did not flow back down to the workers. One worker who ended up having an episode of major depression after a series of client-related incidents commented in relation to her boss that *if she had shown the same consideration for her worker that she had shown [the]*

client in his complaint I would not have been so crushed (W16, female, 24 years CSS).

Workers naturally expect loyalty to be a two-way street in the CSS because it is expected of them to show loyalty to the client base, the agency and to a certain extent the sector, and they are negatively affected when they face the reality that this is not so. Workers clearly see that reciprocity of loyalty should be part of the contract.

When it comes to the other issues, people feeling stressed in their normal work and talking about the amount of work they have, the changes, we are asked to be flexible and change, those things still remain a stressor and I know there is pressure going both ways, but I get a sense that loyalty is only one way and that is up; it doesn't go down. (W7, male, 15 years CSS)

I would describe the culture ... in our workplace: we all work so hard and we work really well with our clients; it's a pity that management don't work so well with their workers. (W5, female, 4 years current agency)

Schaufeli (1999 pp 29–30) comments on a violation of the psychological contract:

A psychological contract refers to the expectations held by employees about the nature of their exchange with the organisation. Expectations concern concrete issues such as workload, as well as less tangible matters such as esteem and dignity at work, and support from supervisors and colleagues. Thus, the psychological contract reflects the employees' subjective notion of reciprocity; they expect gains or outcome from the organisation that are proportional to their investments or inputs.

These gains or outcomes expected for workers in the CSS extend beyond mere pay and conditions. Workers in this study felt particularly violated by the lack of reciprocal loyalty from their organisations. This experience of being let down by management, especially in addressing work stress issues, is important. Lack of acknowledgement by management with respect to occurrences of work stress exacerbates workers' stress levels.

There's about eight full-time staff and at the end of the year six of them are resigning because there's just so much stress and, like people have said, it's stress that the management doesn't understand and fobs off and ... sort of refuses to address or refuses to acknowledge. ... in our workplace we have a lot of volunteers who kind of form the core of what we do and we have amazing self care and debriefing processes for the volunteers, but not for the [paid] staff. (W22, female, 1 year agency)

Schaufeli (1999, p 30) in discussing burnout sees that 'a lack of reciprocity is a key concept for understanding burnout in health care'. The burnout model with its focus on lack of organisational reciprocity resonates strongly with the participants' comments. Workers made statements about a lack of loyalty, respect, compassion, support and appreciation shown by managers in agencies. The burnout model in this context of reciprocity helps to understand workers' stress. You can hear the distress and disappointment in their narratives concerning their organisations' responses and behaviours towards them.

From the conversations it was also clear that the workers have further difficulties around the notion of loyalty to clients. A common theme was the difficulties of improving workers' conditions if it was going to negatively affect the clients. There is a very strong ethos and pervasive mantra within the CSS that 'the clients come first' and workers' needs are less relevant. How do you address workers' important occupational health and safety needs if they, the workers, are not in the narrative? As one worker said, *idealism is often abused I think, and I do think that we ought therefore, if we also work together with unions, we ought to get a kind of guidelines or something for those that come after us.* (W28, female, 16 years CSS)

Agencies have policies on issues of staff treatment that use terms like respect and talk about safe and stimulating places to work, but how these are implemented is an issue for many workers. As one worker commented:

... if policies and procedures [are] in place they really need to be stuck to and I think having that balance between clients' rights and workers' rights clear and workers not being undermined in that process of trying to assert the policy. (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 years ASU)

Too often policies and procedures around such things as respect, values and treatment of staff are 'warm and fuzzy' words in a document that gathers dust on a shelf or lies dormant in computer files.

Workers in this sector take on board idealistic values around the principle that the clients come first and one must show loyalty to them above all else, even at the expense of one's own work-related needs. Workers fall into unreasonable work scenarios and end up allowing themselves to be exploited.

... We tend to sacrifice our own interests for those of the clients. Which meant for instance, that I took some things more lying down than I should have ... I really do think that in our sector we've got to be fairly careful that we must also look after ourselves and not just our clients. And as it is, we usually take home far less pay than anyone else [of] our age or experience ... and idealism is often abused I think (W28, female, 16 years CSS)

Another worker commented in the following terms:

There's nothing given back ... you have this sense that everything's been taken from you and you're meant to sacrifice ... The smell of burning martyr is very strong in the air from where I've just left because of ... what you're expected to ... give up in order to, that there's an empowerment of the client, but there's a disempowerment of the workforce. (W34, female, 19 years CSS)

There is a vocational quasi-religious zeal in this discourse that puts the clients' needs above workers' needs. One could form the view that if one spoke too openly and too loudly about workers' rights and needs as being on an equal footing with the clients, one would be cast in an unseemly light. As one worker said:

[I] found that when you do ask for your board of management to become more involved, you may cause some resentment, especially resentment from the CEO, who saw this as a betrayal. The grievance procedures ... in my case [was] with [my] CEO. It does become very difficult. You find your board members weaving and ducking away, because they don't want to upset the apple cart ... and your colleagues don't want to upset the agency and because you don't want to upset the clients, and so it becomes a kind of stalemate. (W28, female, 16 years CSS)

Idealism, loyalty, altruism, charity and a religious vocational sentiment is very much part of the CSS picture. One worker in a telephone conversation stated *agencies prey on [a] Florence Nightingale response from workers (W11, male, 13 years CSS)*. The overarching rhetoric of idealism and loyalty hampers the drive to reduce work stress for workers. These exploitative elements are used against workers to retain the status quo and contain costs. Both state and federal governments and the sector as a whole arguably take advantage of workers through these exploitative elements. They act as braking mechanisms which reduce agencies', management's and workers' ability to take substantive action on work stress in this sector.

Idealism and loyalty ideation is pervasive in this sector and it does have subsequent negative effects upon the workers. These are in a sense, the Achilles' heel with regard to improving the poor pay, terms and conditions within this sector and are very much connected to the specific work stress experienced by CSS workers. Guthrie & Jansz (2006 p 495) note the connection of high psychological claims in female gendered sectors and comment: 'women dominate industries such as primary school teaching and community service work is where stress claims are notoriously high'.

From the workers' stories it is apparent these issues play a part in high psychological injury rates sustained by workers in this sector. It is more than the concrete systems and structural effects such as workloads and other poor working conditions. This research demonstrates that significant work stress arises from the various players promoting and utilising this mixture of gender expectations, the charity and voluntary model components and the connection to vocational and altruistic behavioural expectations of workers.

A further issue is the growing business side of many CSS organisations, especially the larger ones, including the leading church organisations. The business side of these organisations is less visible and is not promoted. This is in contrast to the 'feel good' and 'caring for others' rhetoric that is used painstakingly in the recruitment strategies for new workers and in donation drives. In the interviews workers frequently mentioned the business management systems (BMS) and the increased competitive tendering not only between the not-for-profits but also with the for-profits. Carson, Maher & King, (2007) note the actual use of the business term 'value added resourcing' in reference to the CSS. In actuality, factoring in specific economic add-ons translates to extracting more from workers through their benevolent and altruistic motives.

As one worker with a very serious work stress related injury from which it took her five long years to recover and begin paid work again, states:

I will never – you know, never – let myself fall into the trap again of giving all to an organisation, and I think you need to go in very much with your eyes open knowing that it is an industry that is under-resourced and you are expected to do more than ... what you are paid to do really, and you do more hours than what you're actually contracted to. It is an expectation and it shouldn't be, but ... if you're someone that is very idealistic and wants to just help people you probably [are] going to come off second best because there is a ... strong real business side of it and it's an under-resourced business... (W9, female, 4 years CSS)

On the one hand there are expectations of workers in the CSS displaying altruistic work practices, established during our early colonial days of charity and voluntarism, and on the other hand, from the mid-1980s onwards working in a quasi-market model. The quasi-market model is further discussed in the next section. Suffice it to say here, that CSS agencies operate within this private business model while still maintaining a not-for-profit charity and voluntary model of operation and status from which they draw the benefits of altruism and loyalty. These inherent contradictions add to workers' stress in a number of ways. As Carson, Maher & King, (2007, cited in Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council 2008b p 21) identified, workers perceived a dissonance between the caring mission and the need to competitively tender with other agencies for work. Clearly relying on an 'all giving and all caring' workforce is a mismatch when in reality agencies are operating in a quasi-free market paradigm.

Findings from this study demonstrate that the promotion of, and subsequent outcomes from, the overlay of charity and volunteer models, alongside the altruism, idealism and loyalty components do play an ongoing role in hampering the drive to reduce work stress for this workforce. The data supports the Effort Reward Imbalance work stress theory (Dollard, LaMontagne et al. 2007), which posits that when workers put in an enormous amount of dedication, effort, time and commitment but experience a mismatch in terms of rewards and validation, the result is occupational stress. In essence this is about an unwritten social contract. A worker in a focus group commented, *we are essentially dealing with people's lives and that's stressful, and I just think how we are rewarded is just quite disgraceful. (W32, female, 1 year CSS)*

3. The Mid-1980s Economic Rationalism

As argued in the literature review chapter, there has been research focusing on work stress in the human services field, but there has been more emphasis on the psychological stressors to do with the difficulty and challenging work with clients. As noted by a worker in a focus group, *the*

[previous] research has been too victim-focused and we should look at the structures more (W28, female, 16 years CSS).

The attention is now turned to the consequences for the workers of neo-liberal policies and directions which began in the mid-1980s and still dominates today. It is argued that the dominance of an economic ideology taken on board by governments in Australia has contributed to increased work stress outcomes for the CSS workforce. It is noted that this policy direction has had significant effects upon workforces in all industries in Australia and indeed globally.

In the CSS there is a juxtaposition between the quasi-markets emanating from neo-liberal policy directions that began in the mid-1980s and the charity and volunteer model. Barraket (2008 p 3) notes 'the establishment of new formation of hybrid organisations that combine the logic of business with the not-for-profit mission'. It is not surprising that workers become stressed trying to work within these oppositional paradigms.

The politically driven economic changes brought about by global neo-liberal policy directions from the mid-1980s has added a further layer that has significantly increased work stress for the workers in the CSS. Neo-liberalism is a worldwide economic phenomenon that has had a significant effect on employment structures across all sectors in the industrial landscape. As stated by Melville (1999 p 38), 'since the 1980s orthodox neo-classical economic and political thinking has heavily influenced Australian social and public policy'. John Howard, the former Prime Minister of Australia, was a leading advocate of neo-liberalism in the 1980s and 1990s (Quiggin 2010). In Victoria, from 1992 to 1999, neo-liberal policies were implemented by the Liberal party and its then premier Jeffrey Kennett. This was noted as the 'free market radicalism policy approach' by Economou (2011 p 05). As a consequence there has been a considerable increase in insecure work, including short-term contractual and casual work for employees, increased audit requirements and competitive rather than cooperative structures.

The emergence of neo-liberal doctrines has seen the Australian state and federal governments setting up quasi-market processes in the CSS. State and federal governments are the largest, strongest and most powerful feeders of the CSS sector in each state and territory because they are the major funders of programs across this sector. Allebone (2011 p 5) quoting the Industry Commission figures of 1995, shows that the Community Services Sector was funded to the tune of \$2.7 billion by governments.

A current union worker summed up some of the issues:

The poor physical conditions such as overcrowded offices, the effects of tendering and contractual work such as casualisation and short-term contract and low resources are part of the layer of stress experienced by the workers in the CSS. (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 ASU)

The above worker's comments clearly show the impact for workers of neo-liberalism's policy focus on the financial/monetary bottom line. In the CSS these cost savings are in part made through tendering processes and the subsequent outcomes of these processes are worsening conditions, decreased job security and increased stress. As Smyth (2009 p 15) notes:

The template for micro economic reform was provided by the Hilmer Report (1993) on National Competition Policy which proposed that government monopolies in welfare and community services could be opened to competitive tendering processes with potential savings to the public purse in the order of twenty per cent.

This opening up of the tendering and competitive practices in the CSS has significantly changed the balance in the working relationships between the CSS agencies from one of agency and collegial co-operation to one of competition. As well the sector was opened up to competition through tendering between the not-for-profits and for-profits (private sector). As Webster & Atkins (2011 p 015) state 'the competitive tendering agenda was corrosive in its impact on community sector organisations, undermining collaborative relationships'. This has played a role in increased work stress for the CSS workforce. As a worker in a focus group commented, *these tendering processes cause major stress as there are less staff to do the work. The government is playing off one organisation against another (W35, male, 20 years CSS).*

As noted in a research report initiated by the Commonwealth Government (2001 p 8), 'the overwhelming evidence of extensive workplace restructuring in both health and community services industries since the 1990s indicates that these environments can be characterised by anything but constancy'. One worker who has seen the significant changes developing over many years, including increased workloads stated:

[I have] been in the sector for over 20 years. I've just seen a lot of changes; workers aren't validated, they're not valued anymore and also the ... workloads have increased. (W30, female, 20 years CSS)

A further consequence of tendering practices in the CSS is an increase in insecure agency work and hence increased unstable employment for workers. This in itself is stressful as workers have mortgages, families to support and daily bills to pay. As one worker stated:

I had three jobs in the 1990s working in the housing sector. All these jobs were defunded, and resulted in three periods without work, through no fault of my own. In the parlance of the time, I was 'Jeffed',²² and found it stressful, mentally and financially. The inability to control your employment situation is a major stressor, and is possibly endemic in the community sector. (W41, male, 25 years CSS)

Furthermore, it is understandable that workers may choose to be silent about work stress issues in such an insecure employment environment. It is possible that workers in such

²² 'Jeffed' refers to the impact on individuals of policies implemented by the then Premier of the Victorian State Liberal Government, Jeff Kennett. It led to large numbers of retrenched workers.

precarious employment situations hold off discussing work stress at early stages and only take action at an end stage where the only option is putting in a workers compensation claim for work stress.

An Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) report (Australian Council of Trade Unions 2011b pp 7, 9) states the Health and Community Services (H&CS) has 16 percent fixed-term contracts. This report notes that in terms of temporary employees Australia is second highest of 15 OECD countries, Spain being the highest. As a worker commented in regard to the stress of having an unstable earning stream:

... Increased stress is derived from non-ongoing time-limited 'piloted' funding, where as a worker there is significant concern about what happens to the client group identified need when funding is finished. As well as the stress this puts on workers, [that is] having an insecure income. (W19, female, 8 years CSS)

The implementation of the neo-liberal market model in the CSS has forced organisations to realign along competitive lines, has increased casualisation of the workforce and has increased insecurity of employment. For example (Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council 2008a p 30) 'strong growth in casual employment from the mid-1990s onwards is well documented' and 'in community services, insecurity in employment arrangements is well documented'. One worker's comment aptly illustrates this:

Ending precarious employment conditions, stopping the competition between services, acknowledging we live in a society, not a marketplace, and people we work with are people, not consumers. (W41, male, 25 years CSS)

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011 p 32) casual or contract work in the general community and disability support services in 2009 ranged between 19 percent and 25 percent, and between 42 percent and 50 percent of workers were employed on a part-time permanent basis.

Along with competitive tendering processes there has been a focus on and subsequent development of business management systems (BMSs) that originate in the market economy. This has had a significant effect upon this sector, its agencies and the workers. As Brace-Govan (2010 p 27) notes 'the government is a significant source of much non-profit funding and has put its full weight behind the introduction of the new managerialism'. A characteristic of this shift has been an increase in administrative duties and audit requirements. This is apparent in the workers' frequent references to the increased work stress from the increased administrative load. As two workers wrote:

I have a strong belief that multiple roles can significantly increase occupational stress. This includes increased data collection and report requirements. (W19, female, 12 years CSS)

The amount of paper work/administration that is required for me to do my job, at times I seriously believe that the balance is 80 percent admin, 20 percent getting to see clients. The administration component is nothing like I would have ever imagined it would be. (W17, female, 2 years CSS)

Business management systems in the CSS have a dominant focus on 'bean counting' accountability. The focus is almost exclusively on the numbers of clients seen by an agency (throughput and output) colloquially known as 'bums on seats'. Counting the throughput – the numbers of clients seen – has become paramount. This is an argument about quantity versus quality. The measure of success has become the numbers moving through the service rather than quality of service. As discussed in Tyler and Wright's work (2004), a culture of audit and regulatory oversight has sprung up across a range of social spheres and organisations. Workers criticised the time they spent collecting data about outputs at the expense of quality practice with clients. As one worker lamented:

Over the 20 years, I find that there's been a gradual drift, or not a drift, a policy direction, a deliberate strategy from government and from hierarchy of the increasingly large organisation I'm now a part of, that brings a lot of stress that is not rewarding, that is not positive, that I'm not motivated to deal with. The sort of stress I had in the beginning was dealing with clients, getting my head around the job, getting used to the pace, getting used to what was then, a new area to live in, and over time as I got on top of what I call the real things, the human stuff in the work, dealing with the clients and the care givers, that's gradually been shrunk and reduced and taken over by bureaucracy and what they call the 'reporting requirements of government' and compliance and regulation and data input and information systems and lots of stuff that I don't find rewarding at all. (W35, male, 20 Year CSS)

Power (1997, cited in Munro 2004, p 1090) encompasses some of the workers' angst when he says:

The audit society is a society that endangers itself because it invests heavily in shallow rituals of verification at the expense of other forms of organisational intelligence.

The worker quoted above went on to say:

Well, there's quote unquote training, but the training is usually crap. It is very limited and it's reduced and taken away very quickly. ... People who are not one-finger typists, it might be ok for them to adapt to a new system, ... but for those of us who aren't, who don't have those skills, it's incredibly challenging and stressful. ... When I first started in this job, the stress was dealing with the paedophiles and the agro clients and the geography and the weather and the driving distance and all that stuff. But, as I said, over time that is manageable and I was in control and I was competent and I was on top of my job. (W35, male, 20 years CSS)

In the focus groups, workers themselves could see that the changes brought about by neo-liberalism and its subsequent accounting focus (business management systems) is adding work

to already stretched workers and is subsequently creating substantial work stress for them. As noted by Allebone (2011 p 12), 'providers must engage with a complex system laden with onerous compliance and reporting obligations which drain the time workers spend assisting clients'. As one exchange in the focus group shows, this was seen as a major issue:

The guy who's just gone ... seemed to be having some trouble with the actual inherent work stress with dealing with his clients and stuff, but the rest of us, I've got the feeling we're sort of ok with that ... I observe with what other people have said, is that we're dealing with the system of which we are a part, not so much the work, the inherent human stuff, but all the bullshit ... that, you know, management, cuts and funding and IT and systems and all that stuff ... I think you're right, but the thing is we do get the stress from the clients, you know, are they going to kill themselves, and are they going to do this and that. But I think we get enough team support or other forms of support around that to contain it a lot of the time, but that stuff, the other stuff, it's like ... you've got no control over that. (W35, male, 20 years CSS)

... yes, you haven't ... you're powerless and that's the stress, yes, you do feel powerless and you're thinking [whether your] social work or psychology or whatever is [your] degrees, you obviously have to be doing an information management degree at the same time. (W37, female, 25 years CSS)

... what wakes me up in the middle of the night is not worrying about a client, it's whether I've filled in the form, you've done the paperwork ... whether I've sent this letter. (W38, female, 1 year estimate)

The above workers' narratives are also alluding to the undermining and in some circumstances replacing of trust in professional expertise by processes of audit control. Here the emphasis becomes more of a numbers game, about verifying the number of clients moving through the service, and not about trusting the professional decision making of workers vis-à-vis client needs. Audit thus undermines and replaces trust and professional expertise; it is part of the new business management systems which have a strong focus on verification and economic results.

There are inherent contradictions in setting up quasi-market models, devised under neo-liberal policies, alongside the continued usage of the charity and voluntary models. As Quiggin (2010 p 125) states the whole focus is viewed through an economic prism:

The economy is embedded in a complex social structure, and there is a continuous interaction between the economic system and society as a whole; phenomena like 'trust' and 'confidence' are primarily social, but they affect, and are affected by, the performance of the economic systems.

Furthermore, as Allebone (2011 p 12) states, 'the fact that the government ultimately pays for the vast majority of the costs of service delivery seriously calls into question the privatised, competitive model of welfare'.

The industrial landscape has changed in a major way and more power sits in the hands of employers and governments and not with unions and their membership. On the industrial front neo-liberalism has had a major impact on containing union power with subsequent negative effects for workers (Kaine 2011). Furthermore, as Quiggin (2010 p 171) notes in discussing market liberalism, ‘Corporations have been deregulated while the full power of the state has been turned against unions’. Three workers concur:

[I was] involved in unions before, you know, in my past ... unions haven't got the strength anymore, this government has diminished their power over the years, over the last years ... the Howard Government. (W13, female, 25 years in CSS)

So I, having come from that sector back to Australia, it was quite a shock to find just how vulnerable we as workers, not only in the community sector, but everywhere, are. I mean, a friend of mine was marched out on Friday afternoon with two shoe boxes full of his possessions after twelve years' work. (W28, female, 16 years CSS)

One factor which resonated with me is the low level of unionisation in the sector. When I first worked in hospitals in the mid-1980s, levels of unionisation were quite good, people had secure jobs and bullying, and other factors which have become so pivotal, were not the problem they are now. Admittedly, unionisation in the community sector was always behind the health [sector]. (W41, male, 25 years CSS)

While few workers spoke in terms of economic rationalism per se, their responses highlight the challenges they confront from the anomalies that are created when they have to work within two opposing models. That is, on the one hand they are expected to accept the poor working conditions that evolved from the charity and volunteer models with its idealism, loyalty and altruism, and on the other work within a quasi-market model. This incongruity presents psychological and emotional challenges and stress for workers.

As a worker stated:

Stress in this field occurs on both a macro and micro level. On a macro level, we deal with budgetary constraints and the resultant issues; on a micro level, bullying and similar behaviours. Stress in the field in many ways reflects contemporary society, with its focus on individualism, the subjection of us to I, and the false economy of scale which is prevalent, where the 'bottom line' becomes the driving force for so much. (W41, male, 25 years CSS)

Neo-liberal practices have led to significant changes in workforce structures, such as increased part-time work, casualisation of the workforce, increased contractual work and individual workplace contracts. The current industrial landscape, in which workers' job security is fragile, is the dominant feature. As well there is the added layer of insecurity of work in the CSS through the opening up of free market ideologies through tendering or, as it is known in Victoria, compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) as well as inviting in the for-profits to

compete alongside the not-for-profits. As has been shown, this industrial reality creates anxieties and insecurities and induces stress.

Community sector agencies and specifically the leaders in these agencies, that is, its managers, have to direct workers to operate within the policy directions coming from the current government; workers are like leaves being buffeted by the changing political and economic winds of the times. There is, moreover, a connection here to the emergence of mega agencies and their competitive practices which do not fit well with models of charity and voluntarism. These agencies still promote the rhetoric of the 'altruistic mission' and expect similar altruistic behaviours from their workers. For example, Howe, comments (2003, cited in Smyth 2009 p 20) 'that the Salvation Army ... has net assets of at least one billion dollars and would sit among Australia's top 200 companies'. Davidson (2011 p 221) notes, 'many larger NPOs [non profit organisations] have become more corporate in their structure, personnel, and operations and increasingly there is criticism of some for being too commercialised'.

Koonin (2011) notes that competitive tendering and underfunded contracts have in effect led to the disappearance of the smaller services, and how community organisations need to focus on business decisions, such as profitability as well as their mission. Furthermore, as some of these smaller agencies ceased to exist, the larger organisations took up these contracts and hence the development of mega agencies (Webster & Atkins 2011).

Bursian's research (1995) into the community sector in Victoria highlights the stress issues for workers emanating from poor working conditions, such as increased workloads and job insecurity. In addition she notes the effects of funding uncertainties, dictatorial attitudes of the state funder, negative cultural changes and a breakdown of safety for workers, with verbal and occasionally physical assaults.

4. Management in an Audit Culture

4.1 Introduction

Power is an important factor in an analysis of systems and structures and work stress. Specifically who holds the power, how is it used and the effects of management and governance power structures upon workers. Dewe & O'Driscoll (2002 p 145) highlight 'the need for stress management programs to become more comprehensive and for stress researchers to pay more attention to organizational issues such as power, control and ethics'. One worker in a focus group noted that management *are not accountable, and one of the issues in terms of resolving it, that there's such a big power differential between someone who's in management and someone who's a worker. (W26, female, 7 years same agency, unknown length in CSS)*

The focus here is on workers' feedback about managers, chief executive officers (CEOs) and

the governance roles of boards of management (BOMs) and or committees of management (COMs) and their relationship to work stress. As noted by Dollard & Winefield (2002 p 9) 'the dominant view based on empirical evidence is that work stress and its attendant mental health issues are firmly grounded in the way jobs are constructed, constituted and managed. In other words they are socially determined'.

A worker, who became ill due to significant work stress she incurred, in discussing her experiences of oppressive management, likened her manager to Machiavelli's The Prince, in which the powerful elite manipulate in order to have power over others:

I felt it went some way to explaining the oppressive power of management in my organisation ... and that in the workplace, first and foremost, you need to tin plate your arse. (W16, female, 24 years CSS).

In a sector where workers deal on a daily basis with a multitude of clients' issues such as major illnesses, domestic and sexual violence, child abuse, homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, it is necessary for workers to make sure they operate with the highest professional standards and practices. Workers need to ensure mistakes are kept to a minimum as they affect real peoples' lives and they are open to investigation and disciplinary actions. Hence there is a compelling need to have knowledgeable, experienced, understanding and compassionate managers to assist in supporting and guiding CSS workers. However, the workers' narratives are clearly showing that this is not the case and that managerial practices are causing them work stress.

4.2 Ethics and Integrity

The workers, from their position on the ground, saw a strong connection between their stress levels and the negative behaviours of management. One worker noted: *Workers do not feel valued because they are overworked, undertrained and underpaid. Many workers I speak with feel like they're used as slaves while managers/team leaders have no transparency or accountability.* (W20, female, 12 years CSS). Another worker commented on the need for ethics training. She suggested the need for *better education and training in ethical practice; particularly for management.* (W20, female, 12 years CSS).

Managers sit in a power position above workers and can have strong positive or negative influences on workers' daily lives at work. For example, managers have the power to shape and influence the workplace culture in agencies: a cooperative, respectful and active occupational health and safety regime or an antagonistic, disrespectful and poor OH&S work environment. As one worker wrote:

Dishonest and unethical managers/team leaders set the mould for a workplace culture of mistrust resulting in an 'every man for himself' mantra where the client and

workers will ultimately feel the brunt of the negative effects of this. (W20, female, 12 years CSS)

She went on to say:

No team meetings for information sharing and support. It's a divide and conquer strategy rather than a unite and build social capital, which I stupidly believed was the goal for human service organisations. (W20, female, 12 years CSS)

Many workers openly acknowledged and accepted the stress from the job itself, but the tipping point came from the added stressors coming from management. As one worker noted: *They love their job. It's just there's stress that doesn't need to be there. You know there's the stress of the job, but it's the management stress on top of that (W22, female, 1 year same agency).*

This is an important point. A large volume of research into stress in the human services field focuses on client-related stressors in the jobs, such as individual burnout and vicarious traumatisation. There is limited focus on the overarching systems and structures, including management structures and subsequent consequences for the workforce. Clearly management are in a position which gives them greater power and control over workers. Managers can for example, choose to behave in a micro-managing way, or in a more respectful, trusting way that recognises the professionalism of their workers. Micro-managing from an OH&S perspective is identified as a work stress issue. Dollard, Winefield & Winefield (1999 p 284) note 'Management, supervisors, and co-workers were more frequently reported sources of stress than were clients'. This finding is replicated in this study.

