

# The Systemic Solutions to Combat Burnout on Leadership Effectiveness in High-Stakes Social Work Environments

Akiva Onika Sarita La Geer-Jeremiah\*<sup>1</sup>, Feleisha Sushane Taylor Harris<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Orcid ID: 0009-0000-0683-1508

<sup>2</sup>Orcid ID: 0009-0007-9602-1285

<sup>1,2</sup>Central China Normal University (CCNU)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1014MG0117>

Received: 06 May 2026; Accepted: 12 May 2026; Published: 13 June 2026

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the factors contributing to burnout and their effects on leadership effectiveness in high-stress social work environments. It combines a qualitative systematic review with empirical evidence from 20 social work leaders from the Caribbean and the broader Global South. The study builds on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, Transformational Leadership Theory and Ecological Systems Theory to examine the negative impact of emotional labour, role ambiguity, institutional rigidity and intersectional stressors on decision-making, ethical clarity and team cohesion. Results show that burnout is a structural problem impacted by resource scarcity, process delays, political interference, and colonial administrative heritage, all of which affect the culture and leadership of small island nations. The thematic synthesis reveals a typology of systemic burnout drivers and underscores the impact on cognitive functioning, leadership relationships and organisational stability. The study also assesses multi-level interventions, including reflective supervision, participatory governance, trauma-informed policy transformation and culturally responsive leadership development, which can help enhance resilience and enable sustainable leadership. These findings have region-specific implications for policy, practice, and education. They highlight the importance of context-sensitive strategies in addressing structural inequities and fostering justice-oriented leadership in social work.

**Keywords:** Systemic Solutions, Burnout, Leadership Effectiveness, Social Work, Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, Transformational Leadership

## INTRODUCTION

Social work is situated between complex institutional systems and individuals' vulnerability. Practitioners are under a great deal of pressure in high-stakes cases, including child protection, crisis and community welfare. Their working environment has an immediate impact on client benefits, staff health and an organization's overall integrity. Burnout, a systemic condition, is influenced by organizational structure, resources and leadership practices. It is also characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment (Pazer, 2025). This phenomenon directly impacts leaders' functioning and organizations' operations. As burnout progresses, it can affect decision-making, undermine team dynamics, create a toxic workplace, and lead to employee turnover (Bryce et al., 2024).

In social work, leadership is based on a person's ability to guide, support and ethically influence their team. This can be difficult when they have to deal with trauma, ethical issues and a constant lack of resources. Frontline leaders' emotional labour and strategic decision-making responsibilities can be overwhelming, and the constant strain makes it harder for them to motivate others, represent their team well, and drive positive change (Lai, Jian & Wang, 2025). These pressures are exacerbated in environments characterized by social injustice, complexity and ongoing community needs. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities, too much administrative work and too few staff to handle the workload. All of these factors contribute to cognitive overload and emotional strain, as predicted by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model

(Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Burnout is also disproportionately affecting women and marginalized groups who are subjected to mental load, temporary contracts and socio-political pressures that affect their daily work (Pazer, 2025).

In the Caribbean and across the Global South, these difficulties are worsened by colonial heritage, inadequate funding and small team sizes, which mean practitioners are expected to perform multiple roles at once. Limited resources, political pressures and community demand can create an environment that increases the risk and impact of burnout on leadership effectiveness (Ravalier et al., 2024). In recent research, similar small island developing states (SIDS) have reported high rates of personal, work-related and client-related burnout. This, according to Ballout (2025), is due to chronic labour shortages and system constraints. Despite these, there are few empirical study that records social workers' and leaders' lived experiences in these regions. For this reason, the study incorporates theoretical and empirical perspectives.

The research objectives are as follows:

- ✓ To identify systemic factors contributing to burnout in high-stakes social work.
- ✓ To examine how burnout impacts leadership effectiveness.
- ✓ To explore evidence-based systemic interventions that mitigate burnout and enhance leadership.
- ✓ To propose a context-sensitive framework for sustainable leadership in social work.

