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Mary Powell · Linda Riggs Mayfield



**Burnout in Social Work
Field Education**
Mitigating the Risk

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Burnout in Social Work Field Education

Mitigating the Risk

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Mary Powell: To Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service for guiding me through my MSW and PhD programs as well as my dissertation on burnout in social work students. To my social work students, past and present, thank you. Your lived experiences guided my way through the writing of this book. To my friends and family, thank you for your love and support. Last but not least, my beloved husband Bill Hughes. You stood by me through my doctoral education and through the production of this work. I love you!

Linda Riggs Mayfield: To the memory of my dearly beloved late husband, Brian K. Mayfield, who supported and facilitated all my academic and personal pursuits, including writing and editing this book; and to our children, Melissa J. Mayfield Ledbetter, Joshua K. Mayfield, Brian Caleb Mayfield, and Sarah E. Mayfield. I also deeply appreciate the support and encouragement of the Women's Prayer Group at Calvary Baptist Church in Quincy, IL, and the Cedarville University Reunion Bunch, as

*well as Monica Foster, Adult Education
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Literacy Office at John Wood Community
College.*

Preface

The purpose of this book is to supply the general information, foundational background, current research, and recommended actions for social work students in the field experience, their schools and faculties, and their site supervisors and mentors, so they can be adequately prepared to make informed decisions and take intentional actions to prevent burnout during field assignments as well as after students become licensed practitioners. Until recently, even research on burnout in social workers has been relatively sparse.

When does burnout start? Could it start as early as during the social work student's field experience? If the potential for social work burnout were addressed as a significant component of social work education, would the long-term incidence of burnout be mitigated?

A 2018 doctoral study of burnout in social work students in the field experiences, their first clinical settings involving interaction with clients (N=203), conducted by co-author Mary Powell, PhD, LCSW-R, NCPsyA, was foundational to this book and is referenced and may be quoted with and without additional attribution. The variables in that study included most of the ones that had been addressed individually in other, smaller studies. Some of the findings were unexpected and causes for hope.

In this book, the repeated pattern of presenting evidence related to the practicing social work professional, then comparing and contrasting it with evidence related to the student's field experience, is utilized to facilitate the understanding of the significance of the relationships between social work field education and professional social work practice. Researchers and practitioners do not have the answers to all the questions about burnout in field experience interns or practicing professionals, but its prevalence has forced it into public and professional awareness and academic consideration. The previous paucity of data is being expanded by new studies, and this book includes a significant number of them that have been published since Powell's 2018 research, some as recently as 2023, and some addressing the impacts

of the COVID-19 pandemic on social work and social work education. The new research is included in the exploration of burnout, role ambiguity, coping strategies, and practical suggestions for successfully addressing and mitigating the risk of burnout in future social work students in their field experiences.

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