Workers' comments link into previously discussed issues about altruistic, loyal and idealistic behavioural expectations of workers towards their client base and their agency; however, workers have experienced no such reciprocal response from their managers. This reinforces the legitimacy of the Effort Reward Imbalance work stress model in the CSS. Workers have talked about the lack of validation, appreciation and rewards (poor pay and working conditions) for the hard work and dedication they continually show.

4.3 Bullying

Management has the power and control to lead and drive the development of the workplace culture and environment. Whether that is a high morale inducing strategic approach or a demoralising and over-controlling approach is largely in the hands of management. If managers employ bullying practices and behaviours towards their workers, this sets up a culture of acceptance of bullying, including collegial bullying. Working in cultures where bullying is tolerated, especially if displayed by those in control, can turn the working environment into a toxic environment for all concerned. Bullying behaviour is an OH&S work stress issue.

Furthermore, as Mayhew (2000) notes, management style and organisational culture can influence the propensity for internal violence in the workplace.

Bullying behaviour from management was a problem mentioned by a number of workers. As one worker commented:

In our workplace many workers have compared the experience of domestic violence to our experience as workers in that field. We have been belittled by management about the quality of our work and berated in surprise meetings as if we are 'naughty' or 'slack' or 'bad'. These experiences have created an atmosphere of fear and guilt and we 'walk on eggshells' wondering who will be next in line for a hardline performance review. Management have sought to control and dominate by excluding workers from decision making about issues that directly impact our everyday work procedures. When management criticise us for gossiping [or] supporting each other they seek to isolate us from each other. Management have even followed the cycle of violence by 'being nice' just after an abusive period. It seems so naïve of management to think we wouldn't be a wake-up to all this nonsense. (W16, female, 24 years CSS)

She went on to say:

The alternative to this abusive hatred would be to practice common human decency and for management to collaborate with workers about performance standards and decision making. This would reduce most of the work stress brought on by bad management practices in my current workplace. (W16, female, 24 years CSS)

As stated by Richards and Freeman (2010 p 10) 'bullying more commonly occurs from a higher level down'. Bullying as an OH&S issue can result in a worker incurring a psychological injury. Furthermore, Mayhew & Chappell (2007 p 338) concluded 'international research and our own empirical surveys have repeatedly demonstrated that bullying has a very severe negative impact on the emotional well-being of recipients/victims vis-à-vis forms of workplace aggression. This finding is of crucial importance for the mental health of workers'.

A worker noted that managers as bullies do not get moved from their positions, in part due to vested interests of boards and CEOs. Workers on the other hand, get shifted somewhere else or pushed out of the organisation. As one worker noted:

Serious issues in the organisational culture regarding bullying and stuff like that ... won't be dealt with in the organisation. It's easier to get rid of the person who's perceived as being the problem, than actually deal with the issue. (W34, female, 19 years CSS)

One worker stated that she has been very upset, dispirited and become stressed after experiencing bullying from a co-team leader. She spoke of experiencing a sense of injustice after trying to get management to address and stop the bullying by this male colleague. She also noted the lack of adequate training for team leaders and managers about bullying in general. She expressed the view:

It's just a very, very unpleasant place to work in and I personally feel let down by management. I feel if management had said to me ... we understand now what's been going on, [and] we are sorry, but instead they're blaming me ... (W8, female, 4 years current agency)

Another worker noted that if a manager could bring money to the organisation, their bullying behaviour was ignored

[There was a] history of ... people getting unwell [under her management] ... they did not change a thing because she brought in money and she brought in services. The organisation was prepared to take some ... collateral damage with staff because this person still brought in stuff and that was only a couple of years ago that she was moved from managing people to more strategic stuff but a lot of people ... ended up unwell and even after me people were still [affected], I know of another person who put in a stress claim. (W9, female, 4 years CSS)

A representative from the Australian Services Union pointed out that they *receive more calls about bullying from management down to staff rather than collegial bullying*. She further noted that *workloads and expectations are a massive part of bullying and harassment*. (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 years union). The worker here is referring to what is termed micro-managing, in which the worker is closely monitored and managed by senior staff. One can argue there is a fine line between managing and/or micro-managing workers; however, the latter can be seen as an OH&S bullying issue. In 2003 the Health and Community Services sector had the highest work-related harassment and or workplace bullying claims in Australia (2006b p 17).

A second worker's narrative also touched on the same experience:

I just see people, you know, particularly their bullying or micro-managing, which I suppose is a form of bullying. All those sorts of things happen, people mostly leave or get sick or go on sick leave because of stress, and I don't know what the answer is. (W6, female, 5 years one agency)

One worker spoke about entrenched bullying by both managers and workers:

[In regards to] entrenched bullying behaviours, management and workers often take their stress and frustrations out on workers and clients and this often becomes a set culture. (W20, female, 12 years CSS)

The workers' narratives describe many managers' behaviours as abusive and that harm to workers is considered collateral damage. The workers' voices express shock, disappointment and stress in an industry that promotes itself as offering rewarding work in which staff will be uplifted by helping others. This added layer of bullying, the multitude of contradictions experienced and the subsequent feelings of being let down by management affect the psychological wellbeing of workers and is a recipe for increased numbers of workers becoming stressed and unwell.

An important connection to the outcomes of neo-liberalism in this context is how it affects managers' operating behaviour as noted by Kelly (2006 p 1), who saw the increase in workplace bullying, particularly from the top down, as 'a consequences of competitive pressures, the predominance of business values and, concomitantly, the declining legitimacy ascribed to fairness and social justice'.

4.4 Reactive Management

A significant issue for these workers was the lack of proactive action by management about work stress. Several workers commented:

I think they wait until someone tells them they're stressed or it becomes absolutely obvious that they're stressed. I don't think they're proactive about it. I think they can deny it. I think they can be so busy with their other tasks and it can be [a] low priority until it gets their attention and they can't ignore it. (W1, female, 10 years same agency)

In our sector there is a lot of segregation and that atomisation and isolation ... People working alone in many instances; disability support workers. ... you're physically isolated in many different ways and any attempt to break that isolation is seen as an attack on ... managerial control. I have experienced that because I set up an on-line group to break that isolation and that also caused all sorts of consternation and things like that [by management]. (W12, female, 19 years CSS)

Dollard et al. (2003) comment on the mythologizing of burnout in the service professions and acknowledge the possible link to inaction by management. This in essence is suggesting that burnout is seen by management as an inevitable consequence of work in the community sector and therefore cannot be addressed. It also allows an emphasis to be put on the individual worker who becomes stressed due, supposedly, to her/his inability to deal with the job requirements. It allows organisations to ignore their systems and structures that lead to work stress. As well, it allows for inaction on prevention and reduction of work stress at the organisational level. It is the workers who suffer the consequences.

It all got very busy and very stressful and I spoke to my manager and I was basically told, you know, to pretty well suck it up. ... This is how it is. This is the way it goes, make this work. ... I spoke to the manager about being stressed and everything else and was just told, well, you know this is the work, live with it anyway. I felt that my hands were tied. I had gone to HR and ... they simply said, oh, wouldn't it be nice if we could send anyone on a holiday to Queensland. (W9, female, 4 years CSS)

Other workers commented about client and agency incidents and who gets the blame. They experience feelings of being let down and blamed by management. As one worker commented:

The main theme of these experiences and observations is that managers and team leaders are unable and or unwilling to respond appropriately to their workers' needs

following such an incident. I have been amazed many times to hear that the worker is blamed, treated like a failure when things go wrong, yet they were clearly following management's orders when the incidents occurred. (W20, female, 12 years CSS)

One worker spoke about an 'us versus them' division. He shared with the group that he had a breakdown due to work stress exacerbated by the 'them' and 'us' division between management and staff. However, he nevertheless felt the need to work hard to develop communication between management and workers because the structure of residential work is so isolating and that workers need to have input into policy development. (W24, male, 2 years same agency)

Workers also spoke about the poor utilisation of power and its negative effect upon them. Several workers experienced a type of 'take no prisoners' attitude by managers towards their workers:

The agency has a grievance procedure ... people who are union members have gone through the grievance procedure ... It's been laughed at or dismissed by executive managers. The very people who need to fix it, they have ignored it and they are not willing to cooperate with their own grievance procedure. This is another thing that's been the source of angst. We have a grievance policy, but you write out your grievance or explain it ... convey it and nothing is done. ... How dare you have a grievance against us? So staff in the community sector or workers in the community sector, if ... anything comes out of anything you need to be able to go to [your] manager or boss and ... with confidence to convey [your] concerns whatever and not[t] be punished for having the concern. (W4, female, 6 years current agency)

[My manager] constantly hindered my coping processes by imposing ill-considered and inappropriate demands and [she] micro-managed me. (W16, female, 24 years CSS)

The power and control management has over workers, especially if it is used inappropriately towards workers, including unionised workers, has stressful outcomes for them. Workers observed how some managers used the myths of the work, such as inevitable burnout, to ignore or deny structural issues that the workers clearly saw as a major cause of their stress.

4.5 Skills and Training

Cotton (foreword to Stebbins & Harrison 2003 p ix) makes the point that 'the incidence of stress claims can be likened to a barometer that reflects an organisation's leadership capability and the quality of people management practices'. Many participants commented that training of managers is deficient. As one worker stated:

Look, I think the stress of working with the clients is quite high but I think the stress in workplaces is higher – mismanagement, poor management. I think generally it is quite an unhealthy sector and I don't know why, because, you know, I hear what goes on ... in the housing sectors and there are quite a lot of unhappy workplaces out there and

*I'm concerned ... a lot of people get quite damaged by work, by their workplaces.
(W5, female, 4 years current job)*

As noted previously the whole funding model is an issue and within that are the inadequacies of training provision for both workers and managers. As a worker in a focus group summarised:

I think the management issues seem to be pretty major and perhaps are characteristic of a poorly paid sector – people go into ‘management’ roles without adequate training or experience. (W26, female, 7 years one agency)

There was an acknowledgement of the challenge of attracting experienced managers in a sector where the pay at all levels is low. As one worker stated in a focus group:

I still think it is the management's problem ... and I guess maybe in this sector, the problem of bad management is that it's really hard to get the qualified and experienced management to do the job. (W27, female, unknown years CSS)

Other workers commented:

I think it depends a lot on management and the team that you've got. ... the sector is attracting people who are willing to manage in a regional area, for 50 grand a year, 50/60 grand a year, who have no training, adequate training in what they're doing, so that filters right down to the caring [of] staff. (W30, female, 20 years CSS)

The work was incredibly hard, draining, despairing, it was all of those, you know, I loved it, but the problems came, I think, for lots of reasons. One is the organisation is run by someone who has never done any management training; he [the CEO] started the organisation ... (W6, female, 5 years one agency)

That's one of the things in our place, people who weren't managers have gradually taken on management responsibility and they haven't got the skills ... It's not because people are evil or they're running an agenda or, or anything, it's just because they're not competent managers and they haven't done the [training]. Ironically, when you work in human services, they haven't had the people skills to manage their staff. (W35, male, 20 years CSS)

Whether it is the inadequate funding that is leading to poorly paid and hence inadequately trained and qualified managers, or whether current forms of management training are themselves part of the problem is an open question. What is clear, however, is that current management practices are failing the workforce and this constitutes a serious issue for workers. As documented, the work in this sector is emotionally draining, challenging and difficult and the workloads are high and the workers are poorly resourced. The workers need support and direction from well trained and experienced managers to sustain them doing this type of work. As participants have noted, poorly trained managers add another layer of stress for them. Morris (2011 p 4) makes a number of assertions that might well have applicability to the Community Services Sector. She comments:

It is worth noting from a practical basis, the educational standard of those working in the sector vary widely, with many people, some in senior positions, being functionally illiterate, while others, having been taught by custom and practice, display thinking that is often rigidly codified by the profession out of which they speak and practice, whether it's nursing, social work, youth work, counselling and other similar community professions.

4.6 Lack of Sectoral Knowledge

An important issue workers spoke about was the lack of experience and understanding from managers with regard to the nature of the work itself, and their subsequent lack of appropriate support and how this impacted on workers.

So then, you get this management that you have to relate to, who don't really know, who aren't really hands-on, so then they make decisions which affect you, and affect your ability to do the work. (W35, male, 20 years CSS)

They really feel threatened, like ... Our current manager, has never been a welfare worker or social worker. She started in administration, and she's the manager, so she's not properly, 'really trained'; [a] nice person, but not trained to cater for what we are catering for, because they're willing to do it for small bucks. We deserve really good managers who know what they are doing. We're not getting them, [because] ... they go for the cheapest tender, and so they try to cut costs. (W30, female, 20 years CSS)

Another worker who became very unwell wrote:

Program Manager and Assistant Program Manager demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of burnout / compassion fatigue, e.g. Assistant Program Manager asked me if I thought I might be stressed and the Program Manager reported she didn't know what burnout really was or what it felt like and told me she thought I'd be the last person to suffer burnout because of all my self-care strategies like yoga, walking, bike riding! I felt this was a very unfair comment and showed a lack of understanding. (W21, female, 3½ years CSS)

As well as the importance of sectoral knowledge, there was also a lack of duty of care shown by this manager towards the worker. The lack of sectoral knowledge was seen as a source of stress by the workers. This lack of understanding and experience in welfare work and the subsequent impact upon the workers is an important issue. How can workers be adequately supported and work stress issues resolved if the managers lack a reasonable understanding and awareness of workers' needs?

I remember saying to our CEO, we should be providing supervision for our counsellors, clinical supervision, and she didn't understand why. ... When you have got a CEO whose background is [a totally unrelated field], it's hard for her to understand, she was generally trying to but she couldn't get past saying 'but I am employing qualified workers; why do they need supervision?', so to sort of explain

that when you engage in ... really personal work where you are hearing lots of trauma stories and absorbing people's grief and all that sort of stuff, that you need stresses accountability and ... making sure that your counsellors are travelling okay with the information and that ... you need access to regular supervision. (W10, female, 15 years CSS)

As will be outlined later in this chapter, good supervision, or more specifically the lack of it, is a significant issue in this sector. Egan's (2012 p 178) recent research on supervision for social workers found that while 80 percent of practitioners were receiving supervision, 67 percent of that supervision was provided by line managers. Line management supervision is not the same as professional supervision and many workers commented on the lack of understanding by managers of the role of supervision.

This lack of sectoral knowledge was seen as a major cause of stress by many workers.

So on one hand you've got the stress of your day-to-day work, listening to people's stories, dealing with that. Then you've got your red tape, reports that have to be written, there's management who doesn't often understand the nature of the work. I think that's a big one. Over and over it's done ... (W25, female, 7 years CSS)

They put managers in who have accounting backgrounds who just want to balance dollars, but they don't have an understanding of issues like continuity of care. (10, female, 15 years CSS)

'Cos I think, we're talking about bean counters ... like all this management stuff is coming from people who haven't a clue. Um, and they're driven by all that retreat from the welfare state philosophy. (W37, female, 25 years CSS)

The work of authors such as Richard Sennett (2006) and Hall & de Gay (1996) about the entrepreneurial self are relevant here. As Hall & de Gay (1996 p 153) state, 'Contemporary managerial discourse stresses the importance of individuals acquiring and exhibiting more "proactive" and "entrepreneurial" traits and virtues'. The emphasis on an entrepreneurial approach to work from both managers and workers has come out of the dominant neo-liberal free market paradigm. As shown in the workers' narratives, managers are behaving within new business management systems as if they are operating in a for-profit private sector. That is, the focus is on outcomes no matter what the cost and effects, such as work stress, for the workers. Workers clearly saw that part of this problem came from the lack of understanding by managers of the work of the CSS.

4.7 The Meat in the Sandwich

It is also apparent that management are caught between their roles in overseeing the contractual obligations of service delivery and overseeing their workers completing the work within tight resources. Governments control the purse strings, agencies compete with agencies to win the

tenders, and management have to oversee the labour completing the work. Low-cost funding models prevail in this sector and in order to complete the contractual obligations the major area of cost containment is extracted from within the human resources. The result is heavy workloads, continued low wages and poor conditions for workers.

One worker in a focus group commented on the underfunding issue: *I think underfund[ing] is an issue [as] to how management treats its staff* (W26, female, 7 years same agency). A second worker added, *I think it all feeds in* (W25, female, 7 years CSS).

Another worker spoke about the funding shortages being used as an excuse:

So I think funding is a problem but ... it's used as the biggest excuse every time ... 'Like, well, why we can't have this for safety?' 'Well, because of [the] budget,' and I think it gets thrown around a lot just for an excuse for inaction. (W22, female, 1 year in same agency)

One long-serving worker in the sector spoke about management relationships pre and post the economic rationalist era:

Management used to be about working together to achieve a common aim. What I see now is 'key performance indicators' ... these are what you have to do. So it is not a collaborative approach, so isolation of workers causes resentment of management. If you don't feel that you're being respected in your job then that increases your stress. (W8, female, 30 years CSS)

Management have to fulfil their contractual obligations, and one approach is to use 'paucity management strategies' in a resource-poor environment. According to the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CSHISC) Literature Review Report (2008a), agencies utilise CSS workers' high level of commitment to the agency and clients to get the work done. The consequences for the workers are ignored.

As one worker who has been in a supervisory role in the past commented:

There is a real issue, I think, in the community sector in terms of caring for workers and its pressure around budgets and it seems, what that means is, that eventually management ... will ... de-personalise their workers [as] they just see them as expendable resources. (W10, female, 15 years CSS)

Clearly the workers were cognisant of the position of management. It was clear that they understood some of the difficulties facing management, especially in trying to manage all facets of the work within strong budget constraints.

A long-term and knowledgeable worker across several sectors said about her current agency:

Managers are really struggling to get across everything that they have to get across, and have direct responsibility for service delivery. You can't have so many effective balls in the air, so the managers do the best they can and we know that, but of course if you're going to drop something you will drop the thing that is not squeaking, the workers and staff. (W39, female, 20 years CSS)

Managers themselves can be caught in an invidious position, especially in terms of the limited, and often inadequate, funds available to complete the agreed contractual work. This constraint, however, can also be used as an excuse to behave inappropriately toward workers. As one participant stated in a focus group, *upper management have seen cycles of distress, and inevitably the workers leave, and it's about least cost to the organisation ... so there are clearly some structural issues that are not going to go away* (W33, male, unknown time in CSS). It is apparent from the workers' narratives that there is significant poor behaviour, including lack of managerial skills, lack of sectoral knowledge and inaction by management.

A clear point in respect to workers' needs from management was given in a written response:

We need to be asked by management – 'what it is that we need to cope with the vicarious trauma?' We need to know that we matter as people to management. That's a basic need. We need to be respected and have our opinions respected. (W16, female, 24 years CSS)

The workers' narratives about management practices towards workers in the CSS are far removed from the recent research by Idris & Dollard (2011 p 343) in which there is the idea of psychosocial safety climates (PSC) in which organisations and senior management actively engage in fostering the psychological wellbeing of workers, including ensuring that enough resources are available to foster growth, learning and development of the workers as well as making job demands that are reasonable. They comment:

a central target to improve the working conditions is systems management and system design. Without a proper design and management of work systems, unhealthy work prevails, and leads to employee stress. We see PSC [psychosocial safety climate] as a system generator and contend that enhancing PSC is [a] practical solution to promote employees' health, boost motivation and increase organization effectiveness. Leadership training and development is required to help managers understand the work stress process and its implications for engagement and productivity.

In conclusion, there were consistent viewpoints expressed by the participants about managers having serious limitations in their management/leadership styles, inadequate skills and training, insufficient sectoral knowledge and sometimes displaying inappropriate and bullying behaviours towards workers.

4.8 Chief Executive Officers, Boards and Committees of Management

Chief executive officers (CEOs) came in for some strong criticism: bullying, abuse of power, targeting unionised workers and union delegates and a lack of appropriate knowledge. Several workers across different agencies spoke of the abusive use of management powers, especially by CEOs. One worker in an interview spoke about a past CEO's misuse of power:

the CEO just walked in and put buckets and buckets of rubbish on my desk ... he said, 'I found all of this in a car that you had driven' ... I share this car with fifteen other people ... I just walked out, and that was the end of that ... But then I resigned shortly afterwards, as I thought I am not going to work here [anymore]. (W7, male, 15 years CSS)

One worker talked about bullying and belittling from the CEO in his meetings with her:

He would rant and rave for two hours and tell me how people didn't respect me and that didn't [I] see how they would roll their eyes, and I mean, really! I was being very professional and very ethical. (W6, female, 5 years same agency)

Clearly this visual display of inappropriate and poor behaviour by CEOs does send strong messages to workers about where the power lies and the consequences of challenging that power.

Some workers also expressed disappointment with boards and committees of management in the CSS and their ineffectiveness in protecting workers and addressing the causes of their work stress. There was little evidence that boards supported stressed staff well. Workers have shared that boards have been ineffectual in assisting workers who are dealing with stressful issues that were unresolvable at the management level. The important question here is where are workers to go to address serious work stress situations that are unresolvable at a management level and which are not at a WorkSafe complaints level? Workers saw structures such as boards and committees of management as the last resort in attempting resolutions to problems that were not being addressed adequately by management. These approaches did not reduce stress for workers as their attempts at resolution resulted, more often than not, in a poor response or no response at all.

One worker spoke about the serious consequences for workers who attempted to call for assistance from the board of their agency, including a case of serious bullying:

The letter from members of the union to the board of directors was asking to clarify certain elements in the enterprise bargaining agreement; it wasn't a demanding letter, it didn't ask for things, it wanted clarification on particular guidelines ... They never responded to us in writing, no, never responded to us personally or by [a] telephone call. It was ignored and it was passed on to the executive manager and the executive management team ... who have since gone all out to harass, vilify, intimidate the people who have signed that letter. Of the people who signed that letter, about ten of them have either left and found another job, they have been hounded out for one reason or another; they have all left. (W4, female, 6 years same agency)

Another worker commented on the lack of response from the board:

I don't think I made a formal complaint until I handed in my resignation later ... about everything that happened. (In that letter to the board stating bullying occurred?) Yes. (What was the response?) None. (No written or informal talking with you?) No. (How

did you know it [got] to the board?) *I emailed it to [all] the board.* (Did you have an exit interview?) *No exit interview.* (Were you offered one?) *No, I don't even know if I asked, I think I was so over it; angry, upset.* (W6, female, 5 years one agency)

Workers noted frequent inaction on workers' requests for intervention by boards. They reported that boards and committees of management were inaccessible via CEOs or managers, who acted as gatekeepers. As one worker commented:

Now there's this filtration system going on ... I can't even get to the board, because they're all friends, handpicked by the CEO, they're friends and family and whatever. They're not going to do anything against the CEO. It's all this nepotism stuff that's going on as well, so no matter even if there's, you know, serious issues in the organisational culture regarding bullying and stuff like that, it won't be dealt with in the organisation. It's easier to get rid of the person who's perceived as being the problem, than actually deal with the issue. (W34, female, 19 years CSS)

Several workers spoke about nepotism. One worker commented that a current board member was currently providing a contractual service to the organisation. This conflict of interest and questionable ethical practice was not seen as an issue by management.

One worker stated: *boards have got no idea what's going on down there, because the only conduit is the manager, who is only going to tell them good things* (W5, female, 4 years current agency).

Another worker spoke about the current limitations for board members in terms of them having direct access to staff to gather some understanding about the workers' working situations:

I've been on boards for many years and as a board member, and when, being in the women's refuge movement, when there were collectives, you had direct contact with the workers. You could find out what exactly was going on and you didn't have to be friends with the management to know what was happening. (W34, female, 19 years CSS)

As has been shown by the workers' data, CEOs have the ultimate power in an organisation and how they behave towards their workforce, including their line managers, has considerable bearing on work stress for their workforce. As one worker stated:

I do know that our managers – bless their little cotton socks – have repeatedly taken up the line to try and get change and he just will not listen ... the CEO, and he won't listen to them and they have tried to get better conditions for staff and he refuses to listen and you can't go to the board because he is the only access to the board. (W39, female, 20 years CSS)

A union delegate spoke about an incident from his union delegate consultative role with two fellow workers:

[The] CEO had a meeting with the [outpost team] which is part of our organisation. [He] started thumping the table and abusing people and telling them they do it his way or no way ... This is the CEO, and he upset them that much that [a worker] ... went to the police and filed an assault [report]. (W11, male, 13 years CSS)

[A staff member] joined the union and ... [has] been quite active ... She has been stripped of some of her responsibilities in the workplace and accordingly ... her career path comes to an end. She is not going anywhere ... She has gone as far as she is ever going to go in this organisation (Because she joined the union?) Yes. (W11, male, 13 years CSS)

One worker summed up some of the structural issues to do with COMs and or boards:

In our sector, the structure is often terribly weak. It can be, it depends where you [are], what kind of board or committee that agency can attract, what kind of expertise is in that board, what kind of humanity, what kind of skills, and very often I have found ... the board or committee will bend to the will of the CEO if that person does have a strong enough personality. So it becomes a one-man or one-woman show, with the board just ... rubber stamping ... I've found that when you do ask for your board of management to become more involved, you may cause some resentment ... especially resentment in the CEO who sees this as a betrayal. ... I really do think that we ought to look at the structures. We ought to have much stronger; there isn't a good human resources personnel like there used to be in the old days, sort of management system, within the community sector. (W28, female, 16 years CSS)

It appears that the governance structures have little impact on reducing work stress and can exacerbate stress for workers. Usually, as a last strategy, workers approach their agency's board of management, and as shown, the strategies mainly fall on deaf ears and this further adds to the stress and sense of failure in finding a resolution.

It is acknowledged that inaction of boards and committees of management may be due to the parameters of what is constituted as a governance role – governing and not managing day-to-day activities. However, it is the boards and committees of management who are ultimately responsible for the organisation and this should include the wellbeing of the workers.

Morris (2011) highlights the issues and limitations that are raised when boards of management in this 'feminised' workforce, are predominantly male and are recruited from outside the sector. She states (Morris 2011 p 5):

Most boards are predominantly peopled by men; most boards have people from a range of sectors who do not necessarily work in the sector or who have sector experience and who bring a corporate business worldview to contribute to the Community Benefit Organisations – charities and not for profits.

She goes on to note '... the board diversity is reflective of the cultural, social, economic systems in Australian society which defaults to white male economic perspectives'.

5. The Fallout

As previously documented, much has changed in the CSS since economic rationalist policies have come to the fore. These changes have certainly not enhanced the ‘lived experiences’ of the workers. As one worker stated *the pay rates and conditions are far worse than I was receiving when I worked in a very similar position in Queensland in 1997, thirteen years ago (W20, female, 12 years CSS).*

There is much ‘kind and caring’ rhetoric about the clients, but not about the workers. As one worker succinctly wrote: *Time to reflect, support and grow workers is frequently not considered within the need to reach targets and to keep going in challenging situations (W19, female, 8 years CSS).* Another worker commented: *You have got to look at the whole ridiculous nature of putting yourself as an organisation [as] caring and sharing, [that’s] burning staff out, treat[ing staff] like shit (W9, female, 9 years CSS).*

Many workers shared about a wide range of work-related health problems that they had experienced: clinical depression, burnout, breakdowns, increased self-medicating behaviours (prescription drugs, smoking, and alcohol consumption), and incidents of post traumatic stress and episodes of high blood pressure. One worker spoke about her attempted suicides due to the consequences of developing a severe psychological injury from the stress incurred from what was expected of her in a position within an agency in the CSS (W9, female, 9 years CSS).

Telling comments were made by a worker who was new to the sector:

I suppose that’s sort of the reason I’m here, that it’s just been, I don’t know, it’s been a huge eye-opener for me to see how badly staff can be treated, and I suppose it’s been amazing for me to see how people can stay in this sector for so long and to put up with stress for so long. (W22, female, 1 year same agency)

Another worker commented: *I thought farming was tough; working as a social worker I experienced quite ruthless organisations as employers (W18, male, 10 years CSS).* Incidentally, this worker shared his plans to return to farming as he considers it less stressful.