The research sought to answer the following research questions:

- ✓ What systemic factors contribute to burnout among leaders in high-stakes social work environments?
- ✓ How does burnout affect leadership effectiveness in decision-making, team cohesion, and ethical practice?
- ✓ Which systemic interventions have proven effective in mitigating burnout and enhancing leadership resilience in social work settings?

## Methods

A qualitative systematic review with narrative and thematic synthesis was conducted to explore the role of systemic interventions in leadership effectiveness and burnout prevention in high-stakes social work environments. Perlman, Ben-Sheleg and Ellen (2025) cite narrative and thematic synthesis as two popular methods for identifying patterns in qualitative research in social sciences, with recent methodological advances focusing on critical qualitative synthesis. Three theories were used to guide the review: the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT), and the Ecological Systems Theory (EST). These frameworks collectively offered a lens for examining the job demands, leadership behaviours and the socio-political context that influenced burnout.

Literature from Europe, North America, Asia and the Caribbean was reviewed to capture the international nature of burnout and leadership problems. An extensive literature search was conducted using the following major databases: PubMed, Scopus, ERIC, JSTOR, Web of Science, EBSCOHOST, ProQuest, and relevant grey literature, yielding 279 records. A total of 157 records were screened after duplicates were removed, and titles and abstracts were selected for relevance. Using purposive sampling, 23 peer-reviewed articles were initially identified and found to be closely related to the study's focus on burnout, leadership effectiveness, supervision models, resilience strategies, and organisational interventions. These studies were then assessed after full-text screening in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 17 studies were methodologically and thematically consistent and eligible for synthesis. To ensure methodological rigour, transparency, and relevance to high-stakes social work contexts, a modified Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI, 2020) checklist was used for quality appraisal. Only sources and publications from reputable institutions were

considered. Systematic extraction of key information, including study context, theoretical orientation, leadership models, burnout typologies and intervention strategies, was conducted.

The study also included an empirical phase, owing to the dearth of literature on practitioners' views and the small number of studies in the Caribbean and the Global South. This phase involved conducting semi-structured online interviews with 20 social work leaders to gain first-hand accounts of burnout and leadership issues. The interview phase used purposive sampling, selecting only individuals with first-hand and relevant experience of burnout and leadership in high-stakes social work. Participants were eligible if they had a leadership position (supervisor, manager, director, or senior frontline practitioner). They also had to have experience working in high-pressure practice areas such as child protection, crisis intervention, community welfare or emergency response. Only practitioners working in the Caribbean or in the wider Global South were included, given the specific systemic challenges experienced in these areas, such as resource scarcity, bureaucracy and political constraints. Likewise, participants had to have sufficient professional experience to provide some valuable insights into leadership problems. Another requirement was having reliable internet access, providing informed consent and participating in the study without coercion. Together, these criteria yielded a sample of 20 participants with a diverse range of perspectives, but all very well-informed, on burnout and leadership in high-stakes social work settings.

The online interviews allowed participation from across the islands and regions and reduced logistical and scheduling challenges. This format also provided confidentiality and maintained the depth and flexibility associated with semi-structured interviewing (Archibald et al., 2019). The interviews examined leadership experience, ethical dilemmas, emotional labour, organisational stressors and expressions of systemic burnout. These empirical insights complemented the systematic review in providing real-life accounts of leadership breakdown and daily operational pressures. They also emphasized challenges in their region, such as a lack of staffing, bureaucracy, and a shortage of resources, that affect burnout experience in practice. Both empirical and theoretical data were integrated to provide context, enhance the study's validity, and increase its applicability to practice.