5.1 Funding Shortages

The reasons for the health consequences and damage experienced by workers in the CSS are complex. However, it is argued that the structural and systemic issues and weaknesses in the CSS play a lead role in workers experiencing psycho-social work stress injuries. One worker, who now works in a government department, stated that she is much better protected and the organisation is better resourced compared to her experience of working in a regional CSS agency. She spoke about her experience of significant work stress, including subsequent depression that emanated from serious events occurring over a long period of time in a position she held for many years in a CSS organisation (W3, female, 6 years one agency).

A further worker made the comment that she is looking for work in a government department as she believes government employed workers are better resourced, the pay rates are higher and there are more promotion opportunities and protection (W5, female, 4 years current job).

As noted by the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council report (2008a p 22), 'In some cases, the prices tendered to perform work are so low, the overall price is not sufficient to cover even the basic service requirements of clients'. How, then, can agencies provide adequate structures and supports to protect their workforce from work stressors starting from such a low funding base? One worker stated that *the funding doesn't allow for things to change, and people burn out and get an unsympathetic response* (W40, female, 12 years CSS).

CSS workers are more vulnerable to work stress due to these overarching systems and structures. Governments, state and federal, largely hold the purse strings, and also have the control over all aspects of the tendering processes. As a worker observed who has worked in private industry as well as this sector:

My experience of both sectors [private and public] has shown me that management and workers in both sectors behave in much the same way but the main difference, as I see it, is that those in the Human Services Sector are far more psychologically unstable [or] damaged due to their ongoing exposure to stressful incidents, ridiculous workloads and insufficient support, assistance, appreciation from management. (W12, female, 12 years CSS)

Another worker commented:

People have ridden on the excuses or the rationale that it's an underfunded sector ... I just think, gosh! it has got to be one way or the other. If it is underfunded to that degree that you can't do the work safely, then that issue has got to be pushed up, but you can't keep pushing it down and expect that [all of it] is going to continue along okay (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 years ASU union)

Many workers clearly saw the connection to work stress due to fallout from the inadequate funding of this sector. In the Community Services and Health Skills Council report (2008a) it notes the use of low-cost funding models by the government in respect to both the health and community sectors. It was well recognised by some workers that in their fight for survival, organisations put in tight tenders and within these submissions there are insufficient resources to sustain and protect the workers. One may draw the conclusion that workers are not a priority. Tenders are based on accounting models, maximising numbers of clients through the system; other factors such as sustainability and/or survival of the workforce is generally not factored into the tendering documents. Funds for the basic needs of workers, such as adequate staff, decent supervision, appropriate training, critical incident stress management and adequate

debriefing, are extremely limited. One worker and ex-manager stated: *this sector has got to get a grip, as it chews people up and spits them out* (W9, female, 4 years CSS).

Other workers have commented:

Resourcing is a massive issue in the sector ... on the other hand there is a lot of agencies that need to do better with what they have got in terms of resources ... an example ... some organisations ... they will spend a lot of time doing policy around utilising cars, so they track their assets, but they won't have all of their policies up to date around ... people's work and safety. (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 years ASU)

An ex-team leader in an interview stated:

I think the community sector is vulnerable to a large amount of work stress because often they don't receive adequate funding, and resources are tight and things that support staff are often skimmed on. So I think that means that the community sector can lose good workers, issues of burnout or going [into] government institutions where work conditions seem to be better. (W10, female, 15 years CSS)

It has been discussed in earlier chapters that workers' pay, terms and conditions have not increased anywhere near those in the private and government sectors of the workforce. As stated by the Community and Health Skills Council report (2008a p 58),

The strong cost-control strategies adopted by both state and federal governments and the historical devaluation of care work jointly contribute to a situation in which leveraging wage improvements in order to maintain labour in-flow is particularly challenging.

As noted there was a universal understanding amongst participants about the inadequate funding for this sector. As one worker noted, *I would be able to do my job properly instead of band aiding, and there is a lot of stress from never really being able to fix something* (W39, female, 20 years CSS).

Another worker spoke about outcomes from the competitive tendering processes in which workers can be disadvantaged, including experiencing increased workload pressures:

They've got the [agency] that'll do the tender for the cheapest; one way organisations are doing that, they're saying, ok – if we pay you the award or close to it, what we can do is put you on four days a week. If that suits somebody, that's fine, but what they've got to do is deliver that [same] job in four days a week instead of five. (W29, female, 10+ years same agency)

As an experienced CSS worker who is currently working for the in the Australian Services Union commented on contractual work:

There might be three-year ... funding [contracts that] the government's responsible for and I guess the way that the organisations [are] getting around not paying out redundancy or those sorts of things, is by keeping people on fixed-term contracts ...

It's more of an entitlement than a condition but working in those sorts of conditions is stressful ... that [income] insecurity. (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 years union area)

Other workers shared their views on this matter in the following way:

I think for funding bodies in particular to realise that you have to build in funding to enable staff to be looked after and the expectations on staff to be realistic and the nature of engaging with individuals who have really complex shitful lives, that you can't do ten of those in a day ... All that sort of thing ... really needs to be factored in at the funding level and then at the level of whoever is head of the community organisation, about how funds are dispersed ... There has to be a package that is available to implement these systems even though it takes time away from the dollar-creating client contact work. (W10, female, 15 years CSS)

There is a lot of burnout ... because they just put it down to the way the agency responds to funding requirements ... the tender. I think they're at the mercy of getting the government contract so the government is dictating to the agency how the jobs will be done. I suppose they're, they have got the money, they're paying for it, but they don't really ... have... OH&S uppermost in their minds, [governments], no. They're thinking they want a job done, but one suspects that they're really so removed they do not actually understand what's going on, on the ground in the agencies. They get reports from the agencies but I don't know whether they have got people who really understand about work stress, who are in control of these funding grants. (W1, female, 10 years same agency)

She goes on to say:

I think everybody has a lot more demanded of them because governments are demanding more from agencies in terms of accountability (W1, female, 10 years same agency)

A major, and possibly the greatest issue, about this sector and work stress come from the fundamental structural weakness within the sector, that is, the shortfalls in funding to complete the work. The lack of adequate financial resources to safely complete this difficult and challenging work has serious work stress consequences for the CSS workforce.

5.2 Workloads

The inadequate funding levels and the subsequently unbearable workloads were frequently mentioned. One worker offered the following insight:

I am having to cover three areas in the one working week and trying to [prioritise] that was ... impossible. I had been doing housing and someone would come in and want to talk about reconciliation or financial counselling, and you can't say 'Go away and come back tomorrow' when they are in tears at the front counter ... So one of the real problems I feel in the sector is ... when you are doing it in the one agency it's really ... very difficult. (W11, male, 13 years CSS)

As one long-serving and highly experienced worker summed up:

I am 20 years in the field and I came from private enterprise so I have had 20 years of poor pay, shocking conditions, appalling superannuation and having to deal with the kind of trauma on a daily, weekly and monthly basis and if I worked in the emergency services – and that can be any kind, hospitals, police, fire [persons] – our conditions would be treated completely differently. For some reason, because when we see violence or when we get exposed to other people's trauma, it somehow shouldn't matter; and I find that [is] appalling and our sector has 'chewed up' workers and I have seen good workers leave the field. I have seen workers just destroyed and agencies that don't handle that well, that don't understand how to respond better to what are horrendously overbearing loads at times for individuals. ... I am [currently] in a [certain] position, I see it happening everywhere ... you know, 'destroyed' is a very graphic word but when you see somebody who is no longer able to work, who's lost their confidence, who's retreated. I myself have ended up housebound through [a] place of work and I ended up housebound only for three months. ... For three months I couldn't go outside my door and it was purely work related. (W39, female, 20 years CSS)

A worker from one of the focus groups shared his views about the workload and the changing culture. He stated that:

The reason that I was late getting [here] tonight, we've had a reduction in staff from six to three. So we've had a 50 percent reduction in staff. Two people resigned and one person went on leave for three weeks. ... I've officially got a case load of five, but we've been running cases, unallocated, non-duty, and I just put twenty case notes away. (W35, male, 20 years CSS)

In the storied accounts of the workers there was a constant flow in the discussion regarding the intensification of work. One worker shared that there was a doubling of workloads for her and four other colleagues in a direct care section with no extra workers being appointed to assist with the additional workloads. This worker noted that higher status workers, including management, were employed, but no extra direct care workers (W30, female, 20 years CSS). Another worker also commented on the increase in managerial positions while the front line positions were declining:

It used to be, when I started, again years ago, it was a team and we were all in a principal officer [position] as they were called then. The person who ran the [nominated] care program would have a case load, we all had a case load; we were all working on the same stuff. We met regularly, we had supervision all the time, it was a small team, community based, and over the years management has come in, so they started to hire managers to manage the team. So there [are] people who aren't really hands on. (W35, male, 20 years CSS)

The workers in this study accepted that the nature of the work plays a role in causing work stress. However, they also expressed frustration at the lack of will shown by management to

address either the client-related stress or the more structural causes of work stress. One worker commented, *I think a certain level of stress is expected in all work, however, as a sector we need to be able to acknowledge the potential impacts of our work and allow for space to reflect, grow and sometimes heal (W19, female, 8 years CSS)*. One of the unacknowledged outcomes of increasing workloads is this lack of time for workers to reflect on their practice. As discussed previously, workers are stressed by the lack of adequate debriefing and supervision in which there would be opportunities to reflect.

Often the participants commented on the relationship between work stress and the inability of management to firstly acknowledge or secondly take action to reduce ever-increasing workloads. The focus instead, is on the short-term gain of getting through the work and fulfilling the contracted throughputs and outputs. As discussed, a number of participants put the view that this emanates largely from the poor funding base that agencies in this sector have to operate within to complete the contractual service agreements.

Other research has also found clear links between workloads and work stress. As noted by the South Australian Council of Social Service's paper (2010 p 21), 'the employment model in the community services sector (part-time, increasing workloads) is contributing to workplace injuries'. Houtman and Jettinghoff (2007) note that poor working conditions, such as high workloads and insecure employment, is a cause of stress for workers. A worker in a focus group commented: *Community teams ten years ago used to be four staff, now we're down to one and the impact of that on health and safety and stress is just phenomenal (W37, female, 25 years CSS)*.

A further reason for the increase in workloads is the increased administration work resulting from the development and implementation of business management systems that emerged as a key aspect of dominant neo-liberal ideologies. As noted in a Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) report (2012 p 12), 'The Productivity Commission observed that organisations have been "swamped by contractual regulation, a multiplicity of reporting requirements, micro management, restrictions on other activities and significantly greater compliance burdens".'

As Baines (2009 p 7) notes about the NFP sectors in Canada and Australia, 'increased pace, volume and intensity of work leaves workers vulnerable to burnout and stress'. In the Victorian Council of Social Service (2012) report they discuss a link between the global economic downturn and its effect in Victoria, in which there is increased unemployment, job insecurity, financial stress and mental health concerns. This in turn means workers in the CSS are being presented with clients who have more complex problems and the end result is heavier and more difficult caseloads, but with increased time pressures to complete and move the clients through and ultimately out of the service.

5.3 Supervision

Inadequate or poor supervision, and in some cases no supervision, was a strong theme from participants. This is an important issue as the nature of the work is challenging, difficult and emotionally draining and one area that holds potential to assist workers to debrief and to some extent offload the stress, is in supervision. Furthermore, supervisors are in a central spot to gain a greater understanding of the causes of workers' stress and could be an ideal conduit to further investigate this important issue.

Clinical supervision addresses how the worker is coping with the client work and there are expectations that support and direction to assist in this work will be provided. The clinical supervision component for workers in this study was found to be inadequate and at times missing altogether. As one worker wrote in reflecting on her experience of significant trauma and subsequent psychological injuries, including a bout of severe depression that emanated from a serious work incident:

It was a tough job and extra tough with incompetent support. In retrospect I should have proposed that I be provided with external monthly supervision. I know that the organisation would not have provided this because they did not value the program enough to pay for this and they did not support the empowerment of workers that this would have encouraged. (W16, female, 24 years CSS)

Supervision should be the place where a worker can discuss issues, such as their health and support needs. This, too, was found to be missing. An important point was made by a worker about the lack of avenues to discuss workers' stress in supervision. She commented:

It is very clear in the [OH&S] Act that psychological health is included ... I don't think that kind of supervision that people are provided with really allows for that. I don't think you can have line management accountabilities supervision alongside something that [is] going to genuinely ... talk about psychological health and that is going to happily co-exist (W15, female, 10 years CSS, 4 years union).

Egan (2012 p 179) comments in research into social work supervision in Victoria:

about two-thirds of respondents were supervised by their line manager and the majority of survey respondents had had no choice of supervisor. A review of the literature about line management and supervision in the managerial context demonstrated a greater focus on line management and organisational monitoring in supervision (administrative function), without necessarily valuing the other functions.

One worker who was in a job for six years and experienced serious work-related depression said, *I got some supervision only in the last year that I was there (W3, female, 6 years CSS)*. Another worker said, *We didn't get regular supervision; we didn't get any mentoring (W9, female, 4 years CSS)*.

When supervision did occur, there was less of a focus on discussing how the worker was coping and what support they may need to assist and support them in general. Workers spoke about supervision focusing solely on how they were going in regards to completing the service provision, that is, getting through a quota of clients. A worker noted that supervision is about monitoring rather than supporting. She stated: *Supervision is ad hoc ... it has become about line management, not actually about how you're travelling as an individual (W39, female, 20 years CSS).*

Another worker commented:

In my experience, worker care is often the 'very poor cousin' in supervision and whilst I understand how this occurs and am guilty of perpetuating this situation, I think that the health of a worker needs to be paramount. (W19, female, 8 years CSS)

One worker half jokingly spoke of his involvement in this research focus group as a form of supervision by stating: *Oh, great being here as I haven't had supervision for about eight weeks. (W35, male, 20 years CSS)*

A further difficulty confronting workers is the increased nature of casual and short-term contractual work in the CSS and the implications of this for supervision. This raises the question about additional trust and vulnerability issues for workers in an insecure employment position. It adds to the degree of difficulty in discussing stress and coping issues if disclosures may directly impinge upon your employment status. In fact, one would be unlikely to complain about not having supervision when it may jeopardise one's employment.

Agencies and their managers who do not provide clear, helpful and supportive supervision are letting their worker down, and this can add additional stress to already stressed workers. Several workers commented on stress being a cumulative process. Supervision is an ideal place to gather a greater understanding for the worker of the issues causing them stress. This lack of supervision is further evidence of the lack of proactive action on stress reduction.

Proactive approaches to stress reduction in the CSS are poor, and if the first line of potential action – supervision – stifles or ignores these serious issues for workers it has the potential to exacerbate workers' decline in health. When stress is unattended and left to fester and spread it is not surprising that the end result is a more serious psychological injury and potential work cover claim. As demonstrated in the following chapter, the work cover claim journey is far from satisfactory for all concerned, and most importantly, for the injured workers.

Sanderson and Andrews' (2006 p 69) research on common mental disorders in the workplace drew reference, as part of the psychosocial work environment, to the more recent concept of organisational justice as a predictor of mental health in the workplace. They state that "Organisational justice" refers to fairness of workplace processes and is usually conceptualized as having 2 components: procedural justice, meaning accuracy and inclusion of decision-making processes; and relational justice, meaning polite and considerate treatment by

supervisors.’ The workers’ narratives about supervision do appear to have some resonance to this concept of organisational justice, or more specifically the lack of it with respect to supervision.

5.4 Skills Issues

According to the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CSHISC) Literature Review, (2008a), the need for skills training comes third behind competition and people management in the H&CS industry. In addition, they noted (2008a p 19) ‘a number of researchers have established a link between the pressures created by this low cost environment and the expansion of low-skill jobs, particularly in community services’. Furthermore, the research conducted by Meagher & Healy (2006, cited in Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council 2008b p 2) that focussed on care workers found a large number of community services workers are starting from a very low skill base.

Participants in this research reinforced these observations in a number of ways. A worker in a focus group commented:

A lot of registered training organisations want the big bucks, so they’re pumping out these courses and people are doing these courses and aren’t trained [well]. [Subsequently these workers] will say ... I’ll do that job for that amount of money and I’ll care for this amount of clients and then they don’t have the [adequate] training. Training organisations are giving them their Certificate IV in 17 weeks for [around] five hundred bucks ... Years ago we earned our training wheels with long hard work and a lot of study. So that has also impacted on the sector as well. (W30, female, 20 years CSS)

This long-serving worker was drawing the connection to the difficult and increased stress she and her fellow workers were experiencing in working alongside poorly trained colleagues. This added to their workloads, but also diminished their ability to stand up for their professional standards as well as improved pay and conditions. Having to work alongside and support poorly or minimally trained colleagues places extra strain on already pressured workers. The potential for mistakes and increased problems is obvious.

In Wagner and Spence’s research (2003) discussing organisational practices in the community sector, they note the practices of employing semi-trained or untrained workers as well as using volunteers and students in professional duties. Dominelli’s (1999 p 19) research discusses de-professionalising social work ‘by reducing complex interactional tasks to their component parts, thereby making them amenable to being undertaken by non-qualified or lesser skilled workers’.

The work in this sector needs competent and well-trained practitioners. It is important and exacting work and requires skilled workers to do the jobs well. A worker commented she came

along to the focus group because presently four of her colleagues were not at work due to being on sick leave for work stress.

5.5 High Turnover

One worker described clearly the stressful effects related to turnover of workers in the CSS:

The other thing that impacts on me more ... is sometimes the fact that people are able to just let go; they just keep changing jobs. Something is wrong, something is really wrong and I am talking about its systematically wrong ... It is a system thing [as to] why people keep moving on from job to job to job ... and ... particularly [in] this office about six or seven people, ... 13 or 14 people [have] gone in four and half years. To me, that's weird; you have got a 200 percent turnover. We are about to have more, by the way. ... You have got to teach them systems and everything else like that, as they come into the job and ... the pressure is back on the normal case manager or family services practitioner to help or mentor, generally, a new employee. (W7, male, 15 years CSS)

Another worker commented on the issues and effects of retention in the CSS:

Continuous feelings [of] loss hit workers because of poor worker retention in human service organisations, and people move on rather than fight the system. This breeds a culture of learned helplessness in workers who have no choice but to stay. (W20, female, 12 years CSS)

One worker commented on the common individual approach to dealing with work stress:

People might bounce around or might change agencies a few times or ... sometimes they leave the sector altogether (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 years ASU).

These workers were frustrated by the constant turnover and low retention rates in CSS. Also, the increased staff movements themselves result in heightening distress for workers. This situation leaves remaining workers with additional work. As documented, the workloads are already high and then having to – even temporarily – pick up added work is causing increased work stress. Earles & Lynn (2009 pp 106-7) state:

There are also anecdotal indications that the inability to fill or backfill positions with appropriately skilled people is increasing workloads for existing staff, and affecting staff morale and agencies' capacity to deliver timely and high-quality services.

The South Australian Council of Social Service information paper (2010) highlights the need to look at retention problems with the ultimate goal to improve staff and organisational welfare. They reported that staff turnover rates for the CSS Australia-wide were 16.3 percent in 2003–04, but had increased to 29.1 percent in 2008–09. Not only is the turnover rate unacceptably high at almost 30 percent, it has almost doubled in five years. In the Australian Government National Compact Document (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2011 p 10), there is an acknowledgement of the need to 'collaborate on workforce strategies to improve attraction,

retention, development and recognition of paid workers and volunteers in the not-for-profit sector' and a priority area is 'to improve paid and unpaid workforce issues'. The ultimate challenge will be finding the will beyond the rhetoric to seriously address turnover and hence have an impact on the high levels of work stress in this sector.

One participant wrote: *For workers, my observation is that workplace stress has become a key factor in failure to retain staff (W18, male, 10 years CSS)*. Research reports tend to focus on recruitment strategies and do not seriously address the causes of why workers are not staying in one agency for any significant length of time, or are actually leaving the field altogether. The findings emerging from this research highlight the importance of addressing the various fundamental issues about retention and turnover: that is, high work stress levels. A greater focus on recruitment strategies without addressing the causes of high turnover will do little to redress the problem.

In the report by the Community Services and Health Industries Skills Council (2008a) exploring skills growth or skills atrophy, it is noted that the Community Services Sector in Australia has many key preconditions for atrophy: a low-based funding model, diverse and difficult to characterise employer ownership profiles, fragmented employment structures, challenging and difficult job designs, low employee receptiveness to training, inactive and low mobilising professional groups, and splintered perceptions of customer need.

Furthermore, as discussed in the earlier chapters, various other researchers have also highlighted the issues relating to retention within the CSS. Workers are leaving in large numbers, including an increase in the younger workers moving on more quickly than has previously been the case (Allen Consulting Group 2008; Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council 2008a, 2008b; South Australian Council of Social Service 2010).

Sennett's (2006) exploration of new capitalism has highlighted the chain reaction happening in terms of missing loyalty when work is determined by short-term arrangements. He notes there is a lack of institutional loyalty towards workers, and workers are responding in kind. There may be relevance here for the younger workers in the CSS, who are less connected to the increasingly redundant concept of employer and employee loyalty and therefore tend to move on more quickly.

5.6 Stigma

Work stress is a psychological injury and several workers in separate focus groups spoke about the stigma surrounding work stress and how work stress can consequently end up being a hidden issue. (W39 and W40, females, respectively 20 and 12 years CSS). The additional stigma is a secondary, albeit silent, burden one has to endure when suffering from work stress

(Dollard, Winefield & Winefield 1999). As one of the above workers commented: *If you can't even name it or acknowledge [it], it's like it's a bit shameful (W40, female, 12 years CSS).*

The CSS is not the only place where psychological illness is stigmatised. It is widely acknowledged that in society in general there is a stigma attached to having any mental health problem. Stigma is a difficult and much more covert and insidious burden to endure. Several workers spoke about mental health issues in general within the community as well as the specific stigma associated with work stress in the CSS. As one worker commented: *I think there is a general stigma in the community around mental health issues ... full stop (W15, female, 10 years CSS, 4 years ASU).*

Two other workers in a focus group commented: *We've had some people off on stress leave in our office and it's all under the carpet and no-one knows (W35, male, 20 years CSS). It's a secret; it's the problem with no name (W37, female, 25 years CSS).*

There are the added inherent challenges of discussing a worker's stress once it has led to the end point of a worker taking sick leave and/or lodging a worker's compensation claim. This then becomes a privacy and confidentiality issue that is expected to be shared only between management and the respective worker.

The stigma is revealed in the way that workers felt unable to openly acknowledge their work stress. Some workers expressed a concern about showing any experience of individual stress in the workplace. There was anxiety about it affecting their job security:

We are so okay with it with our clients; when it comes to the staff ... it's almost like you don't want to be seen to be not coping and hence incompetent. It's like, it's a big question mark over your work abilities. (W9, female, 9 years CSS)

In the mix of the rhetoric about the sector is the perception that the nature of the work is stressful but one just has to deal with it. It is seen as an inherent weakness in the individual worker if they speak about being stressed. There is a persona of toughness about workers in this sector and hence this is seen as the norm. This allows agencies and their management an excuse to ignore work stressors. As a worker stated:

I think there is a really big perception that stress is just part of the job, and I just don't believe that, and I don't think it has to be that way. ... When you talk to people in the sector I think it is often an excuse or a justification that employers will use or see it as part of the job and it is also something I think is a perception, sometimes, outside of the sector as well. ... I just don't think it has to be that way; you can have good systems, and you can have workers who feel like they can speak up and talk about things. You can have workloads that are sustainable. (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 years ASU)

A worker commented on his perception of the manager's approach to workers who suffered stress:

I have seen people separated [and] isolated until they eventually resign. (And why do you think those things happen to them – the isolation?) Well, because if there is somebody complaining and you want a team to function you try to get rid of that person. (And that has been your experience of your team leader doing that type of thing?) ... Absolutely, it's happening right now [in my workplace]. (W7, male, 15 years CSS)

Two issues are raised here. Firstly, there is the contradiction of workers in dealing with clients who have mental health issues in a professional, respectful and supportive manner, yet often not experiencing a similar response when they themselves develop a psychological injury. Secondly, there is a connection between the growing insecure employment realities such as casualisation and short-term contracts and not feeling able to speak up about work stress. It is understandable that these employment insecurities may interfere with workers seeking assistance with mental health issues, including work stress if they believe it may jeopardise the security of their job.

The very nature of stigma attached to a mental health issue and specifically work stress makes it difficult to deal with at an OH&S level. As many workers have commented, they have suffered from various mental health problems and as documented there are high claims for psychological injuries in this sector despite the stigma and the subsequent self-contained strategies workers utilise to survive and stay employed. In interviewing the workers within the research processes, as well as from my extensive background working in the sector, there is evidence of this display of a toughness of character. For example, one worker commented on her fear of taking stress leave: *People not wanting to take stress leave because it means they don't cope, that they're weak (W14, female, 22 years one agency).*

One can infer that this 'toughness of character' often expressed by participants does not fit well with being able to discuss feeling stressed and needing help and support. It is somehow linked to the narrative expressed by workers, management and also by the community in general about work stress being seen as part of the CSS terrain. In a sense one has to put up with it, or as is commonly expressed by many within and outside the sector, 'If it's too hot in the kitchen, then you need to get out'. Meyerson, (2000, cited by Martin, Schrock, Leaf & Von Rohr 2008 Chapter 4) sees healthy organisations as those that allow workers to regroup after experiencing burnout or other problematic feelings. In other words progressive organisations allow workers to affirm the emotional work that they do, share about it and support each other, including acknowledging the stress and feelings of burnout. In the workers' narratives there was only one organisation that appeared to provide this type of proactive response to the difficult and emotional work their workers engage in on a daily basis.

In a general sense there is much about the CSS that is a contradiction and subsequently induces psychological strain for the workers. Underneath the prevailing rhetoric of altruism and

expectation of workers being ‘all giving and caring’ towards their clients and their agencies, there is the almost opposite treatment of staff: neglectful and uncaring. This is experienced by the workers as unfairness and inequality, particularly with the subsequent lack of reciprocal loyalty to workers from management and agencies. Arthur (2004) discusses work relationships and a ‘psychological contract’ that has important reciprocal psychological promises and obligations between workers and management; the breaking of this informal contract can have emotional responses such as betrayal, hurt and stress.

Some workers shared the view that there was limited or, in many cases, no pro-active dialogue at their agency level about dealing with work stress and it was in the main dealt with only at the tertiary (reactive) level of action. Agencies will refer workers to counselling programs such as employee assistance programmes (EAP), but generally only deal with work stress when it comes to compensation claims and the subsequent return to work processes.

Stigma is an added, albeit silent, serious impediment attached to work stress and it adds to the difficulties in addressing this serious issue.

6. Diversity and Inequality in Sub-sectors

The CSS is made up of a diverse range of sub-sectors, each with its respective representative peak body. For example, there are peak agencies that represent the drug and alcohol sector, the housing and homeless sector, the sexual assault and family violence sectors, the family and children services, the mental health sectors. In Victoria the overall peak organisation that represents the CSS as a whole is the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), and nationally it is the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

There are many issues that affect the sector as a whole. Funding challenges, for example, are a sector-wide issue. There are, however, variations in the levels of funding received by agencies within the separate sub-sectors. As noted by the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (2008a p 17), there are major difficulties for sub-sectoral agencies in documenting their underfunding in a systematic way, let alone having the funds to adequately research work stress. Furthermore, governments do not disperse funds in an equal measure across all the different sub-sectors. The dispersion of funds is aligned to an extent with the policy priorities of the government of the day both state and federally.

The participants in this research came from the many and varied agencies within the diverse sub-sectors that make up the CSS. Work stress was an issue across all sub-sectors and classifications of workers, although it is not an even picture across the sectors, and subsequently some sub-sectors have greater issues that increase work stress outcomes for their workers.

One worker made the point that to some extent all agencies work in silos and have different working models (W10, female, 15 years CSS); each organisation operates in its own way and

these somewhat unaccountable and loose structures mean work stress varies substantially across agencies and sub-sectors.

There are differences in pay and terms and conditions in the different sub-sectors. As one worker stated:

I think if we look at the funding models, and it is predominately in homelessness and drug and alcohol sub-sectors, the funding models are ridiculously prescriptive and they don't actually enable organisations ... to take up all of their responsibilities. Now I know the government line on that. The state bureaucracy line on that is, 'We are a contributing funder and you need to find the rest of the money to run your organisation in an appropriate and healthy way,' which is a lovely way of absolving themselves of any responsibility, which is of course why we have the non-government sector. ... Drug and alcohol is very thinly funded as well, really close to the bone, just enough to do the task, let alone the support structures that need to be behind [it] to ensure the task is done to the highest standard, but that is also why we are cheaper than mainstream. (W39, female, 20 years CSS)

She went on to say that the high exiting of workers from the housing and homelessness sub-sector was due in part to the federal government's (the former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd) pledge and subsequent goal to halve overall homelessness by 2020 (Department of Families 2008 executive summary p 1). This has had a significant effect upon the workers, including increased workloads which have led to increased worker stress and exiting of staff. She commented:

Everywhere they piloted it turned over the staff within a year. So we are doing it everywhere; all this rolling out and halving homelessness. We have got across the state a 30 percent turnover rate in homelessness. ... (Staff? What, in a year?). Yes. (W39, female, 20 years CSS)

This highly experienced worker's observations highlight an important connection to what has been extensively shared about this sector: the enormous and unsustainable expectations of the workforce in the CSS. Here we have a major policy direction of halving homelessness within a challenging time frame, and the predictable outcome is that a large number of staff are exiting the homelessness sector as the policy is being implemented across the country without adequate resources. The consequence of the inadequate funding falls mainly onto the shoulders of the workers. Workers are indeed the collateral damage, and the current game is to keep bringing up fresh troops into the sub-sectors to staff the front line. Many of these fresh troops, however, have fewer qualifications and more precarious employment contracts.

A worker spoke about her views on the lack of government accountability to the agencies:

That it is not happening because the mechanism has not been in the department to do it, so they don't have the tools built, in a sense. ... All they have is this really crappy reporting document that gets done twice a year. They don't have a checklist of how

this [staff] person is travelling. They don't have the knowledge of what governance should look like in some cases. There is a gap in their understanding in the department of what a neighbourhood house is and does. (W3, female, 6 years one agency)

Through the compulsory competitive tendering processes, governments are absolving themselves of responsibility beyond monitoring the outputs of provision of services contracts. In many ways it is a type of subcontracting in which almost all the responsibilities, risks and pressures remain with the subcontractor. In neo-liberal terms it is about steering and not rowing. Furthermore, many agencies in the CSS, after years of compulsory competitive tendering, are more isolated as the very nature of tendering and competition for work kills off cooperation and honest communication between agencies, and hence their ability to share best practice.

One worker noted the stress of precarious employment in disability support services by saying:

I have been through the last six years of low-pay, dead-end jobs. You know, job insecurity, sort of precarious, what I would call precarious employment in a sense. You don't know exactly what your hours of work each fortnight is going to be, because if a client goes on holiday or they don't want to work with you, or whatever reason, they can just drop you, and so you don't actually have a fixed income as such. (W12, female, 19 years CSS)

She went on to say in a focus group that *this is a hand-to-mouth existence in disability support*. Another worker in disability shared an experience that was of concern on an OH&S level by saying: *I had to insist on signing an employment contract before I would agree to meet a client in their own home (W20, female, 12 years CSS)*. Without a signed contract this worker would have been vulnerable to not having her rights as a worker met had she needed to call on them.

As has been documented in the literature review, the pay, terms and conditions for workers, especially in the lower classifications (e.g. personal care workers), is extremely poor. This results in unsustainable incomes for many workers. Rather than the work itself, although difficult and challenging, the structures and systems created much of the stress incurred by workers and this is especially evident in some sub-sectors.

In a general sense many long-serving CSS workers have substantial knowledge, views and experiences about healthy and unhealthy sub-sectors in which to seek work. As one worker who also does private practice supervision noted:

I also do a lot of supervision of community workers in two ... [sub-sector] fields and [one of them] is the most terrible sector in terms of being disrespectful to its workers. Oh, they expect them to have these massive case loads, they put immense pressure on them. They [are] constantly forcing them into positions where they are having to choose between their professional code of ethics and the demands of management.

And you know, they put managers in who have accounting backgrounds who just want to balance dollars, but they don't have an understanding of issues like continuity of care. (W10, female, 15 years CSS)

She went on to say:

I think in the community sector, in terms of caring for workers and its pressure around budgets, ... it seems what that means is that eventually management, they will, they do, de-personalise their workers, they just see them as expendable resources. I have had workers say to me, 'Well, they have said to us if you don't like it, get out ... We will replace you.' Which is just really sad, because that is not going to retain good workers in the community sector, and the most needy are not going to get a good service ... (W10, female, 15 years CSS)

Within the confines of the current restrictive funding models comes the subsequent constraint in providing the necessary resourcing for the workers to do their jobs well. The challenges of the time-consuming tendering processes and following the subsequent guidelines raises questions about how much energy is left for understanding – let alone adequately resourcing and supporting – the workers. Currently the emphasis is on getting workers to be proactive about their own health, including reducing work stress levels themselves, with individual self-care behaviours. As argued, however, it is the systems and structures that have the greatest impact on work stress outcomes, and whatever the worker attempts to do for her/himself will not address structural issues. Several workers commented:

I mean, it's hard enough to actually deliver on the tender let alone meet all these other requirements as an employer. (You mean in terms of OH&S for their staff?) Yes, I mean, what they expect of a small agency compared to, say, a government department. You have got a whole structure of support, admin support, structure and technical support, building support, all those many jobs that agencies have to do, plus deliver a service. You know, they are getting it on the cheap; it's about time they actually put money in and funded these agencies properly. (W1, female, 10 years same agency)

In my previous job, I worked in housing information and referral, and the staff turnover was just massive. Our case load was huge, and it was just that stress around housing which is why I think a lot of people burnt out. (W32, female, 1 year CSS)

It is my belief after around ten years working principally in the drug rehab and psychiatric disability recreations services (PDRS) sub-sector that there are significant stress issues amongst workers, and management adversely affecting service delivery. Factors contributing to stress include the low pay and status attached to community work, the increasing demand for service, coupled with chronic underfunding and understaffing, and limited education of management and staff for dealing with stress issues. This leads to bullying in the workplace as management fail to cope, a dispirited workforce who then struggles to deliver the quality of service they would like, and the pigeon-holing and blaming of service clients. (W18, male, 10 years CSS)

This situation in part is politically driven as the sector relies heavily on the government of the day for its survival, via the funds to provide the services. Hence the policy directions of both the state and federal governments of the day play a part in the buoyancy and maintenance of the various sub-sectors. For example, there has been much public driven discourse about the poor resources for people with mental health issues and their families. This has led to government policy outcomes in which there has been an additional injection of funds into the mental health field, including the various CSS agencies that are part of this field. This ultimately has a bearing on the employment conditions of the specific sub-sector.

The CSS can be seen as a complex mix of sub-sectors that receive unequal portions of extremely meagre nourishment that makes it difficult to bring about healthy changes, including a reduction in work stress level for its diverse workforce.

7. Regional Issues

Several workers who were currently working in regional areas raised specific stress issues in regards to aspects of regional work and services. One worker spoke about the stress that comes with the additional services that regional agencies are expected to provide: *In a neighbourhood house in a regional area and a rural area are far worse [as] they're expected to provide much more service than a similar centre in the middle of Melbourne (W3, female, 6 years one agency).*

This was supported by another worker who commented:

Often workers are the only funded service in a large geographical (but lowly populated) area and are required to be a 'Jack of all trades' and this can significantly affect stress. (W19, female, 8 years CSS)

In a regional focus group one worker noted that 'long travel distances' are another stressful issue faced by regional workers. As well, he noted there is a lack of adequate referral options for clients and that this is stressful for workers (W35, male, 20 years CSS).

There are added issues for rural workers such as increased visibility and subsequent increased safety issues. One worker wrote:

In my experience there are particular issues for workers practising in smaller rural communities. I have, and I know of other workers who have from time to time, received threats. The difficulty in smaller communities is that a client will have little difficulty in finding out where a worker lives or simply bumping into them at the local community, the local shopping centre, etc. As an example, I was told by a client having significant mental health difficulties and with a serious conviction for violence, that he knew where my [home] was and he would let my [pets] out. (W19, male, 10 years CSS)

This worker also wrote about the stress of limited jobs and the effects of gossip in rural areas:

Moreover there are limited job opportunities in rural areas. If a worker has a problem in a workplace, or has been bullied, for example, the community seems to be able to find out these things, or what isn't known sometimes gets made up. An aggressive manager can, with a few words behind the scenes, make it very difficult for a worker to obtain alternative employment in that community. (W18, male, 10 years CSS)

Regional workers have additional work stress issues that are specifically about regional and rural work situations. Morris (2011) mentions regional services have even greater resource strapped situations and that CSS agencies can be the biggest employer in town.

8. Chapter Summary

Many of the participants in this research have had long careers in the CSS despite the significant work stressors and subsequent psychological injuries. Many workers spoke of having had some sort of breakdowns, depression, and a variety of other stress-related health issues, and they clearly saw it emanating from the work environment.

It is clear from the workers' data that they do experience a significant amount of work stress and have a well honed insight into the causes of work stress in the CSS. As one worker stated in a written response:

Factors contributing to stress include the low pay and status attached to community work, the increasing demand for service coupled with chronic underfunding and understaffing, and limited education of management and staff for dealing with stress issues (W18, male, 10 years CSS).

As noted by the South Australian Council of Social Service (2010 p 23), there is 'a deep seated undervaluing of much community service work which is evident in the low pay rates across the sector'.

This sector has entrenched contextual overlays. Firstly, the charity and volunteer model with its expectations of altruism and loyalty is at the heart of the CSS. On top of this are notions of gender; that this is 'women's work' and not of equal value to 'men's work'. Cortis and Eastman (2012 p 13) note: 'Recognition of undervaluation based on gender is an historic development for Australia's SACS [social and community services] industry, and for other female dominated fields of work'. The CSS, historically and currently, has been strongly shaped by women's participation, both paid and unpaid. In regards to work stress there are many aspects to it being seen and commonly accepted as a woman's field of employment that has a strong connection to high work stress and subsequent work cover claims. Gender issues such as the undervaluing of women's work are very much apparent in the CSS. This is not to deny that workers draw a

sense of worth and pleasure from doing this work and seeing that their labour enhances clients' lives. However, as documented, it does come at a significant cost in terms of psychological injuries to many workers in this sector. Gender has historical influences on the nature of CSS; however, the systemic and structural issues compounded by neo-liberalism have hugely exacerbated the current issues and problems of work stress.

This sector has an exploitative side, and it is acknowledged that, in part, this stems from the limited resources made available to run services. It is questionable if CSS should adhere to many aspects of a free market competitive model and its specific emphasis on business management systems in which numbers of clients, numbers of services, and numbers of hours spent are the focus. It is a question of how much importance is placed on these accountability measures when you are dealing with human beings, their needs, their emotions, the social and family structure breakdowns. As Allebone states (2011 p 5):

One consequence of particular relevance here has been the gradual downward pressure on the wages and conditions of employees in the welfare sector in order to meet the cost-reduction imperatives that flow from a competitive market model.

The pressure of low funding and the competitive market model of the major funders, the government, flows down to agencies and management. Low-level resourcing can lead to management putting in place paucity management processes. As suggested, paucity management strategies include at best ignoring and/or indirectly adding to already unsustainable workloads. A concern here is whether management does not concern itself with workers not understanding OH&S, including work stress if it means issues such as workloads can remain unaddressed. The question is, how do you do this within a low resource base, in which paucity management strategies are utilised? As previously noted by one worker, workers at some level can be seen by management as 'expendable'.

The current view held by some researchers and managers which maintains that all employers need to do in order to have a healthy workplace is encourage workers to maintain individual healthy behaviours such as fitness and relaxation, is simplistic and reductive. In such accounts very limited attention is paid to addressing structural issues that are causing work stress in the first place. This is a concern as structural issues are part of the primary work stress interventions and, as outlined in the literature review, primary preventions are the most important action items to reduce work stress outcomes (LaMontagne et al. 2007; LaMontagne, Keegel & Valance 2001; LaMontagne et al. 2006). Further structural and systemic issues were those most often raised by workers when discussing their own workplace stress and its causes.

The reshaping of the CSS within the free market model, on top of an already poorly funded sector and subsequently stressed workforce, has brought about a tipping point. This is exposed in the high turnover rates, along with the subsequent recruitment difficulties the sector as a

whole is experiencing. As stated in the Community Services and Health Industries Skills Council (CSHISC) (2008b p 2) report,

Strong cost control strategies by both state and federal governments for example when considered in the context of the historical devaluation of care work, can jointly contribute to a situation in which leveraging wage improvements to maintain labour in-flow is particularly challenging.

There has been research on retention and recruitment for this sector, however, there is less focus on work stress and the psychological injuries sustained by the present workers. As one worker commented: *I think the sector is in real trouble at the moment (W11, male, 13 years CSS)*. Sennett (2006 pp 96–7) mentions Albert Hirschmann's terms 'exit' and 'voice': 'Young workers, more pliant, favour exit when discontented; older workers, more judgemental, give voice to their discontent'. The ages of the workers in this data resonate with Hirschmann's hypothesis as there are only a few workers in their 20s and 30s, and the majority were in their 40s and 50s.

The following chapter deepens the analysis of workers' experiences by focussing on other systems and structures that impact on their working lives. Attention is directed towards the state and federal governments' OH&S structural overlay, current OH&S legislation and the role of the WorkSafe authority, including, in particular, the vexed work cover area.

The role of unions within the CSS is examined; including their capacity to play supportive and protective roles. This chapter also presents workers' experience of their respective unions in terms of union response to the problem of work stress. Lastly, workers' ideas and suggestions with respect to reducing work stress in the CSS are briefly outlined.

Chapter Five: Workers' Voices and Analysis – Part Two

1. Introduction – Workers' Voices

Chapter Five deals with four areas: firstly, how do the occupational health and safety (OH&S) structures in general affect workers within agencies in the CSS? Secondly, what are the workers' experiences of the state government's statutory authority WorkSafe Victoria and its investigative and protective roles, including the workers' experiences of putting in worker's compensation claims? Thirdly, how have union structures and systems mediated work experiences? Specifically, how effective have they been in protecting and supporting workers experiencing work stress? Fourthly, what ideas have workers themselves advanced in relation to reducing work stress in the CSS?

1.1. Occupational Health and Safety Structures – Workers' Experiences on the Ground

OH&S systems and structures play an important role in protecting and supporting workers from injuries, including psychological injuries (work stress). Work cover Victoria is the statutory authority dealing with claims for workplace injury in Victoria. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (Australian Council of Trade Unions, Safe at Work, 2012 p 1) working definition of occupational health and safety states:

(1) Every worker has the right to a safe workplace. When they go to work each day, they should fully expect to return home uninjured and in the same state of health as they left. (2) Occupational health and safety is the issue of complete physical, mental and social well-being within a workplace. (3) The enjoyment of these standards at the highest levels is a basic human right that should be accessible by each and every individual and (4) What this means for workers is that regardless of the nature of their work they should be able to carry out their responsibilities in a safe and secure environment free from danger, stress and bullying.

Each state and territory has its own specific Act; however, the Commonwealth Government is currently leading a process to implement nationally harmonised occupational health and safety laws. In Victoria the current Victorian Coalition Government has called on the Commonwealth to defer for twelve months the implementation of national occupational health

and safety (OHS) harmonisation legislation (Media release 28/9/2011).²³ Hence in Victoria the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 is still current (2005b p2).²⁴

A brief description of psychological injuries is given by The Australian Safety and Compensation Council (2006a p 5):

The term psychological injury describes a range of conditions relating to the functioning of people's minds. While often prompted by workplace stressors, these conditions can be caused by physical injuries, diseases, exposure to toxins or underlying psychiatric issues.

With the above context in mind, this chapter explores the workers' experiences of how their respective CSS organisations respond to OH&S, including their protective obligations within the relevant OH&S legislation.

One worker explained that she had come to the focus group as the result of *four people who've gone off on stress leave and it's for them, who can't even get out of bed at the moment ... it's like a war and they're the forgotten fallen* (W30, female, 20 years CSS).

Another worker commented:

... Systemic changes ... are needed. It is especially in the area of implementing legislation, e.g. in OH&S, that there needs to be an organisational shake-up. It is high time that a mirror is held up to agencies which, because they do 'good works', are allowed to get away with abusing their own workers. (W28, female, 16 years CSS)

It appears that within this system there is a lack of commitment by many agencies in the CSS to seriously address work stress causes. As one worker in a focus group commented:

Stress is often overlooked or handballed. 'Oh, the woman has got personal problems;' you hear that a lot when the issue of stress comes up. It is not given recognition as an OH&S issue as it truly should be. (W13, female, 25 years CSS)

Several workers spoke of being assigned clients who had known histories of violent behaviour towards family, friends and workers, and that they were not informed of this situation prior to working with these clients. One worker who had been assaulted by a client was assured by her manager that she would never again be asked to work alone with a known violent client without her having a choice in this matter. However, to her dismay, she was indeed again placed with a client with a known history of violent behaviour of which she was not informed. This

²³ Confirmation that the current Victorian Liberal State Government will not be picking up the model Work Health and Safety legislation 'harmonised legislation for occupational health and safety' (Victorian Trades Hall Commission 2012).

²⁴ The Act is designed to provide a broad framework for improving standards of workplace health and safety to reduce work-related injury and illness. It allows duty-holders to determine their approach to achieving compliance with the Act. The Act aims to: Secure the health, safety and welfare of employees and other people at work; Protect the public from the health and safety risks of business activities; Eliminate workplace risks at the source; and involve employers, employees and the organisations that represent them in the formulation and implementation of health, safety, and welfare standards. Throughout the Act, the meaning of health includes psychological health as well as physical health (p2).

worker subsequently became quite stressed trying to carry out her normal duties and eventually submitted a worker's compensation claim (W12, female, 19 years CSS).

The experience of some workers illustrates a flagrant disregard by employers of their obligations for the health, safety and welfare of workers under OH&S laws. Organisations have shown a lack of willingness to address the issue of work stress and put in place strategies to protect workers. The approach taken in the instance noted above was to ignore the situation which resulted in a worker incurring a secondary psychological injury.

1.2 What's Happening Inside Health and Safety Committees (HSCs)

According to Work Safe Australia (2012c p 2),

A Health and Safety Committee (HSC) brings together workers and management to assist in the development and review of health and safety policies and problems for the workplace. A HSC must be established when a Health and Safety Representative (HSR) or five or more workers make a request to the 'person conducting a business or undertaking' (PCBU).²⁵

In theory, such structures as HSCs, with their elected worker representatives and management-designated representatives, are a valuable asset. However, according to workers these voluntary HSC worker representatives have difficulty in supporting workers' needs in terms of addressing OH&S issues, especially work stress.

There are inherent challenges and difficulties concerning HSCs in any workplace. As the workers' data showed in the previous chapter, management in many cases utilises power in ways that have negative consequences for workers. As an elected OH&S representative commented: *there is a level of bullying that's going on that anybody that tries to do anything [about] in the sector is squashed.* (W34, female, 19 years CSS).

As previously documented, there are significant structural reasons for this, including underfunding, that affect how CSS agencies deal with OH&S problems. It appears that OH&S, especially work stress prevention, is not often at the forefront of managers' minds. Subsequently preventative strategies are sparse in reality. Health and safety representatives (HSRs) do not have the same access or power as management and they subsequently face difficult struggles to get acknowledgement, let alone action, to reduce OH&S issues such as work stress.

I was an OH&S rep [and] that whole issue with OH&S in the community sector is something I feel very strongly about. ... A lot of management ... feel threatened by the role of the OH&S representative. ... They [management] don't understand it, I don't think, and even if they did understand it, I think they still feel that they are somehow

²⁵ Noted in the (2012c) This guide is part of the new Commonwealth Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (passed 24 November, 2011). The State Government of Victoria has delayed introducing the model work health and safety laws – media release 28 September 2011.

losing control within the workplace, and ... it disturbs their understanding of the hierarchy. (W12, female, 19 years CSS)

Several workers made comments that work stress as an OH&S issue was not on the radar. It is much easier, it seems, to develop workplace guidelines and policies around physical hazards as opposed to psychological injuries. Two workers commented:

OH&S committees,²⁶ they are supposed to have a risk management procedure that covers financial risk ... the resource risk [etc] ... They have a risk management policy [and] they're inclined to concentrate on physical risk to the workplace. (W14, female, 22 years one agency)

There is an occupational health and safety committee and the idea is that issues are brought to the reps and they come up with solutions [about] the things that cause stress. [They] ... tend to deal more with the physical hazards in the workplace. I am not sure that they have actually tackled anything except a critical incident. (W1, female, 10 years current job)

Another worker commented that the policies in her agency were updated and an OH&S person was employed after the workers called in WorkSafe Victoria. However, the work stress issue was not addressed and the focus has been on the physical injury risk:

The email's gone out that this person is now our OH&S person ... and we've been made more aware of OH&S – things like wet floors or whatever; everybody's very aware, which is probably a good thing, of our own OH&S responsibilities, and if we see something that's not quite right, like the electric jug's plugged in and it shouldn't be, or there is a ladder there and it shouldn't be, that's been a good thing, to make us all aware of our safety, of our physical safety. (W4, female, 6 years current job)

The agenda items in these Health and Safety Committees often focus on the more overt and tangible physical issues, rather than matters that are causing stress for the workers such as untenable workloads. Dollard (2006) discusses a risk management approach in which the process is to identify, assess and control the OH&S issue. Given the evidence presented throughout this thesis, this preventative approach to work stress reduction does not appear to be happening on many fronts.

Some workers, including elected HSRs, mentioned the difficulties of attending OH&S training. This situation hampers workers doing their elected OH&S roles to the best of their ability as a lack of appropriate training limits understanding of OH&S (legislation, regulations and codes of practice). Furthermore, as noted in the Safe Work Australia guide (2012c), only representatives who have undergone the five-day official OH&S training course can put a Provisional Improvement Notice ²⁷ in their workplace.

²⁶ Occupational Health and Safety committees are now called Health and Safety Committees.

²⁷ A PIN is a Provisional Improvement Notice as per Victoria's Occupational Health and Safety Act (2004). This is a formal notice from a Health and Safety Representative to his employer or employer representative advising

One worker who sits on the relevant OH&S reference groups in her paid work with the Australian Services Union spoke about HSCs in workplaces from her experiences listening to managers in various settings:

There has either not been a proper election or people have been discouraged from being involved in it. One of the standard kind of responses that I have often heard is, 'Oh, nobody wants to do it anyway.' Rather than saying, 'Look, we will give people the time, we will reallocate some of [the work]. We will make it possible for you to do it and do it meaningfully,' but we'll be given every reason not to do it. (W15, female, 10 years CSS, 4 years union)

Managers have the advantage of placing themselves in 'gate keeping' roles in terms of access by workers to the agencies' boards and or committees of management. As well, management has the power and influence when setting up the structures for Health and Safety Committees, including greater control over agenda items, discussions and outcomes. One worker stated: *there is really an imbalance, because it's always chaired by executive management; the [HSC] meetings (W11, male, 13 years CSS).*

As stated by Safe Work Australia (2012c), there is no obligation for an agency to have a Health and Safety Committee or a health and safety representative. Furthermore, a worker has to ask for a health and safety representative to be elected and/or five or more workers have to make a request to set up a Health and Safety Committee. It is up to a worker or workers to ask their management to develop these structures. Having five or more staff committed to OH&S, specifically its importance in assisting a safe and healthy workplace can be a greater problem in small agencies with fewer staff. As previously documented, workloads are a significant issue in this sector and hence the issue of a worker taking on board the extra voluntary duties of a health and safety representative may be prohibitive.

There are, therefore, inherent obstacles within the CSS that impede the growth and development of more proactive OH&S workplace cultures and environments, including an increase in a commitment to setting up Health and Safety Committees and encouraging health and safety representatives to step forward. The historical links with the charity and voluntary models, the greater gendered expectations of altruism and loyalty and the expectations of vocational thinking hamper efforts to improve OH&S outcomes for workers. The pervasive – almost religious – zeal of 'the clients come first' does muddy the water for workers to clearly see that their OH&S needs are of equal importance and are indeed a legislated right.

them that there is a health or safety problem at work. It is use where consultation between the Health and Safety Rep and the employer/employer rep does not resolve the problem. OHS
[Reps@Work:http://www.ohsrep.org.au/law-right/law/the-ohs-act/a-pin-how-to-use-it/index.cfm](http://www.ohsrep.org.au/law-right/law/the-ohs-act/a-pin-how-to-use-it/index.cfm) 22/08/2012

1.3 Experiences of Victimisation of Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs)

Of the 41 participants there were only two known official OH&S representatives. The male worker shared the view that he saw the connection to his experience of stress from bullying as being connected to his union delegate and OH&S representative roles (W41, male, 25 years CSS). The other worker had also been an OH&S representative as well as a union representative. She outlined that these voluntary positions had come at a personal cost. She stated:

I'm an active occupational health and safety rep. I'm punished, my hours are cut [and], I'm back to eight hours a fortnight. I'm supposed to pay my rent on eight hours ... When I was active as a health and safety representative there, as well as elsewhere, suddenly my workload doubled, because I became active on occupational health and safety issues in that workplace ... So, as far as the management was concerned, I didn't know my place and that was purely, and very clearly, their attitude all the way through. (W34, female, 19 years CSS)

This raises an important point about the inherent risks of being a worker representative. It is the health and safety representative's role to bring up workers' OH&S issues and if necessary argue and hence challenge current management practices. It can hamper career advancement, especially in the current climate of greater employer power, where both tenure and hours of work are often insecure as noted above. As mentioned by the ASU worker, *the coverage of OH&S reps in the sector is really poor (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 years ASU).*

WorkSafe investigators can investigate possible discrimination, or threats of discrimination, against an employee on the basis of their OHS activities (2005a). However, discrimination can be subtle and extremely difficult to prove. One worker discussed her involvement with WorkSafe Victoria, from her role as a health and safety representative and she found this to be an unsatisfactory experience. She commented:

(So you were talking to the [WorkSafe] inspector). The inspector said he had to pass it up to his manager at WorkSafe. (Why?) He [the inspector] contacted the CEO of the organisation and the CEO [then] contacted WorkSafe and said that he wasn't satisfied with this inspector and his attitude, and that is all I know about that side of it. (Why it happened?) He [the inspector] said that he wasn't able to [help], it had been taken out of his hands. (W12, female, 19 years CSS)

She went on to say:

I found out surreptitiously that there was a meeting being held by the OH&S committee so I was right from the start never put on the mailing list. I was never given the minutes. I was never given the agenda, and then coupled with ... [not being] given the training, formal training ... made me feel well ... a bullying tactic [enacted] by management. (W12, female, 19 years CSS)

Continuing, she said:

It wasn't the work itself that was driving me bonkers; it was the attitude of management and with me trying to just carry out a role that I had been designated to do, and them fighting me on every level and trying to punish me for doing that role. So anyway, I ended up on stress leave as a result of them just piling on more work and having unrealistic deadlines and unrealistic expectations and things like that. (W12, female, 19 years CSS)

A number of workers spoke about the inappropriateness of staff in management positions nominating themselves as the staff health and safety representative. This is clearly not in the spirit of the legislation and regulations, and raises serious issues of conflict of interest. Health and Safety Committees are meant to have equal numbers of worker representatives and management representatives.

Uneven representation, apart from giving the ultimate power position to management, further leaves workers vulnerable and exposed when raising issues that they perceive management may be resistant to discuss. One worker spoke about his immediate manager (team leader) who is also the appointed OH&S rep: *'I can't go to [him]; I can't raise this as an OH&S issue because the two people are one and the same (W7, male, 15 years CSS).*

One of the above workers drew the connection to her work colleagues not supporting her in the OH&S role because of their fears that publicly showing support towards her may negatively impact on their employment situation:

Well, because of the nervousness, because of the precarious nature of the job and the favouritism and all this sort of stuff about work allocation ... a lot of people do not want to be seen ... siding with me. ... Even though it is in their best interest and all that sort of stuff. ... There is this other layer that comes ... It's enmeshed with their financial and economic security and so of course I totally understand. I mean, [with] hindsight, I was not talking about anything really ... radical or anything like that. I mean, asking for information, attending ... the site inspection and things like that, doing surveys of workers ... OH&S issues. ... This is really ... basic stuff. (W12, female, 19 years CSS)

As has been shown, insecure, short-term contracts and casual work situations make it so much more difficult to support, let alone stand up for, action on OH&S issues.

A prevailing lack of trust governs current workplace conditions and relations. Research conducted by Gunningham & Sinclair (2009 p 9) explored notions of trust. They note:

One aspect of culture that is often of great significance, particularly in areas of social regulation such as environment or OHS, is trust. According to the literature, for example effective worker participation is crucial to improved OHS but such participation is unlikely to be effective in the absence of constructive dialogue between the two sides of industry.

Given the major struggles around poor funding, especially for management to oversee the delivery of service agreements, and the obvious need to maximise labour outcomes, a lack of

trust between the two parties may play a role in the disjointed OH&S picture emanating from the CSS. As evidenced in the workers' voices there is conflict, disappointment and anger towards their respective managers about many issues. Cunningham & Sinclair (2009) note international research findings that workers are more likely to trust their employers if they perceive they are being treated fairly and that managers are displaying procedural fairness in their dealings with them. As previously discussed, the utilisation of paucity management practices are rife in the CSS (Wagner & Spence 2003). For example, management practices of adding more work to already substantially 'loaded up' workers must encourage blindness to the fairly obvious connection between unsustainable workloads and poor OH&S outcomes for workers.

It is interesting to note that out of 41 participants there were only two workers who spoke about being health and safety representatives in their careers in the CSS. As shown by the two HSRs, these roles can be unpopular positions that can result in negative outcomes for these volunteer staff representatives. As well, there are many obstacles about the CSS that do not encourage or support workers becoming active on their health and safety needs, including becoming HSRs in their workplaces: workload pressures, CSS models (charity and voluntary and quasi-free market), insecure employment, vulnerability.

1.4 Gaps in Knowledge and Training about OH&S

Training for OH&S representatives extends over several days, hence given the low level of funding models in the CSS this can make it difficult for agencies to adequately comply with their OH&S obligations. Management subsequently has difficulties funding training and then back filling positions so that the worker can be released to attend the training (Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council 2008b). As the ASU union worker on a sector-wide OH&S reference group commented:

[I have been] getting out to go to those OH&S information sessions and I think accessing the training sessions, it's mostly management. It's not the staff and that really concerns me and I have fed that back through ... the reference groups. (W15, female, 10 years CSS, 4 years ASU union)

From these interviews it does appear that workers have limited knowledge and understanding of OH&S in general, including government legislative guidelines and the role of worker representatives and OH&S committees. There was no mention, except by the two HSRs, about attending any OH&S training at all, let alone training on work stress prevention. As one of the two HSR worker representative stated, she was denied OH&S training which should have been provided in order for her to diligently carry out her voluntary OH&S role (W12, female, 19 years CSS).

Another worker commented:

occupational health and safety is a very low priority; the managers really don't know very much about occupational health and safety and they don't have much respect for it; only in terms of their legal obligations. (W34, female, 19 years CSS)

This is disappointing when there is clear evidence that work stress is an important and serious issue occurring in this sector. As stated by Safe Work Australia in 2008–09 (2011a), mental stress in the CSS was 12 percent of claims, whereas the average in the Health and Community Services (H&CS) industry was 8 percent. Furthermore, psychological injury claims usually are at the expensive end of costs for agencies, including subsequent rises in their work cover insurance premiums. Workers usually take longer to recover and return to work after incurring a work stress injury. Serious claims are those that last five days or more (Safe Work Australia 2009, 2011a), and work stress injuries generally fit in this category.

From the data it was apparent that many workers saw increased workloads as a cause of stress, but did not see this as an OH&S issue that could be discussed and dealt with in OH&S forums or discussed in HSCs. Unmanageable workloads play a clear role in the causes of work stress outcomes for workers and as research shows it is a serious issue in this sector. As stated above, work stress (psychological injury) is a valid OH&S matter.

WorkSafe Victoria also has an educative role to its brief; however, this appears from the workers' voices to be missing in terms of work stress prevention education. As noted earlier by a worker, it is mainly management who are attending these OH&S forums, including those that focus on the causes and prevention strategies in regards to work stress. There has recently been some work stress training funded by Work Safe Victoria; however, it has been limited to a small numbers of sub-sectors. Such training was open to management and workers in 2010–11; however, issues such as back fill may have led to more of the attendees being from the ranks of management. The researcher attended one such sub-sector training in June 2011 titled 'Safer Workers Better Care' and noted the majority of attendees were from management, including team leader positions.²⁸

Several workers mentioned seeing OH&S posters and having brief discussions about physical injuries in an OH&S light. There was limited discussion, however, about work stress as an OH&S issue. Indeed, knowledge about OH&S in general appeared to be absent. There has been some education about work stress that was initiated by WorkSafe Victoria but it appears that it is not flowing down to the workers. There are several reasons for this including management's fear of a rise in OH&S demands as well as anxieties about opening up a perceived work stress Pandora's box.

²⁸ The Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) received Work Safe Victoria funding and the training were advertised through VCOSS various platforms in 2010–2011.

From the analysis of the workers' stories and comments it is apparent that there is some confusion and limited knowledge about OH&S systems and structures such as Health and Safety Committees or that work stress does come under an OH&S framework. This in itself is a major concern. This lack of knowledge and understanding limits efforts to address OH&S issues, including work stress. As a worker suggested: *a key recommendation is ... that there be increased education around stress issues in all community welfare/social work programs (W18, male, 10 years CSS).*

Many of the participants have had long work histories in this sector, some over 20 years; it appears within these long histories, there has been little participation in health and safety work. Workers themselves have, for whatever reasons, not been able to participate in improving their health and safety situations. Given the documented long history of poor wages, terms and conditions in this sector, this should be surprising. Unfortunately, this may link to the expected behaviours of this predominately female workforce, and a genealogy based upon charity and voluntary work. An ingrained 'clients come first' mantra in some instances prevents workers from taking action around what are clearly OH&S issues.

On a broader scale, Wagner & Spence (2003) found a lack of knowledge of OH&S legislation and associated practices by 50 percent of managers in one study of 81 managers in human service organisations in Not-for-profit agencies. The current research suggests that this figure may be even higher for workers in the CSS. A similar concern, stated by one worker, was the fact that managers also appear to have limited knowledge and understanding of OH&S legislation and guidelines (W34, female, 19 years CSS). According to a report produced by PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia (PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia 2012 p 12) commissioned by the Victorian Government on the impact of the proposed national Model Work Health and Safety Laws in Victoria:

While the costs of adoption of the Model WHS laws are expected to be disproportionally borne by small to medium enterprises (SMEs), this view needs to be tempered somewhat by the reality that 54 percent of Australian SMEs are either 'not aware', 'somewhat aware of' or 'don't know' their existing OHS obligations.

Evidence of such a paucity of knowledge of OH&S laws and obligations is a serious concern. It is therefore not surprising that employee OH&S are seriously compromised in many organisations.

One worker in a telephone interview said that work stress is *the elephant in the room*. She spoke about taking sick leave as her way of dealing with her experience of work stress and mentioned that her manager supported this individual reactive approach (W14, female, 22 years CSS). Workers using their sick leave to deal with work stress effectively conceal the real levels of stress. Other workers also commented that they use sick leave to cope with the stress created in their work environments. This raises an interesting question about whether workers chose to

leave jobs as a way of controlling stress coming from their work environment. As previously noted, retention is a major concern in this sector (South Australian Council of Social Service 2010).

2. Workers' Experiences of the Role of the Work Safe Authority

In Chapter Four the role of both state and federal governments in funding the CSS was examined. State and federal governments also play a major role in OH&S. Safe Work Australia is an Australian government statutory agency established in 2009, as the national policy body. It does not have a work health and safety regulatory role. All state and territory OH&S authorities have connecting links with the Commonwealth Government statutory authority Safe Work Australia.

Having completed an analysis of worker's experiences about OH&S systems and structures working within the CSS, it is important to discuss and analyse workers' direct experiences of the legislated structure, that is, the statutory authority, namely WorkSafe Victoria. WorkSafe Victoria is the trading (branding) name of the Victorian work cover Authority, a statutory authority of the state government of Victoria. WorkSafe Victoria's statutory obligations are covered in several Acts of parliament, including: health, safety and welfare in the workplace under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*; workers compensation and the rehabilitation of injured workers under the *Accident Compensation Act 1985*; WorkSafe injury insurance premiums under the *Accident Compensation (work cover Insurance) Act 1993*; explosives and other dangerous goods under the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985*; high-risk equipment used in non-work-related situations under the *Equipment (Public Safety) Act 1994* and mines and quarries under the *Mines Act 1958* (WorkSafe Victoria 2011b). The majority of CSS workers in Victoria are covered by WorkSafe Victoria and a major role is to help avoid workplace injuries occurring. Workers compensation coverage across Australia currently runs at 90 percent of the workforce (Safe Work Australia 2011b).

WorkSafe Victoria is funded primarily by insurance premiums paid by Victorian employers who are covered by the WorkSafe Injury Insurance Scheme. In 2010–11 this totalled \$1.8 billion (WorkSafe Victoria 2011b). Furthermore, as stated by Elana Rubin, Chair of the Board of WorkSafe Victoria, in the 2010–11 Annual Report, 'throughout Strategy 2012 we have worked on the basics: reducing work-related fatalities and injuries, improving our services, and delivering a sustainable and affordable WorkSafe Injury Insurance scheme' (2011a). Stebbins (2003 p 1) notes, 'a recent estimate puts the cost of workers' compensation claims in Australia for stress-related conditions at more than \$200 million every year.'

2.1 Workers' Experiences of WorkSafe Victoria – Complaints and Investigation Division

Several participants talked about their disappointing experiences after initiating contact with WorkSafe Victoria in its role as the investigator in a work safety issue at their place of employment. In one instance of a complaint about bullying by management, the outcome was to provide training and updated policies around bullying situations rather than assistance in addressing the actual bullying incidents themselves. The worker commented:

We had [the] work safe inspector[s] ... come ... [to our workplace]; twenty [something] members, ... current and former staff, went to see those two people and we conveyed our concerns. ... From the day of interviews the only thing that the agency has done, or been made to do, is develop a bullying policy or anti-bullying policy, and that's been plastered all over the lunch room and everything, and we now have a person employed by the agency who is the OH&S person. [This person] ... sees that there is no bullying, discrimination, whatever. ... The agency has been seen to respond to our concerns that way because they had to, but as to anything voluntary coming from executive management or the agency to our concerns, I would say no. They have dug their heels in; they're belligerent and they're very professional to you; everything's done legally, probably, but everything is unethical, immoral. You could throw words around all day. ... They're professional, as we are to them, but behind the doors it's a different story. (So there's nothing been discussed in terms of, this person, in terms of occupational health & safety, in terms of occupational stress?) Not to my knowledge, no. ... I think a lot of people are very wary of coming to their team leader, supervisor or whatever manager, saying ... 'I'm stressed out, strung out by all this.' I think we are a little too scared, but we are wearing it ourselves and we are dealing with it ourselves. (W4, female, 6 years current job)

Outcomes resulting from a WorkSafe visit in some cases are limited to directing that the agency put in place the correct paperwork. As a second worker commented on the same work safe incident above:

WorkSafe [Victoria] came in, when we went to WorkSafe and we organised that ... around bullying and harassment I believe. ... Twenty seven people came, and former employees who went up to their office to make statements, but after all that happened they came in, they found that the organisation had breached its duty by not having bullying and harassment policies in place and gave them two months to get it in place, and then left, and we have not heard from them again. (W11, male, 13 years CSS)

As can be seen from these workers' narratives, those on the ground have had little satisfaction even when they have called in WorkSafe. There is a belief that the agencies do little more, and are expected to do little more, than ensure their OH&S paperwork is up to date and satisfactory.

2.2 Workers' Experiences of Putting in Workers Compensation Claims

Workers' descriptions of the work cover journey were not positive. They stated that the processes were unclear and caused anger, pain and frustration. Many workers felt abused, confused and demoralised after dealing with work cover insurance agencies for a stress-related work injury. Kenny (1995, cited in Dollard, Winefield & Winefield 1999 p 280) noted 'a significant number of injured workers reported feelings of distress at the poor relationships they had with many of the stakeholders in the rehabilitation process, but particularly with their employer'. More recent research by Roberts-Yates (2003 p 898) found:

... impediments experienced in the return to work processes created considerable stress and concern ... [This] included the erratic payment of economic benefits, indifferent case managers, the management of the stigma associated with a registered work cover claim, a general lack of information, disrespectful communications from service providers, and a suspicious response to their injury by the employer, co-workers and some professional service providers.

One worker in this research said *the work cover experience is one to increase your stress, not decrease it* (W8, female, 30 years CSS).

Other workers described the work cover journey as 'horrendous and appalling'.

[The] work Cover system, its awful; it's not a system that encourages people. When I sit back and look at it and regardless of stress injury, physical injury or whatever, it is not a system that encourages you to get well. You consistently have to prove that you have been unwell, that you are unwell, and they threaten you with withdrawing payments and all of that kind of stuff. (W9, female, 9 years CSS)

Agencies, insurance companies and WorkSafe, in writing, tell you we deal with it, but in reality they do not. In fact, they put up all the barriers not to deal with it. [Agencies] certainly [need to] recognise when it is happening and put things in place to deal with it, instead of opposing it and rejecting it and potentially destroying people. (W13, female, 25 years CSS)

The impediments that workers have to overcome include how to survive day to day without an income while they challenge rejected claims.

I was assaulted four times last year by a client in a community residential unit and basically, for me, the work cover system is an enormous stress, of going through that whole process. My claim was denied by my organisation and so I had to battle, and in the end I didn't get anywhere, and so I had to use up my holiday pay and all accumulated leave and all that sort of stuff, and so basically it left me destitute as a result of that. So I think there's issues within the work cover system itself, and the way that it's left to you to fight it out with [them], if there is a dispute, fight it out with the management, and that they can force you to use your own accumulated benefits and entitlements and stuff. (W34, female, 19 years CSS)

Several workers mentioned poor responses by their employer after they had instigated a work cover claim. For example, various agencies or their representatives attempted to place the cause of the worker's stress elsewhere. Two main themes emerged: the stress issues were not work-related or the person was not suited to the work itself. The first of these, that the stress was not caused by the work situation but was rather something to do with the worker's personal life, or something about their interpersonal self, was often the first response of agency representatives.

According to several workers, their respective agencies and insurance companies tried to apportion blame to personal, non-work-related issues for the incurred stress and subsequent claim. As one worker commented:

We're not being nurtured and we're not having the protective gear to go and do the work we do, and then if we do suffer the consequences, it's our fault [and] nobody else's (W29, female, 10 years same agency).

Another said:

This was a consultant that they used, so one of the women who did that, did comment [about] stress, you know, relaxation kind of stuff and things about looking at your whole life and your circles of support and your areas in your life and have you got something happening in your spiritual life, your community life and in person [life]. All of that kind of stuff, looking at balances, and I kept trying to say, it's not about work/life balance, that is all cool. (W9, female, 9 years CSS)

She went on to say:

Something that's common ... with any kind of stress issues, that I have heard of [at work] or actually been part of, they did turn around and go, 'Oh, what is going on in this person's life? Let's look at that.' ... He said, 'You have got here a lot of issues and you're going to need some treatments.' (W9, female, 4 years CSS)

Another worker stated:

The so-called independent psychiatrists who see you for thirty minutes and don't even understand what an intervention order is, then write a report stating that I am too emotional ... I just could not believe what I was hearing. (W13, female, 25 years CSS)

The second common response from agencies was suggestions that the worker was not suited to this type of work and should perhaps 'move on'. One worker clearly saw that her agency tried to get rid of her, via trying to help her get another job when she was clearly very unwell. She did not work again for approximately five years due to this work-induced stress injury and the subsequent experiences with the relevant service providers. She stated:

I realised that they were trying to get me to look for jobs elsewhere, out of the organisation, through the return-to-work person. ... The return to work had nothing to

do with actually getting you back to my job, it was all to do with helping you find work somewhere else; doing something else. (W9, female, 9 years CSS)

She went on to say:

Basically, I remember being told that you, you let these people know that they need to get back to work and the work is not going to change. And so they need to actually look at whether they are suited for it and the encouragement would be to encourage them to move on, just like myself. So I know that was the position ... So here I am being advised that this is what I need to do to manage my health. (W9, female, 9 years CSS)

Another worker commented:

Strange thing, [I] ... ended up ... on work cover then we had,-... it was going to court and all this sort of thing. I just cracked it [in] the end and thought, I can't cope with this any longer; and it was going on and on and getting nowhere, and so I left and took another job. (W23, female, 15 years CSS)

As stated by the then NSW Commissioner for Legal Services (Mark, 2001 p 6):

It is also hard to imagine how the system will be fundamentally improved while the insurance industry can benefit from stringing settlements out or making unrealistically low settlement offers in the hope that a certain percentage of those offers will be accepted due to the stress and strain of proceeding down the adversarial path. This area of insurance practice needs more direct regulation.

Several workers have highlighted the difficult and challenging work cover journey and it is not unreasonable to conclude from this evidence that this is not an uncommon experience. One worker said her experience of work cover for a work stress claim was an appallingly lengthy process in which she had to borrow money from her parents in order to pay the rent and feed her family. She stated:

[In] my case I [was told] I would get a response within fourteen days. Four weeks later no response, right! (Were you getting paid by work cover?) No, they refused to pay me, and because of that I was not eligible for any benefit, right. (Pending the claim?) Yeah. So it basically left me destitute. I had to borrow money to pay my rent; it was just outrageous what happened ... So then I ring them four weeks later and I said, well, your policy stated you've got fourteen [days] to respond. He goes, 'Oh no, the psychiatrist is on leave and we can't do anything until she gets back.' I said, 'But that is not within your policy, and I don't give a shit if she is on leave, right? So my life depends on a psychiatrist [who] has met me for 30 minutes and is on leave; is that what you're telling me?' I was furious, and so I kept ringing and ringing, and I did not get an answer until I went to the union. The union organised conciliation for me. ... [I] won that case. ... When I say I won the case, it went to conciliation. They [the agency] had to pay me, they paid me but in the meantime they terminated my contract. (W13, female, 25 years CSS)

The Safe Work Australia report (2012b p 5) estimated the cost of work-related injury and illness in 2008–09. They apportioned 5 percent of these costs to the employer, 74 percent to the workers and 21 percent to the community. Clearly the workers' narratives confirm this situation in which workers bear the greatest economic costs when trying to address the injury they have incurred through work, although the workers' voices are telling us it is not only economic pain but psychological, emotional and physical pain. The experience of high work stress has been linked to the development of heart attacks, depression and other illnesses (Blewett et al. 2006; LaMontagne, Sanderson & Cocker 2010).

The sharing of workers' experiences of putting in a work cover claim was mostly discussed in the one-to-one interviews. There was limited discussion about WorkSafe or work cover in the focus groups. However, this may have been due to the personal and private nature of the experience. As documented in the previous chapter there is the stigma surrounding mental illness including psychological work injuries (work stress). Nonetheless, workers mentioned breakdowns, depression, post-traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, burnout and stress (see Appendix Table 4). Roberts-Yates (2003 p 904) has discussed the social stigma associated with putting in a worker's compensation claim: 'the myths about workers' compensation create the belief that injured workers are usually malingerers. Too many of the respondents considered workplace injury to be the modern equivalent of leprosy.' Furthermore, as Dollard (2003 p 4) states, 'Also in Australia there is a lot of stigma associated with making stress claims, which may inhibit people from making them. There may also be organisational challenges to stress claims. Claim rates therefore do not reflect the stress risk of work environments'.

During 2005–06 it was reported that the Health and Community Services industry (H&CS) workers were less likely to claim workers compensation than those in other industries (Safe Work Australia 2009). There was no explanation as to why this was the case. Furthermore, in this report it is noted that the national data set only captured one in three injuries involving stress or other mental conditions and that claims in the H&CS were underestimated.

The workers' experiences in the current study provide a picture that all is not well, and nor does it end well for workers in regards to work cover claims. Workers' experiences of the state government's WorkSafe authority, especially its work cover claims area, were not positive experiences. Guthrie and Jansz (2006 p 485) neatly sum up women's experience of the workers compensation scheme in Australia:

The Australian experience suggests that as a consequence of the combination of lesser industrial bargaining power, lower wages and differing forms of injury and disease women often receive less than men in compensation payments, struggle to obtain equity in the dispute resolution process and experience greater difficulties in returning to work following injury or disease.

They further noted that the nature of women's claims is stress-related and repetitive strain injuries (RSI) and that these are medically and legally complex, receive greater scrutiny by employers and insurers, and are frequently not accepted. These are important observations and have direct applicability to the CSS, which as we know is predominately a female industry. The four participants whose experiences of work cover are documented above never returned to their respective workplaces and eventually found work elsewhere.

There has been important research completed by Guthrie, Ciccarelli & Babic (2010) into the structural and legislative amendments put in place by all state and territory jurisdictions that helps explain the negative experiences of workers accessing work cover in Victoria. In their concluding paragraph they (Guthrie, Ciccarelli & Babic 2010 p 107) state that 'to combat the rising costs, each state and territory has implemented legislative amendments to reduce the number of compensable stress-related claims lodged by workers'. Victoria was the lead state government in developing these stress claim exclusion clauses. Larsen's research (1995 p 237) 15 years ago, into workers compensations claims for work stress in the USA, discouraged this approach and recommended a more proactive preventive strategy. He stated that 'These suggested preventive interventions involve a philosophy fundamentally different from merely changing the definition of injury so as to reduce claims.' Larsen's (1995 p 236) preventive measures included: 'employee education, supervisor training, employee assistance programs, early intervention, mediation services, outpatient mental health benefit, comprehensive psychiatric examination, claims review, documentation and premium reductions'. Some of Larsen's suggested preventive measures are part of the Australian OH&S landscape today, such as EAP and mediation. However, it is concerning that Australian state governments in the last few years are implementing legislative strategies to reduce claims by amending definitions of actionable injury, particularly in relation to stress. It is a reactive approach and flies in the face of much research into work stress recommending proactive approaches to reducing the stress in the first place, as well as not making it harder for workers to seek recompense through the legislative processes. This was not the first time this reactive response has been taken in terms of work stress. Cotton & Jackson (1996 p 248) note: 'massive cost increases over the past 5 years have recently prompted moves to restrict availability of compensation in most jurisdictions'.

A recent Safe Work Australia report (2011c p vii) states 'In 2009–10 injuries incurred in falls were the most likely to be compensated while injuries from exposure to mental stress were the least likely to be compensated'. A further difficulty for contractual and casual workers is their particular vulnerable position in terms of future job prospects if they lodge a stress claim (Dollard, Winefield & Winefield 1999).

As one worker commented in a focus group:

I've just got a half thought, which was just triggered by a comment earlier about parallel processes, where I'm just thinking, we're dealing with people who have been abused by the system in one way, and at the same time we are ourselves being abused by our systems. (W25, female, 7 years CSS)

In Lippel's (2007 p 435, 437) research into workers' narratives about the compensation process, she notes 'the issue of power imbalance in the legal context is not new, nor is it exclusive to the field of workers' compensation'. She goes on to say, 'the fact that the worker can feel blamed in the process, while the fault of the employer is not an issue, contributes to both feelings of stigma and power imbalance'. At the worker level, Roberts-Yates (2003 p 906) suggests that what is needed is 'the education of work-mates and the community in order to promote a non-judgemental response to "invisible" injuries'.

As confirmed in the workers' narratives, the workers compensation system is an adversarial model and the power in this compensation system does not lie with the injured workers (Lippel 2007). Steve Mark, the NSW Commissioner of Legal Services (2001 p 7), concluded in his paper:

the present system is based on adversarialism, litigation and a focus on the interests of the legal, insurance and medical professions rather than being driven by the needs and perceptions of the injured party.

As Mark (2001) comments, it is no surprise that the medical research shows that the processes of work-related injury cases in itself makes people sick.

3. Workers' Perspective of the Unions

Unions are major players in protecting unionised workers. Workers commented on this protective role of the respective unions and particularly aspects such as Union Assist. Union Assist provides work cover conciliation support for union members through the Victorian Trades Hall Council.²⁹ As one worker in a focus group commented, *Trust me, you are going to need them one day, you really are, because no-one else can help you, except the union. (W37, female, 25 years CSS)*

The power of the unions is compromised by the small membership compared to the number of workers. However union membership is rising according to the respective unions. In the ASU magazine (Australian Services Union 2011 p 4), membership from the social and community services (SACS) industry was 14 percent of female and 4 percent of male union membership. According to a report by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (2011c p 10):

²⁹ Victorian Trades Hall Council website www.vthc.org.au dated 3/1/2012

The strong female participation is also a reflection of the growing numbers of women who are union members. In 2010 female union density was higher than male union density for the first time.

According to the latest ABS figures (2012), union membership as at August 2011 for full-time workers was 20.2 percent, while for part-time workers it was 14.2 percent. For all workers, union membership was 18.4 percent for males and 18.3 percent for females. These low figures do limit union power. Several workers commented that they see, understand and accept this reality. One worker said, *there are a few in the union; not many (W23, female, 15 years CSS)*.

In addition, the increase in the CSS of casual, part-time and short-term contractual work adds to challenges for union recruitment strategies. According to the Workplace Research Centre (2007 p 86), 'Permanent employees are more likely than contract or casual workers to be members, as are higher-skilled employees.' As has been discussed, insecure work makes for a more compliant workforce.

The ASU has always had particular struggles in recruitment and in its industrial protective roles within the CSS, as outlined in the literature review chapter. As Quiggin (2010 p 172) states:

The decline in union membership has almost certainly played a substantial role in promoting inequality in market incomes, not to mention the removal of checks to the power and prerogatives of managers.

In addition, governments, sub-sectoral peak bodies and the agencies themselves are aware of the curtailed protections that unions can enact to support and protect workers when they have such a low membership base.

The heyday of union power from high union membership has passed. It has been eroded by the development and gradual dominance since the mid-1980s of a neo-liberal (economic rationalist) paradigm. As Crouch (1986, cited in Heery 2009 p 327) noted, 'the dominant policy of elites towards trade unionism under neo-liberalism is one of exclusion'. Free market economic liberalism incorporates a drive for greater casual and contractual workforce under the guise of flexibility and efficiency. It has the added benefit, for employers, that workers can also be dispensed with more easily, with greater speed and less cost. In addition permanent workers are more likely to be union members as opposed to casual and contractual workers. This slippage of union power through the decline in membership has led to less industrial muscle of unions to negotiate, defend and support its unionised workers.

In reality, more workers are sliding into insecure employment and this makes it harder to fight to improve working conditions and wages. As discussed earlier, living day in and day out with insecure employment is stressful. According to the report by the Australian Council of Trade Unions, using ABS 2010 figures, 16 percent of the H&CS workers are on fixed-term contracts (Australian Council of Trade Unions 2011b). Furthermore, over a decade ago

Leonard's (2002) research into women's volunteering in the human services industry noted the highly casualised workforce, as well as its culture of personal commitment.

One long-term worker and rights activist commented:

Admittedly, unionisation in the community sector was always behind the health sector, but there were times when the ASWU [Australian Social Welfare Union], which preceded the ASU (SACS) division, worked hard at building a sense of consciousness and provided support for workers in the community sector. I won't say there was a halcyon period, but since the early 1990s things have not [been] good, be it in terms of unionisation, or the ability of all workers, not just community sector workers, to tackle stressors. (W41, male, 25 years CSS)

As one worker stated, *[the] agency refused to have union involvement in the Enterprise Bargain Agreement* and furthermore he shared that *'the CEO sent letters to all staff stating union workers at the agency were scornful of their clients and not interested in their welfare'* (W11, male, 13 years in CSS). This worker also commented that the union membership currently in this organisation was around a third, although workers who are union members were leaving the agency. He stated this is due to them being unfairly targeted by management.

Some of the workers' comments were made about experiences that occurred prior to the changes made by the current Labor government. One major initiative of the Labor government was setting up Fair Work Australia and the subsequent changes in policies and directions emanating from this new structure. It is reasonable to state that unions in a general sense have gained back some powers under the current federal Labour government in Australia. Vromen (2005) suggests unions are a more insider interest group with a Labor government and a more outsider interest group with a Liberal government.

An added challenge for the two respective unions (ASU and H&CSU) in their roles in the fight for better pay and conditions in this sector is around 'the clients come first' rhetoric: the underlying altruism and idealism rhetoric. These concepts have been discussed and analysed in Chapter Four. As one worker noted:

I think our voices as ... low paid workers, is that we often are so busy doing for others that we don't ... collectivise around our own rights. ... We neglect ourselves, to our own detriment [and] to our sector's detriment as well. (W34, female, 19 years CSS)

Another structural difficulty is the union representative/delegate roles. These workers are more vulnerable to being targeted by management due to the nature of these roles, often challenging management decisions and hence management's power position over workers. This situation can be exacerbated in smaller agencies in which staff numbers are few. It is easier to target a representative when the effects may be minimal in terms of the contractual obligations and general running of an agency. One union delegate spoke about the targeting processes by

management in response to my prompt question: ‘Do you feel that there is stress due to your union role and signing that letter. What’s the mix for you in terms of issues?’

Oh yeah, it’s been stressed right up, you know it’s been, I mean, every time it seems to me, that every time I hop out of my chair I get hit with some sort of threat of a disciplinary hearing or disciplinary letter. (W11, male, 13 years CSS)

This worker went on to state, rather dryly, in reference to his union delegate role:

I have been involved in nine grievance procedures in the last two years and seven of them were with [supporting] non-union members; they have taken out grievance procedures against members of the executive [staff], so I guess that didn’t win me that many friends either. (W11, male, 13 years CSS)

The difficulties and challenges for worker representatives, whether they are health and safety representatives or union delegates, pivot around who has the relative power in agencies. Under the present conditions it can be reasonably asserted that it is management who has greater power. This is the result in part of the casualised and feminised nature of the CSS workforce (Gunningham & Sinclair 2009). As the above union delegate noted in reference to a colleague who is also a newly active unionist as well as an OH&S representative, in his opinion her career path in this organisation will now come to an abrupt stop due to her activism (W11, male, 13 years CSS).

Another worker, however, fairly new to the union delegate’s role, felt the opposite, and he said:

I am the delegate because I think it actually gives me a little bit of support and clout if you want to call it that, to feel safer in my position ... I can now raise issues on behalf of the membership without identifying anybody and still be professional and pleasant to everyone and say these are the issues that have been brought to me, and present them to management. (W7, male, 15 years CSS)

The above scenario is unusual in that there is a 90 percent union membership in this worker’s particular organisation. There is obvious strength and protection in cases where most of the workforce is unionised. As the old union saying goes: ‘united we stand, divided we fall’.

One worker spoke about the targeting of workers who are known to be in a union and the level of ongoing stress that this brought:

... going through an enterprise bargaining agreement negotiation at the moment and this has been in the throes probably for the last two years, the amount of stress, angst and anxiety that has been levelled at people like myself who are a union member. (W4, female, 6 years same agency)

Several workers in focus groups spoke of the union being a buffer against individual stressful worker-versus-management issues. A number of workers spoke about the protective nature of union membership:

Trust me, you are going to need them one day, you really are, because no-one else can help you, except the union. I know; I've been there, and I wasn't in the union at the time; couldn't be helped, even by solicitors. And they said, well, you should have been in the union. So I learned my lesson. (W37, female, 25 years CSS)

My involvement in the union has really been the only thing keeping my head above water, really, in terms of my own sanity. (W34, female, 19 years CSS)

We've had four good, I'd say very good, friends and colleagues go on work cover and stress leave; at least four in the last twelve months. (Four in the one organisation for work cover?) Yes, and they weren't in the union, and I think the only reason I survived is that I've been in the union. And when I've needed support, they'd come down and they've been there, and so of course management will think twice about that. (W30, female, 20 years CSS)

The last worker shared that in her agency a doubling of workloads transpired for her and her colleagues in the specific direct care section of the agency, with no extra workers being employed to complete the increased workload. Additional higher status workers, including management, were employed, however. As research has highlighted, those less qualified and with lower status are treated less well (Meagher & Healy 2005, 2006).

Another worker spoke about a 50 percent turnover of direct service staff due to a current conflict between management and workers. She stated that *the union have been like a breath of fresh air; it is so good to know we have people looking out for us and who are familiar with the issues. (W16, female, 24 years CSS).*

In the findings, most of the workers spoke about themselves as well as fellow staff as 'people' and not as 'workers' or 'colleagues' per se. One can speculate whether seeing and talking about yourself and colleagues as people does in fact, contribute to the difficulties some individuals have in taking action on improving pay, terms and working conditions as 'workers'. Clearly workers have industrial rights, but do 'people' have industrial rights? For example, workers in the construction industry do not identify themselves as people, but as construction workers, who are known to have a strong union base in which they fight 'as workers' for improved pay and working conditions. Perhaps it is still viewed that the more emotional caring work is not real work, unlike the more physical, bricks-and-mortar work of the construction industry. This language of 'person' rather than 'worker' also fits neatly into the discourse about the 'entrepreneurial self', a form of neo-liberal selfhood, wherein each individual is deemed responsible for creating and driving their own employment opportunities (Hall, S & Du Gay 1996; Wright, RD 1998). Within this radically individualised view of the world the individual must, as Wright points out, live up to the demands of the hyper-competitive market and be endlessly performative. Such thinking is exemplified in Margaret Thatcher's comment to the effect that 'there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their choices'. The consequence of expelling any notion of society or social collectivism, however, leaves

individuals isolated in their workplaces and communities without means of support or capacity to improve their lot.

Allied to the problems associated with a radical individualism, as Davis (1987) notes, are the challenges in this particular industry for workers to fight for better wages when in their daily work they come face-to-face with people who are much worse off than themselves. This may in part explain the reluctance on the part of some CSS workers to self-identify as industrial workers.

The neo-liberalism policies from the mid-1980s onwards have led to a subsequent increase in casual and fixed-term contracts in many industries, including the CSS. Union membership Australia wide has declined in this period. The overall situation makes it harder for unions to flex their industrial muscle on behalf of unionised workers. Linda White (2010), the current Assistant National Secretary of the ASU, encapsulated many of the issues regarding the CSS. At the Care, Social Inclusion and Citizenship conference (2010) she noted the challenges of governments' outsourcing of work through tendering processes; the diverse and poorly connected sector made up of small organisation, large charities, some for profit and most not-for-profits; the involvement of national organisations such as churches, charities and peak organisations that do not have an industrial relations focus, and the overall unsophisticated industrial relations scenario of the sector.

4. Summary

The overarching OH&S government legislated systems and structures (regulations and codes of practices) relevant to all industries, including the CSS, have distinct limitations in their preventative and post injury treatment roles at the organisational level. The state government OH&S legislation has mechanisms in place in order to protect workers from workplace injuries. There are, however, inherent structural difficulties which prevent these policies and guidelines working well on the shop floor in the respective agencies in the CSS.

As Kenny (1995, cited in Dollard, Winefield & Winefield 1999 p 280) argues, 'the rules and norms of the workplaces are productivity and cost containment'. The workers' voices as well as the statistics about psychological injuries in the CSS have been a testament to the difficulties and challenges of providing a safe and healthy workplace. In a way it is not surprising that agencies and their managers try to ignore workers' stress as it can be understood, consciously and I suspect unconsciously, as an intractable problem. In a poorly funded sector it is counterproductive to acknowledge and attempt to act on something that cannot be adequately addressed.

Mayhew & Chappel (2007 p 328) point to the struggles of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). This is a body that is concerned with protection of the OH&S of workers

on the global stage. The ILO's original draft Code of Practice in 2003 included a substantial and broad definition of workplace violence including homicide, bullying, mobbing, harassment and mental stress. After lobbying by employer groups this was reduced to read:

... any action, incident or behaviour that departs from reasonable conduct in which a person is assaulted, threatened, harmed, or injured in the course of, or as a direct result of, his or her work.

Mayhew & Chappell (2007 p 328) explain:

this definition came under severe pressure, principally from employer experts who sought to limit the scope of the compromise code to intentional acts of physical violence and to exclude workplace stress entirely from the document.

There are health and safety committees that are meant to oversee OH&S issues; however, these have proven in many instances to be of limited efficacy. Management can seek to redefine codes of practice as in the ILO case cited above, or they can simply stand in the way through inaction. In the CSS managerial reluctance to address the difficult issues that are causing work stress and subsequent high number of psychological injuries in the CSS has simply deepened these problems. Funding for this sector is strongly reliant on governments, state and federal, and the money is in short supply. Hence there are difficulties in obtaining funds to enable workers to access OH&S training to assist them in the ongoing work that is required to maintain healthy and safe workplaces.

Other important players are the relevant unions and their respective roles in protecting, advocating for and supporting workers in the CSS. As documented, workers could not do without them, but the reality of a small membership base has its limitations when assisting workers on a representative and advocacy level. Unions have been hamstrung as a result of the global economic rationalist agendas and governments adopting economic free market approaches to the labour market (deregulation). Tendering and the subsequent opening up of competition between CSS agencies has resulted in increased casual and short-term contracts. These new realities of increased instability in employment limit recruitment opportunities for unions; membership is their life blood and it has been seriously curtailed.

The findings show that the relevant systems and structures have an effect upon workers in their daily working lives in the CSS. From an occupational and health perspective the systems and structures frequently fail with regard to protection and rehabilitation of injured workers. Pearce (2006a p 4) comments, 'the primary focus on tackling the problem of accelerating psychological injury claims in the workplace may lie in greater resource allocation focused on prevention and rehabilitation'. This is a huge problem for a sector that at its very core has major funding shortages. It has led to strategies being implemented by management that have demonstrably negative health and safety outcomes for the workforce.

5. Workers' Ideas on Reducing Work Stress in the CSS

5.1 Introduction

Workers were specifically asked the question: Have you got any ideas for reducing job stress in the community sector? Many of the workers' suggestions for change are included throughout the thesis, but further detail arose through this final question. As one worker commented, *Work stress has to be made a priority and it needs to be dealt with in a thoughtful, respectful and thorough way (W10, female, 15 years CSS).*

Interestingly, there was minimal focus on legislated OH&S in the workers' discourse. However, occupational health and safety issues are present throughout the workers' narratives in more indirect ways. As previously documented, there has been little training and focus on OH&S, especially work stress in this sector, so it is not surprising that the umbrella term 'OH&S' is not in the forefront of the workers' vocabulary.

5.2 Funding Is Pivotal

Many workers expressed an understanding that funding shortages in the CSS caused stress for workers and a frequent recommendation was the need for substantial funding increases for agencies to operate in a sustainable way. As one worker commented, *I can't see there's any other solution besides increased funding (W29, female, 10 years same agency).* Workers clearly saw this as a major structural issue that is strongly linked to the poor pay and conditions experienced by workers.

The inadequacy of current funding arrangements underpinned many of the workers' comments. One worker in a focus group shared thoughts about workers setting the agenda on developing caseload formulas as a positive way of reducing the workload and subsequent stress this causes (W28, female, 16 years CSS). Given the clear knowledge that this sector loads up the workers for reasons mainly to do with the funding limitations and accepted contractual agreements, this would be a big call for the management structures in organisations to enact. It would need collective action by workers and the sector as a whole to push the government of the day. It would also take the active involvement of a considerable section of the public to get behind such a strategy. The relevant state and federal peak CSS representative bodies regularly present to state and federal governments the facts about this underfunded sector at pre-budget allocation time, often to no avail.

Inadequate funding impacts directly on the sector and is reflected in the poor pay rates for workers. Many workers commented on the need for improvements in pay and conditions. As one worker noted, low pay affects workers' lives beyond the workplace and hence exacerbates any stress that is already being experienced.

[We need] better pay rates. As we all know, workers in community organisations are paid comparatively low rates and I think that this contributes to workers' stress, as we are working long and often difficult hours and still having to manage our own lives on lower than average incomes. I think that this is especially relevant given the qualification and experience requirements of most of the field. (W19, female, 8 years CSS)

Other workers also recognised low pay and poor conditions as precursors of work stress:

If you want to stabilise the workforce, you've got to have people ... feeling that they're paid the proper wages, [or] ... people are going to keep moving; they'll leave the sector, or leave to try to find another job. (W29, female, 10 years same agency)

[We need] much better pay and conditions and decreased workloads. (W20, female, 12 years CSS)

Interviews with workers took place before the 1 February 2012 Fair Work Australia decision regarding the Social and Community Services (SACS) modern award. Fair Work Australia handed down a decision to award wage increases ranging from 19 to 41 percent, further evidence of how exceedingly low the wages have been in this field. These changes will be brought in on an incremental basis over eight years. It remains to be seen if there will be a concomitant increase in funding or whether fewer staff will be expected to complete the same amount of work. This would only result in better-paid workers doing even more work and by itself will not decrease work stressors. Furthermore, each state and territory is expected by the Commonwealth Government to contribute a fair share of the funds needed to pay for the award increases in wages. Presently the State Government in Victoria has not made a decision on the level of funding it will provide as part of state and federal funding arrangements to pay for the Fair Work Australia pay decision. As is evidenced in the research, one strategy currently employed by organisations is to down-grade the qualifications needed to do the work and hence save on wages by employing less-qualified workers (Meagher 2007; Meagher & Healy 2006). There may also be a greater focus on bringing in even greater numbers of volunteers to buffer organisations against the increase in wages.

As discussed in earlier chapters the poor pay and conditions fits with the Effort–Reward Imbalance work stress model. There is a substantial imbalance in what is expected of the workers and clearly given by workers in this sector, and the minimal rewards received.

The impoverished funding models in the CSS appear to be set in concrete and it would take several significant blasts to break down and then reconstruct this well-established foundation. The Allen Consulting Group report (2008), which was commissioned by the CSS peak body VCOS, found that half of the organisations would respond to insufficient funding by decreasing working conditions. The organisational responses included requiring workers to take on further duties without additional pay, reducing staff numbers and reducing wages. In the long

run, with increasing psychological injury and work cover claims, this strategy is counterproductive.

5.3 Need for a More Open Culture

Workers spoke about cultural changes as an important aspect for reducing work stress in the CSS. There were many comments from workers about how they often felt devalued and neglected. It was widely felt that a degree of cultural change on the part of managers was necessary. Managers, they claim, need to change how they view and treat their workers, including, in particular, according them more respect. As one long-term worker suggested, agencies need to tell workers that they are valued, that they are important and will be supported and *that they value what [we] do.* (W10, female, 15 years CSS)

Several workers spoke of the need for a more open culture:

Maintaining a culture of open constructive criticism and support ... constructive questioning to maximise creative problem solving. (W16, female, 24 years CSS)

[Need] consultation that is meaningful consultation, like not just, 'Yes, this is what you are going to do now; isn't it great and thanks.' ... it needs to be genuine. Workers [need to] feel like they can speak up and talk about things, [such as] workloads that are sustainable. I also think that this is not 'pie in the sky' [stuff]. I think there is a lot of room to do things better and it would mean a massive reduction in occupational stress. (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 years ASU)

Given the current direction of an audit and accounting culture this would be certainly going against current management policy practices. It does indicate, however, a pressing need to dispense with the limited and reductive economic and accounting focus of contemporary managerialism.

The workers' narratives throughout this research clearly highlight a culture of neglect with respect to workers in the CSS. One could use the term 'organisational neglect' to best describe the current situation. There appears minimal will to take the strong action needed by those in the power positions to seriously change this culture of neglect to address workers' stress.

5.4 Supervision, Debriefing and Critical Incident Stress Management Action

Further evidence of this 'organisational neglect' is seen in the current supervisory arrangements. Flaws in the current supervision models were frequently mentioned by workers as adding to their feelings of stress at work. A notable comment was made by one worker regarding supervision. She wrote:

I think that supervision needs to include accountability practices (monitoring and review of cases, etc.) and worker's care. This should include checking in with workers as to how they are coping and an opportunity to acknowledge the impact of our work.

In my experience this worker care is often the 'very poor cousin' in supervision and whilst I understand how this occurs (and am guilty of perpetuating this situation) I think that the health of a worker needs to be paramount. (W19, female, 8 years CSS)

Workers' comments about supervisory arrangements included monthly supervision, quality professional supervision, peer-led supervision, internal and external supervision and, most importantly, supervision that is more than a focus on line management needs. The withdrawal of professional supervision is another example of the de-professionalisation that is occurring in the sector. As noted in Chapter Four, one worker found that her manager did not even know what professional supervision was, why it was considered essential for good practice, or what use it would be (W10, female, 15 years CSS).

Several workers suggested peer-led support, as one worker commented:

regular peer support meetings including time for case discussion and blowing off steam. (W16, female, 24 years CSS)

Without such avenues to debrief, stress levels can become chronic and lead to greater psychological injury, which can ultimately result in work cover claims.

Another worker stated:

Regular daily periods in work time for workers to deal with stress by sleeping, meditating, praying, exercising, or whatever works for them (one hour per day). (W16, female, 24 years CSS)

Several workers stated the importance of debriefing. As one worker commented:

I know one workplace I was at where we demanded in the end, [and] set aside half an hour at the end of every day, to debrief and we'd talk. (W25, female, 7 years CSS)

Workers also recognised the fundamental need for debriefing after a critical incident. One worker spoke about the need for managers and supervisors to be on the lookout for vicarious traumatisation and deal with it early:

Critical incidents and vicarious trauma needs to be taken much more seriously by staff and agencies. (W39, female, 20 years CSS)

An experienced worker commented:

Vicarious traumatisation is a given; you have permission to talk about it and you need to talk about it and the second part [is to] meet every two months ... and have group debriefing with [a] facilitator. (W10, female, 15 years CSS)

Workers plainly saw that the stress from the work itself needed a place to be addressed. Adequate professional supervision is designed, in part, to fulfil this role, yet supervision was not available for most of the workers. As well as missing the professional outcomes of supervision itself, workers clearly saw this lack as a devaluation of them and their work. It was another reflection of the lack of reciprocity that so many found exacerbated their stress.

5.5 Management Change

Workers clearly saw a need for change in management behaviour. The need for managers to change the way they interact with workers on many levels was forcefully articulated by the majority of workers. One worker pointed out the need for a cultural change in attitude by managers, especially towards workers' OH&S issues (W16, female, 24 years CSS).

As mentioned above, workers wanted to see managers showing them more respect and acknowledgment that they and their work are valued. Two workers made comments about managers needing to validate, support and acknowledge the hard work they complete and the need to reduce the workload levels (W28, female, 16 years CSS; W38, female, 1 year CSS). They also wanted managers to better support them, especially when they are in distress after a critical incident or experiencing symptoms of vicarious trauma.

Several workers made suggestions such as the need for better qualified and trained managers, as well as the need to pay managers better salaries. As one worker commented with regard to managers:

one of the major issues for the sector [that's] missing, [is the need to] attract better qualified, better trained people. (W26, female, 7 years one agency, unsure others)

One worker commented that managers need specific training about work stress in order to better support stressed staff (W16, female, 24 years CSS). A rather telling written comment was made by one worker about her experience of management:

A system where it's ok to say you're not coping and a system where the case manger's cry for help is heard by line manager and/or pastoral care worker if current manager is unable to manage the situation adequately. (W21, female, 3½ years CSS)

One experienced and well qualified worker made a variety of comments about managers performing better in terms of taking more responsibility and action:

Management responding appropriately and in a timely manner to workers who are traumatised by incidents they were involved in or witnessed; adhering to policies of worker safety from the top down; better education and training in ethical practice, particularly for management; experienced and highly qualified managers rather than young people with lots of knowledge, quick-fix attitudes and the gift of the gab but no real wisdom or understanding of their clients' or their workers' needs. (W20, female, 12 years CSS)

Several workers suggested the option of working 48 weeks instead of 52 weeks per year.³⁰ The major drawback with this 48/52 option is that usually there is no back fill provided whilst the worker has extended annual leave. This leads to extra work for other workers whilst the

³⁰ A 48/52 arrangement means that a worker is paid for 48 weeks spread over 52 weeks, which allows 8 weeks annual leave per year.

agency stands to save money in terms of a reduction in staff salaries. One point highlighted in the previous chapter was the interim pressures on workers when someone leaves and extra work falls upon those left working. As one worker commented, management need to fill gaps in staff more quickly, as those left behind have to do the extra work created by the vacancy. She stated: *it's just sitting there as a vacancy and, like at our [work], we've had all these vacancies and they're not even advertised (W38, female, 1 year CSS).*

5.6 Committees of Managements and Boards of Management Changes

Part of the more open culture that workers would like to see includes having access to boards and committees of management (W39, female, 20 years CSS). Workers want more consultation with boards and committees of management, especially about their ideas for much-needed changes to reduce work stress.

Workers stressed the need for more open and transparent boards and committees of management in this sector. Several workers put forward ideas for change in regards to boards. One worker suggested:

There need to be clear guidelines for the appointment of not-for-profit agency boards that are publically funded. There need to be clear guidelines around governance procedures and transparency. All board members of a publically funded not-for-profit service delivery organisation should be listed by that organisation and their qualifications detailed in the annual report and [on] any organisation website. (W18, male, 10 years CSS)

There was also mention of better access to boards that may come from a more open culture.

Not having access to boards and committees of management added to workers' feelings of disempowerment. As well as having less say over their work, in terms of increased audit requirements and lack of real consultation, not being able to access boards and committees of management when workers had legitimate grievances added to their disenfranchisement and hence their stress.

5.7 Changes at the Organisational Level

There were further suggestions for stress reduction at the agency level. This is not surprising as it is where the workers toil day in and day out. Although there was little talk of OH&S specifically, the workers clearly saw that increased training on OH&S would assist in reducing work stressors. This would be a start insofar as workers would be more informed of their rights around work health, in particular psychological health at work.

One worker stated that agencies need to prioritise staff welfare; to listen to staff needs (W10, female, 15 years CSS). Two workers commented on the safety aspect. One suggested better

security at work to alleviate incidents and subsequent stress (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 years ASU). Another worker stated:

In terms of the stress and the stressors in the [direct personal care work] ... I think workers are at risk. It is a particularly difficult issue and rather urgently, from a safety perspective, there ought to be procedures in place to protect workers. (W26, female, 7 years once agency; unsure other workplaces)

Workers did know about employee assistance programs (EAPs). Workers were also clearly aware that the number of counselling sessions available to employees was demonstrably inadequate when it came to dealing with the range of workers' health issues. One worker commented: *[We need] more EAP sessions, as four are not enough when working through issues; twelve per year is more reasonable in this line of work (W21, female, 3½ years CSS).*

Awareness of EAPs is not surprising, as they are heavily promoted as an option to address work stress. To a certain extent they are held up as the panacea for addressing workers' issues. EAPs are part of the secondary and tertiary prevention responses that organisations prefer when addressing workers' issues, including work stress. Secondary and tertiary responses are favoured over primary prevention strategies, but this is not the most effective model as evidenced from a wide body of research (Dollard, LaMontagne et al. 2007; LaMontagne et al. 2007). Primary prevention is the most successful model for reducing work stress. Work stress is primarily emanating from the systems and structures. Ideally the focus on change needs to occur here, not by the worker cajoling herself to better handle work stress. As Arthur (2000 p 557) suggests about EAPs:

... they must be part of holistic strategies, involving management, human resources and occupational health, to evaluate policies, procedures, work patterns, communications, decision-making and employee empowerment within organisations. They are not in themselves effective enough to counter the effects of stressful work environments.

These important points are reinforced and further supported in research by Dollard, Winefield et al. (1999 p 286) completed over a decade ago which suggested:

To prevent occupational stress, reduce the number of stress claims, and improve return-to-work outcomes, one's focus should be on a reduction of workplace stressors (e.g. reducing heavy workloads, management change in philosophy and policies for supporting workers, and conflict resolution/restraint training for dealing with violent clients). In the absence of change, stress responses to adverse work conditions should be normalized.

Several workers commented on changes needed in policy and procedures (P&Ps), such as increased worker input and evaluation of P&Ps (W6, female, 5 years one agency; W29, female, 10 years+ one agency; W28, female, 16 years CSS).

5.8 Stigma Reduction Strategies

A culture of silence forms a component of the culture of neglect. The silence in this instance relates to the stigmatisation of stressed workers. Direct comments by two workers spoke of the culture of silence that surrounds work stress and of the need for this to change:

We all still pretend, but until you actually get this out and say 'These jobs are stressful,' then you can't start having a dialogue about how to resolve this. How do we make it less stressful? ... There are some things we can't change and there are some things that we can, or we can do better at, but until we create the space to have the dialogue, you will not see a change. (W40, female, 12 years CSS)

There is a stigma to stress; you can't name it, and you can't just acknowledge it. If we can't deal with it, I guess how you can do anything about it? (W39, female, 20 years CSS).

Workers throughout this research have spoken of the need for a more open culture, and part of that openness needs to include permission to discuss work stress, its causes, effects and preventative strategies. Naming the stigma surrounding work stress is a small step toward agencies developing a more open culture. Management needs to drive, not obstruct, the flowering of more open cultures through acknowledging stress and work stressors.

5.9 Secondment

One suggestion, in terms of sector-wide structural changes, was to put in place staff rotations or secondments especially for frontline workers, as a mechanism to reduce stress. This is in place in other industries such as teaching, academia and religious fields. This would be a more primary and hence proactive approach to stress reduction, and may also assist in some reduction of the current serious retention problems occurring in this sector. As one worker commented, *people need to be taken off the front line and [given] a rest (W36, male, 5 years CSS)*. Another worker suggested *varied roles; change case loads – particularly demanding clients/family members (W21, female, 3½ years CSS)*.

It may be difficult to develop a secondment strategy between CSS agencies, as the funding arrangements are currently based on a competitive tendering model in which fostering cooperation and collegiality is limited. However, a secondary advantage of secondments may be that it would enhance cooperation and support between services, albeit with inherent challenges and difficulties. Secondments could also be initiated between government departments and CSS agencies. However, the government in many ways considers itself 'steering and not rowing' in terms of its role with the CSS and perhaps may not think secondments are appropriate between the steering of the state government department and the rowing of CSS agencies and their staff.

5.10 Training Ideas

Workers spoke about training to assist in doing their work, to increase confidence and for professional development (W6, female, 5 years one agency; W16, female, 24 years CSS; W19, female, 8 years CSS). Another worker stated:

I think we need to get [quality] training and education services. I think workers who go to high quality, valuable training manage their stress better but as opposed to a worker who goes all the way down to Melbourne for a two-day training [course] and it was boring and useless, they come back with more resentment. (W39, female, 20 years CSS)

Several workers spoke about managers requiring managerial training, including education and training around good ethical approaches in their daily dealing with workers (W20, female, 12 years CSS; W39, female, 20 years CSS).

Another worker commented on the lack of support from managers when staff wished to take on further training:

There needs to be more support for workers undertaking study. I was surprised to find while working at a drug and alcohol rehabilitation residence [agency] that I was criticised by the manager for undertaking a Diploma of Alcohol and Other Drug Work. The centre was run by a religious organisation with none of the staff having drug/alcohol relevant qualifications. It is my belief some managers may feel threatened if workers are better qualified than themselves. (W18, male, 10 years CSS)

Another avenue for debate, discussion and research is in the relevant courses taught at universities and TAFEs. How prepared and informed are new graduates about the current systems and structures in the CSS, including occupational health and safety issues? The physical and psychological health needs of workers should be included in undergraduate and postgraduate courses. As one worker stated, *It is my belief that students are not well prepared for the complexity and demands of the workplace by their studies and that educators are failing in their responsibilities (W18, male, 10 years CSS).*

5.11 Union- and Worker-Led Change Action

One worker made clear and strong comments about structural changes and saw that the workers need to take a more active role in making structural changes happen. He stated:

[Structural change will not come], until we can challenge the current paradigm, where we are taught to simply see ourselves as little more than individuals, pursuing our own agendas. ... Once we start to look at collective solutions to problems, it's going to be hard, but if we don't start, no one else will do it for us. We need to reclaim our dignity as workers, and the best way of doing this, and tackling the stressors in this industry, is about challenging the dominant thought process, and all that entails.

Ending precarious employment conditions, stopping the competition between services, acknowledging we live in a society, not a market place, and people we work with are people not consumers. (W41, male, 25 years CSS)

There was some recognition by workers of the need for collective action to improve the conditions that lead to work stress. In terms of union-led change the two main ideas were for unions to focus on their core industrial and support roles as well as become more involved in OH&S training, including demystifying the work cover system. Several workers spoke about how the union needs to focus on their industrial protection and advocacy work, and spend fewer resources on incentives such as free tickets and shopping discounts (W35, male, 20 years CSS; W36, male, 5 years CSS; W37, female, 25 years CSS). Another worker suggested that union-led OH&S training could be funded by the insurance companies. She suggested this strategy may lead to a reduction in claims and hence reduce costs for insurance companies; a win-win situation (W15, female, 10 years CSS and 4 years ASU).

The difficulty for unions, as documented, is the low level of union membership. Membership is the life blood of unions and they can only do the work that their membership dollars will allow. They, too, have their funding limitations.

In one focus group there was considerable union discussion, including frustration about workers' apathy towards the union, except when workers were in trouble and sought out union help. As a worker and union representative stated:

People don't see industrial issues and work structures and power structures and social policy over time. ... I don't know what you can do about it except just keep telling them to join the union. Not enough people in the union; under 20 percent. (W35, male, 20 years CSS)

One worker shared in a focus group that he had a breakdown due to work stress and he wanted to contribute to positive change and could see the benefits of collective action. He commented:

You know, when I see people like nurses trying to negotiate for [better] workplace conditions; [here] it seems to be such a large group of compliant people. And I often think, because I've just been trying to think of how am I going to change things in my organisation, and it feels like sometimes it's just me or a few people. ... I kind of wonder [about] a group of people like nurses, how this [our] industry could maybe do something a little bit similar. (W24, male, 2 years same agency)

There are substantial hurdles confronting the development of a strong and united sectoral workforce capable of fighting for improvements in working terms and conditions. Challenges include the huge diversity in the sub-sectors, the historical and philosophical differences in organisations (charity, church and community), the diversity in qualifications, classifications and pay rates between workers, and the disparities in funding levels between sub-sectors and

agencies operating within the sector. It is indeed a tricky jigsaw puzzle and attempts to gather all of the pieces can be extremely difficult.

One worker stated, *it's almost like we have to develop some consciousness raising, to then say, 'Well we're not taking this anymore' (W35, male, 20 years CSS)*. This statement fits well with the reality, as shown in the data, that many workers struggle to put their needs upfront and subsequently take action upon their needs, including improving pay, terms and conditions.

Several other workers spoke along similar lines: *We need to reclaim our dignity as workers (W41, male, 25 years CSS)*, and *we have got to value ourselves (W37, female, 25 years CSS)*. Another worker spoke about the strain on her from speaking up for others, getting into trouble, and she wanted others to speak up for themselves (W38, female, 1 year CSS).

It appears from the data that presently there are only a small number of workers prepared to take a stand on their needs and make the concerted effort to drive the momentum for change that would result in a reduction in work stressors.

5.12 General Ideas for Change

It was further suggested that there was a need to educate the public about the stress and strains for workers in this sector. The need to solicit support from the community and organisations outside the sector was seen as a necessary precursor to placing increased pressure on the main feeding arm, namely state and federal governments. As Meagher (2004 p 3) comments:

Australians are simply not aware of how complex the 'mixed economy' of human service delivery and funding is in Australia, and so don't realise the extent of service delivery by not for profit organisations of various kinds (including charities in the narrow sense).

There has been little interest and action coming from management with respect to tackling work stress, and garnering support from outside the sector may prove fruitful.

Two workers in the same focus group spoke about utilising current communication mediums to increase the support and understanding of the stresses on community welfare workers:

Because the community aren't aware of the issues. (W38, female, 1 year CSS)

Reality TV. It is actually truck drivers or brain surgeons; it's never child protection workers or foster care workers, or crisis mental health [workers]. ... Obviously you can't do reality TV unless you use actors because of confidentiality, but you could do that, if you wanted to, and then people are kind of [more] aware ... (W37, female, 25 years CSS)

A further worker suggested utilising web-based communication; he commented:

I have been told pharmacists have a web-based discussion group for the consideration of a wide range of technical and professional issues. I would like to see a confidential

web-based discussion group set up by the Australian Association of Social Workers suitably moderated by a Department of Social Work in one of our universities. This could have great benefits in the advancement of the profession and the lifting of standards. I believe it would be of particular value for workers in more isolated areas where quality ongoing supervision is difficult to obtain. (W18, male, 10 years CSS)

6. Concluding Remarks

In general the workers' ideas for change were clear, insightful and did not appear to be 'too demanding' such as one would expect of an initial ambit claim. This is not surprising though; as argued throughout this thesis the CSS workforce has to operate within two very different, yet equally demanding and controlling, frameworks. That is, the 'feel good' charity and voluntary model with an overlay of 'hardnosed' neo-liberalism free market model. This accords extremely well with a largely compliant female workforce, who demonstrate a strong alignment with their clients. As one worker pointed out, *I think there is a lot of room to do things better and it would mean a massive reduction in occupational stress (W15 female, 10 years CSS and 4 ASU).*

Clearly the workers' voices show a genuine attempt to put forward ideas to address work stress. Workers suggested increased training for managers in order to increase their understanding of ethical management practices. Workers also wanted more training for professional development and to enhance confidence.

Workers spoke disappointingly of the low union numbers and could see this was a problem. A rather sobering conclusion has been drawn by Dominelli (1999 p 21) which has some relevance to the CSS. Made some 13 years ago, her comments about the social work profession strike a responsive chord in relation to CSS workers today. She stated:

Unless social workers come to grips with the ramifications of globalization – the impoverishment of the people with whom they work; the restructuring of their profession; and the deterioration in their conditions of work – the future of social work looks bleak. To produce a different outcome, social workers will have to find ways of empowering themselves as well as assisting their clients in this process.

The situation for clients and workers are two distinct domains. As argued throughout this thesis, it is necessary for there to be some disentangling of clients' and workers' needs. Currently the primacy given to clients serves to largely disadvantage the needs of workers.

Structural change that would improve workers' conditions has not occurred over the past decades. The workers may need to lead the change, including spearheading the action to reduce psychological injuries in this sector. This may prove difficult given the structural features of the labour force in the CSS. The increasing casualisation and short-term contract work leaves more and more workers in a precarious employment state. This is not a conducive situation for workers to stick their head above the parapet in terms of making the legitimate and much

needed noises about workers' injustices and stress; it is rather more a focus for simply holding onto work itself.

Chapter Six: Colliding Models

This final chapter draws together and summarises my analysis of factors that cause high stress for workers in the CSS. Firstly, it is important to reiterate that there has been only limited research into work stress in this sector. Secondly, what has been missing to date in the small amount of research carried out are the perspectives and views of workers themselves regarding the nature of their work. This lacuna is directly addressed in the thesis. Indeed, a central aim of the thesis is to bring forth the ‘voices of workers’. The absence of both workers’ voices and relevant research underlines the importance of the work carried out in this thesis. The thesis thus represents a much-needed contribution to the analysis of work stress in the sector from the point of those most directly affected: the workers themselves. This thesis is an attempt to bring into the open the workers’ missing voices.

1. Work Stress Models and The CSS

There is a considerable body of research examining work stress theories. In broad terms we can note that there are three models of work stress that have relevance to workers’ experiences of work stress in the CSS. These are: firstly the Effort Reward Imbalance model (ERI); secondly the Demand Control and Support model (DCS) model; and thirdly the Burnout (organisational) model. While no one model can alone explain the multitude of factors feeding into the production of stress in the CSS workforce, these different conceptual frameworks, when taken collectively, have a certain utility in defining and highlighting the various causes and manifestations of stress in this sector.

Work stress in the Effort Reward Imbalance model is caused by the effort performed by the worker not being matched with sufficient rewards which leads to an imbalance for the worker and results in stress outcomes for them. Leiter and Maslach (1999) for example, discuss the cognitive and emotional impact on workers from a perceived inequity in reward given and the connection of this to workers’ burnout.

That there is a disjuncture between effort and reward for workers within the CSS is immediately apparent from the workers’ stories set out in this research. These workers are expected to work extremely hard and make enormous sacrifices. There is clear evidence that they are expected to uncomplainingly accept high workloads, and at the same time show minimal rancour and unconditional loyalty to both clients and their agencies. They are expected to accept poor pay and conditions and the challenges of working alongside volunteers. A high level of sacrifice is expected of these workers. Conversely the returns, in terms of rewards from management, are few and far between. This effort–reward imbalance is psychologically

exhausting and stressful. It is an imbalance that is ultimately unsustainable in terms of the workers' mental health.

The thesis exposes, from the point of view of the workers, the absence of reciprocal loyalty and care shown by management. The lack of validation and appreciation from employers was often mentioned by the workers. Helping the clients is often presumed to be the main reward. While workers expressed satisfaction in helping clients, these 'vocational' rewards fell far short in terms of a balance between reward and effort. As we have seen, workers spoke frequently about lack of rewards and recognition, even expressing the need for such small rewards as a thank you. A clear pattern emerging from within these stories is a feeling that when monetary rewards are low, as they are in the CSS, personal rewards assume even more importance for the workers.

Wages have always been low in the CSS, but now workers also face the prospect of increasingly insecure employment. In many cases, workers no longer receive even the reward of secure employment to compensate for all the shortcomings such as poor pay and conditions that prevail in the CSS. As shown in several of the workers' narratives, work can disappear at any time. This factor not only causes stress, but further reinforces workers' feelings that they are not valued by their employers and will not necessarily be rewarded for quality work. Sheen's (2010 p 4) research notes the work of the World Health Organisation in 2008 in which they identify 'precarious employment as a major factor contributing to health inequalities including mental illness and heart disease'. Clarke, Lewchuk, de Wolff & King (2007 p 325) conclude:

the high levels of stress and health issues reported by the majority of workers in precarious employment in our study indicate a worrying trend that points to higher levels of stress related ill-health for workers.

A major imbalance in rewards received and efforts expended by workers is a clear source of work stress. The workers' stories offer a telling narrative about the abysmal reward situation for most workers in the CSS.

The second relevant work stress model that I have utilised within the thesis is the Demand, Control and Support model. In this model, high demands, coupled with a lack of worker control (autonomy, a voice in what is happening), and inadequate or poor support, cause workers to experience work strain and subsequent work stress. As shown in this thesis, CSS workers are expected to cope with the high demands (workloads), accept less control (de-professionalism and audit regimes), and cope with minimal supports.

The report by the Allen Consulting Group (2008 p 27) states that community service organisations 'have 'absorbed' additional costs to date by requiring staff to manage larger case loads and work longer with no additional pay.' This has been exacerbated with the introduction of business management system approaches. On top of their heavy case load, workers are

required to complete extra reporting and data entry. These tasks are primarily to satisfy accounting and audit requirements and are seen by the workers as extra tasks that take them away from their main work rather than assist it. Many workers saw very little value in this extra paperwork. To them it merely satisfied audit requirements, while diverting them from their work with clients.

It is also apparent from the study that the new business management systems have also lessened the autonomy and decision making role of workers. Decisions about clients are increasingly based on efficiency and quantity, rather than clinical judgement and quality of work. This has resulted in diminishing opportunities for workers to exercise their professional judgements because of the strong pressure for getting through the volume of work (number of clients). This lack of decision making (control) coupled with increased management control and additional reporting requirements is challenging to workers' sense of themselves as professionals. As noted by Muetzelfeldt & Briskman (2003 p 2), there is a 'mostly negative impact of markets and managerialism on human service professionals' autonomy, scope for advocacy, and working conditions'. The focus on outputs also raises ethical dilemmas for workers regarding the quality of their work with the clients. As the workers' narratives clearly illustrate, it is the pressure and strain of being drawn away from the client work to complete the time-consuming accounting (auditing) part of the work which causes considerable tension and strain for them.

An increase in the numbers of unqualified and minimally qualified workers is also a pertinent issue for workers. The presence of poorly trained and underqualified workers increases staff workloads, since time is taken assisting these workers. Moreover, workers view this deprofessionalisation of their workplaces as insulting to their hard-won skills and expertise. As increased numbers of untrained workers are recruited, professionals are less able to argue for their professional needs such as adequate supervision. A strong theme emerging from the workers' narratives concerns the level of frustration and disappointment felt at the demonstrable inadequacy of the supervisory support received. Supervision was often inappropriate or inadequate, and sometimes non-existent. This is yet another manifestation of the lack of support for workers who are carrying out demanding work. This suggests both a lack of understanding by management of the work itself, as well as management's seeming inability to appreciate workers' needs. Supervision is an expectation in social work training and subsequent practice. It is understood by workers to be an essential component of the work; its primary purpose is to support and guide workers. Yet, it was found that even when supervision was supplied it had often been co-opted to the business model. The issues covered in the supervision sessions for many workers were primarily on how best to work more 'productively' or on how to manage in individual self-nurturing processes.

Another key concern expressed by some of the workers relates to the fact that the supports which are meant to assist in the occupational health and safety of the workers were singularly lacking. This research found poor OH&S systems and structures operating in workplaces. There was a considerable lack of OH&S awareness among participants. Many workplaces had no formal OH&S committees and many of the workers were unaware of their rights concerning OH&S issues. Even when OH&S policies and working groups were in place, workers found them to be of little value in assisting them in raising, let alone addressing, work stress issues. In fact, in many cases using the OH&S systems to attempt to address such issues resulted in harmful outcomes for the worker and/or the OH&S workplace representative.

Furthermore, a key issue for a number of the participants was the nature of the work cover system. Even when workers were damaged enough to access the work cover system they found these systems to be unsupportive. In fact, more often than not these systems exacerbated their psychological and physical health issues. The focus of employers, via the insurance providers, was to simply dispense with the damaged workers by encouraging them to move on. Psychological injuries were often considered to be the result of individual failings rather than due to the working environment. Such pathologising of the individual worker was common; workers found these responses insulting, disrespectful and damaging to their confidence, self-esteem and sense of wholeness as productive human beings. Such pathologising of individuals completely ignores the systemic and structural nature of problems in the CSS which result in worker stress.

The third model of some import to the issues examined in this thesis is the burnout model. The burnout model was developed from research into human service professionals. The burnout model focuses on burnout in the individual worker and sees this as mainly due to the nature of the work itself: workers dealing with clients who come with many problems and much trauma and pain. Workers, according to this model, become emotionally exhausted, depersonalise clients and experience a sense of lack of personal accomplishment. It is important to keep in mind that the physical state of the worker is, however, a direct consequence of the nature of the work itself. As noted by Sennett (2006 p 95), 'Burnout more accurately applies to the character of work than to the physical state of the worker.'

Demerouti, Nachreiner, Bakker & Schaufeli's (2001) research on the Job Demand–Resources model of burnout is most relevant to the CSS. The emphasis in this model is on working conditions. The focus is, moreover, on job demands and the particular resources that are available to workers in any given job situation are the key to understanding 'burnout'. Job demands include such things as physical workload, time pressures, recipient contact, shift work and the physical environment. Job resources refer to feedback, rewards, job control, participation, job security and supervisory support. The basic tenet of this model is that unrealistic job demands lead to exhaustion, and lack of adequate job resources leads to

disengagement, the end result of which is burnout. Workers' stories presented in this thesis are intimately concerned with such matters and support the argument that a multiplicity of factors concerning working conditions must be taken into account when examining workplace stress. Blaming individuals and explaining workplace stress in terms of individual worker frailty is misplaced. As Dollard and Winefield (2002 p 11) contend, 'overall, empirical research has generally shown that job factors are more strongly related to job strain and burnout than are biographical or personal factors'. Furthermore, Tracy (2008, p 31) states, 'it perhaps should be of little surprise that most organizational research and training still treat burnout and stress as individual pathologies rather than organizational, structural dilemmas'. There appears to be a myopic approach to work stress reduction strategies around the causes of burnout.

To view worker stress in such individuated terms is profoundly misleading. The narratives presented in this thesis and supported by a substantial body of empirical research suggest precisely the opposite. That is, it is both the organisation of work itself, and the wider systems and structures which shape working arrangements, which are the major causes of burnout of workers. The high demands, the poor resources and the lack of will to address and reduce the main stressors cause the burnout. Workers acknowledge the personal toll from the type of work they do, but they did not believe this was the cause of the majority of their work stress. They had methods for dealing with the emotional work-related issues. Most however, identified the lack of support, the heavy workloads, the ever-increasing audit paperwork and lack of professional autonomy in their workplaces as the major factors placing them under strain.

2. Two Paradigms Shaping the Community Services Sector

While the three theories of work stress discussed above help to explain work stress in its most immediate sense, it is, nevertheless, important to keep in mind underlying causes and factors emanating from wider social forces which impact on the CSS and its workforce.

In 2004 Arthur saw systems and structures as the less-explored field of worker stress. He (2004 p 167) posed a number of interesting questions that are still clearly relevant.

This review concludes that work-related stress is complex, requires an interdisciplinary and integrative approach, and a major social/political paradigm shift to empower people to evaluate its physical and mental health costs. How will this be achieved? Probably not by those who continue to apply traditional compartmentalised responses to work-related stress. The surveyed evidence suggests there are now broader questions that need to be considered by those involved in treatment and research. At what point should the right of organisations to require stress professionals to fit individuals into inherently demanding and harmful work practices be challenged? How will individuals become empowered to understand and make informed choices about the costs and consequences of denying their psychosocial, health and spiritual needs for material improvements and increasing work pressure? Is

it possible for those who benefit financially from providing stress support services to challenge their employer's convenient individualistic solutions? Should clinicians present the social and economic causes of stress to patients and organisations as an alternative to individual psychopathological labelling?

These questions can only be addressed by examining the underlying paradigms upon which the CSS is based and how these paradigms themselves lay the foundations for the work stress that workers experience. From the research it is possible to identify two paradigms operating in tandem in the CSS, both of which lead to significant work stress outcomes for the workers: the charity model and neo-liberalism. The original charity voluntary model, with its altruistic and loyalty expectations of workers, is currently very much alive in the CSS. The outcome for workers of this model has been profoundly negative and leads to work environments that generate high levels of stress. Since the 1980s, however, the neo-liberal policies of successive federal and state governments have overlain a second model onto the CSS. The neo-liberal focus on cost minimisation, competition rather than cooperation, and outputs rather than outcomes has placed new pressures on the CSS workforce. These two paradigms coexist to create an environment that is ripe for neglect, exploitation and damage to workers. The end result is widespread work stress, psychological injury and increasing numbers of compensation claims. Available statistics clearly attest to this reality. When we further consider the secondary signs such as the current low retention and high turnover rates, we are left with a worrying and disturbing picture of this sector.

Figure 1 (below) highlights the issues that impact on workers in the CSS which play a leading role in the development of work stress. Each paradigm has inherent issues that impact on workers' ability to avoid excessive stress. However, there are also several aspects that are common to both paradigms, even though the rationale may be different for each, and whose objective is to ensure costs are minimised.

When practices drawn from within a neo-liberal paradigm are overlain onto the worst characteristics of the charity volunteer model, workers are subjected to impossible demands. Altruism and loyalty, vocational overtones and the lower wages of the predominately female workforce are thereby exploited to contain costs and present a picture of market-based productivity and efficiency.

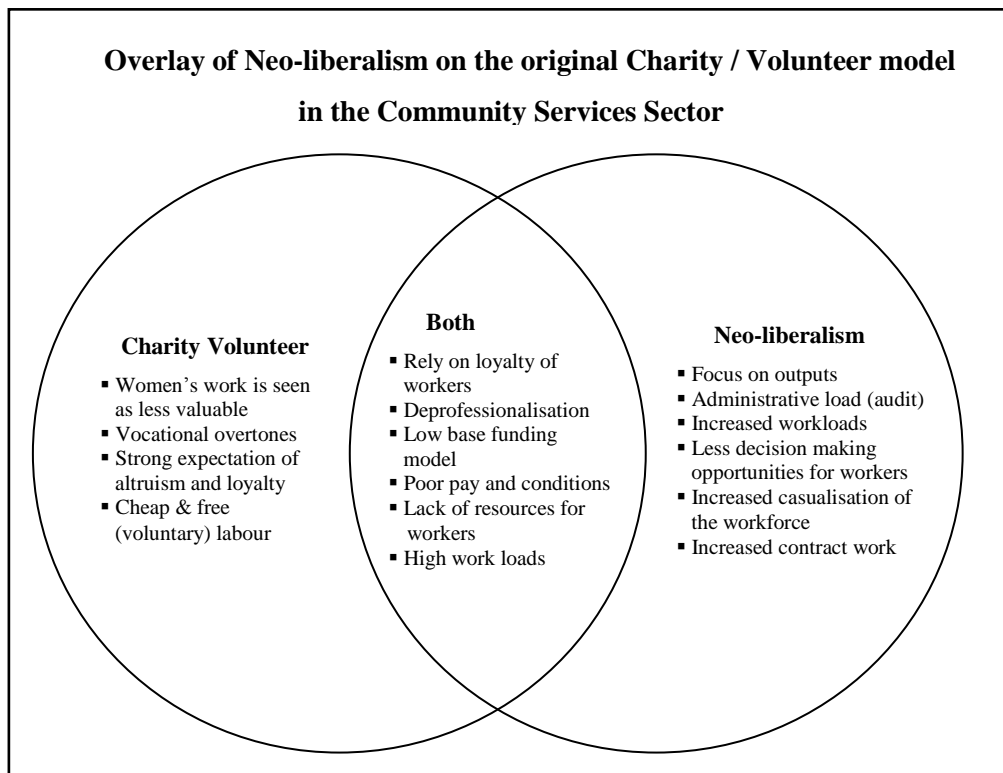


Figure 1: The two paradigms at work in the CSS

2.1 The Charity Voluntary Model: Impact Upon the Workers

With the above in mind, it is clear that the workers felt that there is a strong sense of charity and overtones of vocation in the CSS which bring higher expectations of giving from workers performing their work. Much of the work in the CSS has historically been done by volunteers, the majority of whom have always been, and still are, women. Subsequently workers' understanding of their work is further complicated by the problem of it being seen (and experienced) as not 'real work'. These vocational overtones tie in with the expectations of workers demonstrating altruistic behaviours and loyalty towards their employer and clients. A recent report by the Victorian Council of Social Service (Victorian Council of Social Service 2012 p 8)³¹ states:

At both a leadership and frontline level, people do not work in the social services sector for the financial reward. These are some of the most altruistic members of our society, people who commit themselves to their profession to support others in need. For people working in the social services sector, the reward is all about seeing their clients repair and restore their lives.

³¹ This quote comes from VCOSS commissioned JWS Research March 2012 to capture the views and understanding among the leadership and staff of their membership organisations.

Many workers in this study felt unable to adequately complain about issues that were causing them stress. The message conveyed to them, sometimes overtly, sometimes implicitly, was that the work itself should be its own reward. As one worker was told, *you are doing God's work* (W23, female, 15 years CSS). This invocation of religious calling has led to workers being treated neglectfully and being exploited by their employers and managers. One example, among many mentioned in the workers' narratives, concerns workers' occupational health and safety, which has been low on the radar for attention by many organisations. Workers have shared instances of serious breaches with respect to their safety; for example, not being informed about the violent histories of clients and only becoming aware of this when confronted by such behaviour.

Workers in the CSS receive low wages, experience poor working conditions and have to uphold heavy and difficult workloads. This further reinforces the low value placed on the work and the subsequent lack of respect and status experienced by the workers in the so-called caring professions. Not only do workers receive less tangible rewards such as decent pay, they have to cope with feeling devalued in the underfunded CSS. Recognising workers and the job they do is largely ignored by significant players such as governments, the sector, and its organisations and managers.

CSS workers also work with high numbers of volunteers. This dual workforce, in which one group gives their labour for free, presents challenges for those who are paid workers. It makes it harder for them to stand up for their industrial rights while working alongside volunteers, and feeds into the altruistic and vocational expectations of all staff in the CSS. This in turn exacerbates the stress of workers by implying they have little about which to complain, when so many volunteer for free. As noted in a worker's narrative, one CEO would shut down criticism of late pay and questions about this by reminding workers that volunteers were giving their labour for free.

Gender assumptions underpin much of the devaluation experienced by CSS workers. This is 'women's work' and hence it is seen to be of less value and importance compared to the work of other industry sectors, where there is a more balanced gender mix. Messing et al. (2003) studied the treatment of gender in occupational health research and identified three problems: the hazards in women's work have been underestimated; women are less studied by occupational health scientists; and under-reporting and under-compensation are often more problematic for women. Furthermore, Hall's research (1989 p 726), some 24 years ago, noted 'women have been neglected as subjects in the mainstream of occupational health research'. As previously noted the CSS is predominately a female sector. As stated in the literature review, the majority of studies of worker stress in this field have examined areas where there are much higher numbers of male workers (public sector organisations, hospitals). There are, as I have argued, powerful disincentives that prevent many women from pursuing worker compensation claims.

Moreover, even if successful, women's outcomes from workers compensation usually result in much lower recompense due to their already low wages.

2.2 Neo-liberalism and the CSS

The second paradigm underpinning the CSS in liberal democracies in recent years has been termed neo-liberalism. Globally and within Australia political parties of seemingly different persuasions have sought to reshape government, society and citizens according to free market principles and market-based criteria. The emergence of this free market ideology and its application to a variety of social organisations and social arenas has placed those organisations operating in the CSS under great duress. As Wright (1998 p 117) comments, 'competition emerges as the newly exalted public ethic, as governments privatize themselves and install the market as the organizing principle for social organisation'. Burawoy (2007 p 242) uses the term 'third-wave marketization' to describe the introduction of neo-liberalism into the community sector. This has had a serious negative impact upon the workers. Firstly, organisations in the sector have to compete rather than co-operate with each other, and secondly, agencies are forced to live up to this hyper-competitive model which has a negative impact on services and staff. Workloads which were already heavy have increased under this new quasi-market paradigm.

The focus of neo-liberalism is on free market systems as the perceived best option, and in the CSS, its watered down cousin, quasi-markets, have become a co-driver of the CSS. However, in the promotional arena, it is the 'caring mission' and not the hidden 'quasi-markets' that is projected as the social face of the sector. It is clear, however, that it is the competitive and lowest price structure that clearly influences tender outcomes. As stated by the Australian Council of Social Service (2011 p 12), 'A fundamental challenge for community sector organisations is the capacity to meet the demand for services, while at the same time managing funding and resourcing constraints'.

Marketisation has brought with it a greater emphasis on business management systems, which in turn has led to increases in administrative load, including new software reporting regimes as clearly reported in the workers' data. Marketisation and contractualisation also create in their wake a need for external evaluation and assessment of organisations. This must, according to neo-liberal rationality, be based on calculable market logics. Hence, neo-liberalism simultaneously promotes market methods and creates the need for an audit culture. As in many other industries, the CSS is part of an emerging dominant audit culture (Tyler & Wright 2004; Wright, RD 2000). Indeed, as Wright (1998 p 115) contends, 'the widespread use of audit connotes a distinct shift in the functions of government and an increasing reliance on the knowledge forms of accounting and managerialism'. Within the CSS these increased activities, aimed at providing quantitative evidence of completion of contractual obligations, as shown in

this research, take workers away from their main aim of their work in assisting clients. They also often leave workers feeling de-skilled and frustrated.

As a global phenomenon neo-liberalism restructures work according to merciless market logic. Unsurprisingly, it has led to increased casualisation and the expansion of contractual work within the sector. Workers in this study highlighted how much more vulnerable they are to job insecurity, increased anxiety and income-induced stress. As stated in the Australian Council of Trade Unions' (ACTU) working paper (2011a p 2), 'The rise of insecure work presents significant challenges to Australian workers and their unions'. On top of the stress from the work itself, workers must now also endure the stress of insecure³² and often short-term employment. As noted in the ACTU (2011b p 12) working paper:

In a number of sectors such as education and health care, the structure and delivery of government funding, as well the lack of adequate funding, has led to the rise in insecure work, both in terms of the increased number of workers in casual and other nonstandard forms of work and deterioration of working conditions and increased insecurity for those engaged in more 'permanent' jobs.

There has been a growth in the development of mega agencies, as these are better able to compete in the CSS market and hence are more often successful in winning tenders (Morris 2011). This has led to the demise of smaller agencies, which has affected workers' livelihoods and increased work stress outcomes such as increased employment insecurity. Workers are struggling to earn sufficient wages to sustain daily living needs through casual work in the CSS, especially in sub-sectors such as the disability field and occupations such as personal care. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), in November 2011 54 percent of community and personal service workers were working part time. Even more telling, however, 40.7 percent of these community and personal service workers were in positions where they did not receive leave entitlements. Both of these figures were even higher for women, with 62.8 percent in part-time employment and 41.7 percent having no leave entitlements.

An interesting link has been drawn by Mayhew (2005, cited in Kelly, 2006), between precarious employment and casualisation and the increased risk of workplace bullying. Many of the workers in this research commented on an increase in bullying by management. As noted, this sector now has a significant proportion of casual and contractual positions. This situation allows people in more powerful positions, generally management, to treat workers in a manner that they would not otherwise accept. Casual and contractual workers are more vulnerable to top-down bullying, as shown in the workers' narratives.

³² ACTU (2011a p 3) Working definition of insecure work is poor work that provides workers with little economic security and little control over their working lives. Indicators of insecure work include: unpredictable, fluctuating pay, inferior rights and entitlements, including limited or no access to paid leave, irregular and unpredictable working hours, or working hours that, although regular, are too long or too few and/or non-social or fragmented; lack of security and/or uncertainty over the length of the job; and lack of voice at work on wages, conditions and work organisation (page 3).

In the CSS, and in the human services in general, the phenomenon of diminished professional roles is well documented. Workers are now more intensively governed by audits and less able to make professional judgements and decisions in regard to their work with clients. Workers now have less professional autonomy in decision making. For those who see themselves as trained professionals this adds insult to injury. The current rationale of pushing through greater numbers of clients poses professional ethical dilemmas for workers around quality of service outcomes for their clients. This is a most invidious position in which to be placed, as many comments made by workers in this thesis attest.

Indeed, it would appear that the current model is unsustainable at a number of levels. Younger workers are not staying in the sector as long as previous generations of workers, and many are leaving the field altogether to take up less stressful work with better pay, terms and working conditions. Munro's research (2004) into audit and social workers in the public sector identified six main factors connected to workers leaving jobs. These factors consisted of being overwhelmed by bureaucracy, paperwork and targets, insufficient resources and unmanageable workloads, a lack of autonomy, feeling undervalued, and unfair pay and ways of working that are imposed and irrelevant. These same factors emerge from the testimony of workers and as the major themes of this thesis. Contrary to what many regard as the precursors to work stress, namely the nature of the work itself, it is clear that these structural and systemic issues cause most distress for workers in the CSS.

Low pay and volunteerism plague the CSS. For neo-liberals this is simply the consequence of market choices and automatically functioning price signals. Meagher & Nelson (2004 p 113) point out a rather shallow argument emanating from a neo-classical theoretical base which argues that care workers should be paid less:

The arguments for keeping the pay of carers low hinge on the dualistic association of market exchanges with selfish individualism and extrinsic motivation and of non-market interactions with altruism and intrinsic motivation. Within this framework, money and love are opposites, such that money threatens to corrode ties of affection and obligation.

The conventional neo-liberal argument simply reinforces existing gender divisions and gender expectations for women. Women are expected to be self-sacrificing and this flows onto the caring work inside families as well as in the workforce in so-called 'caring jobs'. Mutually reinforcing gender divisions at home and work therefore support each other in a way which locks women into poorly paid part-time and frequently exploitative positions within the labour force.

When economic needs drive the organisation, one way managers will seek to stretch the inadequate funds is by employing less-qualified workers. This increased pressure on better-qualified staff to support other less-qualified staff adds significantly to workloads. As well,

there are increased demarcation issues that results in increased tensions. This has arisen at a time of increased client need and client numbers, thereby placing further strain on the shrinking workforce.

While neo-liberal cost-cutting measures and approaches may offer savings to organisations, they offer very little to the workers in the CSS who are unable to bargain in the same way that workers with greater industrial muscle can and do. The nature of the work itself means that it is not possible to increase productivity and maintain quality merely by increasing output.

2.3 Effects Upon the Workers of the Two Systems Operating in Tandem in the CSS

In essence there are collusions, contradictions and collisions coming from the articulation of these two models operating together. Within the CSS these affect workers in seriously negative ways. The assumptions of neo-liberal and charity approaches exist in different but strangely parallel universes within the CSS. Both rely on similar expectations and behaviours from the workers. There are the more emotive expectations of altruistic and loyal behaviours (to be freely given) by workers towards clients and their work agencies within the charity and voluntary model. Yet concurrently organisations are required to operate according to colder logics and unemotional economically defined quasi-markets. Here, Sennett's (1998a p 25) comments on the new capitalism are very relevant. He states: 'Detachment and superficial cooperativeness are better armor for dealing with current realities than behaviour based on values of loyalty and service.' As shown in this research the expectations of CSS workers are based upon values of a working world that no longer exist outside this sector.

Community service sector agencies consciously promote the more 'caring and sharing charity voluntary model' to the general community and in recruitment drives to address growing retention problems. However, workers are required to operate in a quasi-market model in which business management practices rule; a caring rhetoric overshadowed by the growing neo-liberal world of work. This glaring contradiction is faced by workers in the CSS day in, day out.

There are conscious and unconscious collusions between governments and the employers with respect to certain key assumptions underpinning work in the CSS. Specifically, all of the major players in the CSS continue to turn a blind eye to the damaging consequences of neo-liberal policies and practices within the CSS. The application of economic driven free market approaches forces workers to accept the dictates of hyper-competitiveness on the one hand, while being actively exploited by the rhetoric of altruism on the other.

There is minimal research about the consequences for the workers of the outcomes of the low funding based models and the cost of maintaining this model. The low funding models take advantage of the cheap and free labour, the casual and contractual workers in competitive

tendering processes, and the strategy of replacing skilled workers with less skilled and 'cheaper' workers as part of the retention and recruitment plan (Allen Consulting Group 2008).

In short, then, current approaches to work stress focus on the individual worker, and ignore the structural and systemic issues causing high work stress which are damaging the lives and livelihoods of workers in the sector. This is very clear in the workers' narratives about their experiences of work stress and the agencies' approaches in dealing with them. The much-touted employee assistance programs (EAPs), for example, are based on an individual deficit model, where the aim is to strengthen the resilience in the individual worker herself. These programs completely ignore the major factors that are the actual causes of the work stress in the first instance. This system is promoted as 'best practice', yet by its very nature EAPs cannot even begin to address the underlying causes of the workers' stress.

A similar focus of tinkering at the edges is also seen in the current recruitment strategies within the CSS. Rather than address the issues that are causing retention problems in the sector, agencies have adopted a 'head in the sand' approach of responding to the high turnover of staff by simply employing less-qualified workers. As stated in the South Australian Council of Social Service paper on the South Australian CSS (2010 p 23), 'The initial goal for improving staff attraction and retention in the sector should be to reduce staff turnover to (at least) the level of other industries'.

Despite research demonstrating the greater efficacy of primary stress prevention strategies, the responses of organisations to the high levels of stress claims in the CSS continue to be reactive. Workers spoke of their organisations often ignoring the increased stress experienced by workers until the situation resulted in extended leave and/or a work stress claim. OH&S committees where they existed, remained focused on physical injury and seemed to the workers, to be oblivious to the need to also address psychological injury.

Governments, the sector, agencies and the general community all benefit from the volunteer altruism model within which workers operate, although this comes at a serious cost to the workers. How can workers understand, let alone reconcile, the contrasting models? To attempt to do so is physically, emotionally and psychological challenging, draining and ultimately damaging.

As stated by Lewig, et al. (2007 p 430):

As a result of economic rationalist policies, growth in the volunteer sector has become a significant economic and social force that is increasingly and inextricably linked to both public and private sectors. ...Recent figures reveal that volunteer welfare services are worth double the value of services provided by all levels of government in Australia.

It is obvious that these dual operating models hand out guilt to the workers, while at the same time extracting a free market pound of flesh. In essence it is a business model of caring, as

well as a free and cheap labour model of caring. Agencies use the charity and voluntary model with its altruism and loyalty to staff the business of caring. As noted by Davidson (2011 p 221), many of the 'larger NPOs [non-profit organisations] have become more corporate in their structure, personnel and operations': they end up in essence a market entity.

Ultimately, the main ingredient in keeping the CSS functioning is the workers. They are in a purely market sense the raw material as well as the (human) machines that do the work; it is a labour-intensive sector. One of the deepest flaws and most serious shortcomings of the current system is the failure of state and federal governments to adequately fund the sector. The unsustainable low-based funding model therefore places strong downward pressure on the system to cut costs and intensify work.

Neo-liberal policy prescriptions, when combined with the charity care model, thus cause significant work stress and damage to workers' health. The sector and the agencies within it are clearly in crisis and the workers become the collateral damage. One social worker sums it up as follows: *The culture we work in, we're used until we're burnt out, then discarded and new ones are brought in (W16, female, 24 years CSS)*. This does indeed seem to be the case. The manifold pressures on workers are a consequence of a systemic structural crisis within the sector and market-driven policies. Dollard, Winefield & Winefield (1999) found the chronic work stressors for welfare workers were: high workload, inadequate training, conflict with workers or management, rising grievances, job dissatisfaction through lack of rewards, the violent nature of the work environment, high demands and responsibilities, redeployment failure, lack of support, chronic turnover in managers, and job uncertainty. This thesis has consistently presented evidence and examples of chronic work stressors that concur with this research which was completed 13 years ago. Indeed, they are prominent in the majority of the workers' voices in this research. It is of concern that not much has changed and that secondary and tertiary approaches to work stress prevention still appear to dominate even though there is strong evidence that primary intervention works best. I have argued that the problems are primarily structural and systemic, rather than individual issues. This is not to suggest that other individual problems confronting workers are inconsequential; quite the opposite: the pressures which manifest themselves in individuals in a variety of ways are a direct consequence of the social relations surrounding work and current public policy priorities. It is clear that there has been minimal change for several decades with respect to improvements in the reduction of work stress in this sector.

In addition, the findings illustrate that the workers in the CSS are in a unique but also untenable position compared to fellow workers in other industries. Capital and labour alike in most industries try to extract a reasonable return for their efforts. However, in the CSS, there is no profit upon which workers can bargain for better pay and conditions. In fact it is the very opposite; there is no profit to be made but in order to provide the government services the main

ingredient, the workers' labour, has always been bought on the cheap and/or for free. In this scenario labour also needs to be stretched to its limits in order to produce a service to the clients at a rate governments and the public expect to pay. In this model the workers are exploited in order to maximise the services and government policy directions. Two other female dominated workforces that come to mind are teaching and nursing, however both have a strong union membership base and have had many positive industrial outcomes for their membership.

A central line of argument throughout the thesis has been that it is the systems and structures themselves which add to the stress levels experienced by the workers. The high demands, poor resources and the lack of will to address and reduce the main stressors cause burnout in the first place. The current recruitment focus does not seriously address why workers are leaving in high numbers and may subsequently burnout the new workers more quickly. The Council of Social Services' network submission to the Equal Remuneration Case before Fair Work Australia (2011 p 3) states:

The greatest challenges facing the community sector include unequal pay, underfunding and declining capacity to attract and retain the workers our services rely on to meet the needs of people and their communities in Australia.

The current operating models rely on low-based funding which suits both paradigms: under the charity volunteer model it is accepted that any shortfall to funding will be supplemented by volunteers and by staff acting above and beyond their duties through altruism and commitment; under market-based imperatives the quantity of outputs for the smallest dollar is the *raison d'être*. As the Community Council for Australia Access Economics Report April 2010 (Access Economics Pty Ltd 2010 p i) states:

Reforming government funding arrangements for the community sector will always be a difficult and sensitive issue; ... many stakeholders voiced their concerns about changes to current funding arrangements.

At the highest level, there is the question mark over the political will necessary to fund and provide reasonable pay and improve working conditions, let alone diligently tackle the causes of work stress in this sector. As previously noted the federal government has in the past expressed concern about finding the necessary funds for the Australia-wide 'Equal Pay for Equal Work' case for the social and community services workforce. Although in November 2011 the Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard, did indeed change her directions and stated that the federal government of Australia was backing the current case put forward by the ASU for equal pay for CSS workers.³³ The current Victorian government has not yet signed an agreement to provide a share of the necessary commonwealth and state funding to implement these substantial wage

³³ Address to social and community sector workers, Sydney, Prime Minister of Australia – 10 November, 2011 <http://www.pm.gov.au/press-office/address-social-and-community-sector-workers-syd> ... 12/11/2011

increases, although it was recorded in the Human Services newsletter (2012) that the Victorian government has made a financial commitment of \$200 million over four years. It was, however, also noted in the same newsletter that over 25,000 people work in the community services industry in Victoria and, as such, this will go nowhere near increasing workers' wages by the 19 to 41 percent decision brought down by Fair Work Australia. Furthermore, the Fair Work Australia decision for pay increases is to be implemented over the unusually long period of eight years.

2.4 Globalised Neo-liberalism: The Long Shadow Over the CSS

There does not currently appear to be the communal will to seriously address the structural causes of work stress in the CSS. The global effects of approximately three decades of neo-liberal free market policy in which casual, part-time and contractual work has proliferated still has a strong foothold today. It is an era of over-employed, under-employed and unemployed. In this situation substantial power lies with employers. The workers' representatives – the unions – are struggling with declining membership. Employers' interest in seriously addressing the structures and systems causing work stress, especially with the currently compliant workforce, is doubtful. As stated by McDonald & Chenoweth (2009 p 146),

Economic globalization and the associated rise and eventual dominance of neoclassical economics and neo-liberal politics played a key role in destabilizing and eventually completely fragmenting the long-standing Australian compromise between capital and labour.

As the workers' narratives show, they feel vulnerable and powerless, especially those who are employed casually or on a contract basis. As Sennett (2003 p 191) perceptively comments,

the flexible work world tends to breed passivity in its bottom echelons. In an unstable institution, where people have no viable claims on the organization, they tend to keep their heads down in order to survive.

As the workers' narratives attest, this is certainly very much the case in the CSS.

As argued throughout this thesis, neo-liberalism and free market demand for flexible workforces is having a serious impact on work stress outcomes for workers. Research which discusses work stress must include the social economic context within which individuals and organisations exist. As Dollard and Winefield noted (2002 p 11), it is necessary to analyse 'the potential conflict between broader notions of health and safety in the workplace and the economic goals of business and industry in the investigation of work stress'. We need, therefore, to continue the debate on a global scale about the very nature of work. As Arthur (2004 p 164) comments:

It is important to point out the psychological consequences of the following major changes in the workplace: short-term contracts, virtual organisations, the home/work-life balance and families, loss of job security, downsizing, delaying, outsourcing, etc. The world of work has changed and society has to ask, Can human beings cope with permanent job insecurity, without the safety of organization structures, which in the past provided training development and career.

Furthermore, Arthur (2004) noted the research that explored workers' individual responsibilities for the effect of work-related stress, given the workers' acceptance of long hours and the subsequent negative effect of this on them and their families. However, these workers saw increasing hours as the only way to maintain their financial quality of life. 'Both studies seem to suggest that in order to maintain certain economic standards psychological sacrifices are (willingly?) made' (Arthur 2004 p 165).

As this research on work stress shows, if long hours are necessary to secure sufficient monetary rewards because the pay is low and the work uncertain, this can hardly be considered a 'willing sacrifice'. Furthermore, workers reported that their organisations and their managers expected staff to contribute to the organisation outside of working hours, completing such tasks as staffing fund-raising stalls in a voluntary capacity.

With regard to the CSS, the low funding and a sector based on a charity and voluntary model, with a free market overlay, further challenges work stress reduction, especially at the primary level. The retention and recruitment problems may, however, have some traction to garner interest and commitment to seriously address this runaway train called work stress. An additional issue specific to health care and social assistance, in which the CSS fits, is that the industry also has a relatively older profile in its workforce: 47 percent of workers are aged 45 years or older, compared with 38 percent for all industries (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012). As commented earlier, younger workers are not staying and the current workforce is aging. It is a serious and challenging problem that will not go away.

3. Reflections

This thesis has attempted to fill a gap in the extant literature and is unique in its focus on the CSS workforce as a whole. My inclusive approach welcomed any professional, semi-professional, administrative and/or unqualified worker from within this sector to participate in this study. Rather than simply reproduce yet another abstract quantitative analysis, I sought to give expression and voice to the concerns of those most directly affected by changes within the sector – the workers themselves. Simultaneously the thesis also examines the wider underlying forces and constituent features behind these changes. Dollard, Winefield & Winefield (1999 p 281) comment:

Whereas occupational stress research has relied on quantitative approaches, an in-depth analysis of individual responses can generate useful inductive information and provide a richer understanding of the factors important in predicting and managing occupational strain’.

The contributions, insights, commentaries and observations provided by workers form the substantive basis of this thesis and, it is hoped, have contributed to such a ‘richer understanding’.

Neo-liberalism has, I have argued, led to far-reaching changes that have increased work insecurity and workloads, while concomitantly decreasing autonomy and undermining union and worker power. In the area of work, flexible, short-term, part-time, casualised and unstable work is replacing stable, full time, secure employment. This point is emphasised by a number of eminent international writers (Hall, S & Du Gay 1996; Saul 2005; Sennett 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2003, 2006), and also by Australian writers on work–life balance (Pocock 2003; Pocock, Skinner & Pisaniello 2010). Richard Sennett, in particular, is vitally concerned about a society dominated by the ethos of ‘no long term’ – a world dedicated to the disposability of people and their livelihoods. He might well have been talking about work in the CSS in Australia when he comments (Sennett 1998a pp 26–7):

How can long-term purposes be pursued in a short term society? How can durable social relations be sustained? How can a human being develop a narrative of identity and a life history in a society composed of episodes and fragments? The conditions of the new economy feed instead on experiences which drift in time, from place to place, from job to job.

Short-term capitalism, in his view, threatens to erode moral character, ‘particularly those qualities of character which bind human beings to one another and furnishes each with a sense of sustainable self’ (Sennett 1998a p 27). The lasting and damaging consequences of these transformations therefore demand our attention.

Within Australia the CSS is the only remaining industry where there is a Florence Nightingale rhetoric enclosed in a hard-wired market-driven working paradigm. The nurses threw off their Florence Nightingale cloak through hard-won industrial battles over many years. It will be a difficult challenge to throw off the yoke around the CSS. The CSS sits within the ‘not-for-profit’ sector and it is difficult to disturb this sacred ground and improve conditions for the workforce. After all, charity and volunteerism are all about a willing sacrifice. Volunteers may choose this, but paid workers are caught in its slipstream.

With already high and continually rising work stress claims in the CSS, recognition of the untenable overlay of the neo-liberal model on a charitable altruistic model is long overdue. Discussion is needed on the implications of the two models and their sustainability in terms of damage to workers, and subsequent retention and recruitment problems. A dialogue about these

two operating models is urgently required in order to adequately address the work stress effects upon CSS workers. This is the elephant in the room and the initial challenge is to acknowledge it to then begin the work to addressing it.

The two clashing paradigms working in the CSS are not sustainable as a working model for the health and welfare of the workers. Consciousness-raising ‘through which subordinate groups develop insights into and contest their subordination’ (Burawoy 2007 p 250) is required. As was the case with the women’s movement, where women gathered in groups to discuss what was, consciously and unconsciously, causing their oppression, so the workers in the CSS need to come together to discuss their position. The workers in the CSS also require their working lives to be socially and communally validated if they are to sustain health and reduce work stress. They need to begin discussing their working situation and uncovering the conscious and unconscious barriers to good work health; how they consciously and unconsciously become entangled in the opposing operating models that exist in this sector and, most importantly, how to address the consequences of current working arrangements. Burawoy (2007 p 249), much like Sennett, contends:

... we live in an age of market idolatry and possessive individualism, when higher circles have diminishing tolerance for notions of social justice, social welfare and social equality – when the very notion of the social is held in disrepute.

It is this essentially neo-liberal view of the world that must be challenged.

Despite the apparent global hegemony of neo-liberalism there is still a pressing need to continue to engage in the debate about the very nature of work. Saul (2005 p 146) quotes Kofi Annan: ‘history teaches that such an imbalance between the economic, social and political realms can never be sustained for very long’. Saul goes on to say: ‘What is an imbalance? Unacceptable levels of unemployment, job insecurity and exploitative work conditions’. The challenge lies in governments, researchers, civil society organisations, enterprises and the wider sector taking an interest in further exploring this area and seriously investigating the continuation of social welfare on the cheap. As Sennett (1998a, pp 147–8) states: ‘I have learned from my family’s bitter radical past; if change occurs it happens on the ground, between persons speaking out of inner need’. Workers can play a lead role in tackling, from their vantage point on the ground, the ‘organisational neglect’ of them as workers. They are the ones who experience the brunt of this neglect and have the greatest interest in making change happen. It is their voices that need to be heard, their inner needs which require redress.

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Appendix

Table 1: Participant Demographics – Interviews

Code	Gender	Years of service	Interview type	Place
Worker 1	Female	over 10 yrs current job	Face to face	home - night
Worker 2	Female	10 yrs current job	Face to face	work - day
Worker 3	Female	6 yrs with one agency (just left)	Phone	night - home
Worker 4	Female	6 yrs current job	Phone	home - day
Worker 5	Female	4 yrs current job	Face to face	home - day
Worker 6	Female	5 yrs one agency (leaving)	Face to face	home - week-end day
Worker 7	Male	15 yrs CSS	Phone	work - day
Worker 8	Female	30 yrs CSS	Face to face	work - day
Worker 9	Female	4 yrs – 2 agencies in CSS	Phone	work - day
Worker 10	Female	15 yrs in CSS	Face to face	work - day
Worker 11	Male	13 yrs CSS	Phone	home - day
Worker 12	Female	19 yrs CSS	Face to face	cafe/shop - day
Worker 13	Female	25 yrs CSS	Face to face	home - night
Worker 14	Female	22 yrs same agency	Phone	work - day
Worker 15	Female	10 yrs CSS, 4 yrs ASU	Face to face	work - day

Table 2: Participant Demographics – Written Responses

Code	Gender	Years of service	Date submitted
Worker 16	Female	24 yrs CSS	November 2009
Worker 17	Female	2 yrs CSS	December 2009
Worker 18	Male	10 yrs CSS	December 2009
Worker 19	Female	8 yrs CSS	February 2010
Worker 20	Female	12 yrs CSS	June 2010
Worker 21	Female	3.5 yrs CSS	June 2010
Worker 41	Male	25 yrs CSS	2011

Table 3: Participant Demographics: Focus Groups

Code	Gender	Years of service	Focus group
Worker 22	Female	1 yr in agency	1: metropolitan
Worker 23	Female	15 yrs CSS	1: metropolitan
Worker 24	Male	2 yrs in one agency	1: metropolitan
Worker 25	Female	7 yrs in CSS	1: metropolitan
Worker 26	Female	7 yrs one agency + unsure about elsewhere in CSS	1: metropolitan
Worker 27	Female	unknown duration	1: metropolitan
Worker 28	Female	16 yrs in CSS	2: metropolitan
Worker 29	Female	10+ years same agency	2: metropolitan
Worker 30	Female	20 yrs in CSS	2: metropolitan
Worker 31	Male	20 yrs in CSS	2: metropolitan
Worker 32	Female	1 yr in CSS	2: metropolitan
Worker 33	Male	Unknown length of service	2: metropolitan
Worker 34	Female	19 yrs in CSS	2: metropolitan
Worker 35	Male	20 yrs in CSS	3: regional
Worker 36	Male	5 yrs in CSS (estimate)	3: regional
Worker 37	Female	25 yrs in CSS	3: regional
Worker 38	Female	1 year (estimate)	3: regional
Worker 39	Female	20 yrs in CSS	4: regional
Worker 40	Female	12 yrs CSS (estimate); leaving job	4: regional

Table 4: Work Stress Injuries of Participants (participant terminology)

Code	Health Issue
Worker 2	Breakdown
Worker 3	Depression – work related
Worker 4	Counselling & now mental health plan
Worker 5	Counselling & increased medication
Worker 7	Post-traumatic stress
Worker 8	Depression & anti-depressants
Worker 9	Major breakdown
Worker 11	Depression & weight loss
Worker 12	Depression
Worker 13	Counselling & significant stress
Worker 14	Taken sick & annual leave for stress
Worker 16	Clinical depression
Worker 21	Depression & using anti-depressants
Worker 24	Breakdown
Worker 30	Burnout
Worker 31	Breakdown
Worker 34	Stress leave
Worker 36	Stress & vicarious trauma
Worker 39	Mental health decline, including agoraphobia
Worker 41	Counselling – psychiatrist