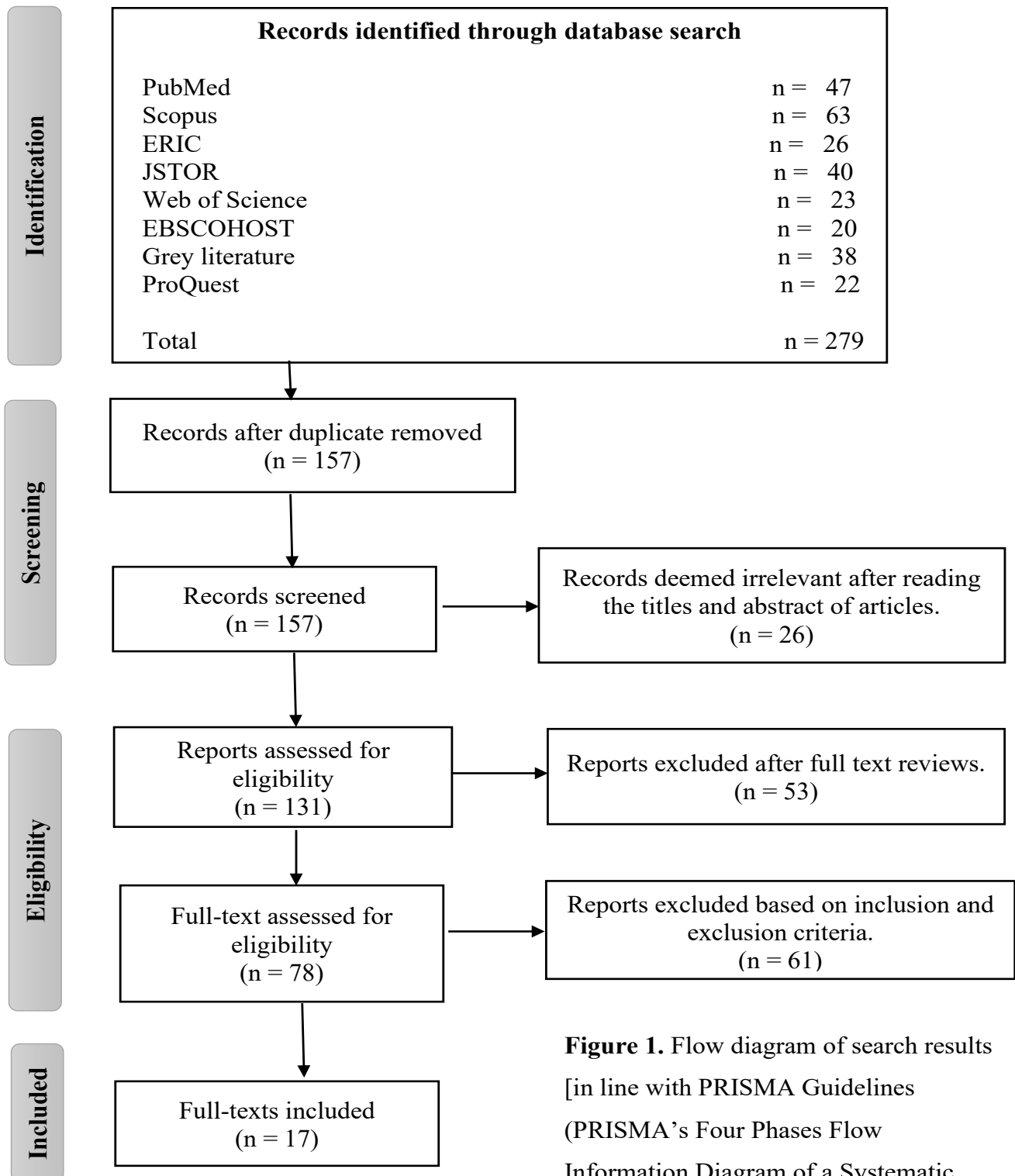
All interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed in accordance with the six stages of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis: familiarization, initial coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Both inductive and deductive coding were employed; deductive codes were generated from the JD-R Model, TLT and EST. In addition, inductive codes were generated directly from participants' narratives. Coding was done manually and cross-checked for credibility. The researcher's positionality and potential bias were accounted for by documenting reflexive memos throughout the analytic process. Themes were then compared with the patterns identified in the systematic review to triangulate findings and support analytic rigour.

Thematic synthesis was used as a structured method to analyse data from the systematic review. Studies that met the inclusion criteria following the PRISMA procedures were coded using a modified Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) extraction framework. Systematic charting was performed on key information, including the study context, theoretical orientation, leadership models, burnout typologies and intervention strategies. Braun and Clarke's approach to thematic coding was used to detect patterns in the studies. Themes were grouped into three categories to understand the multidimensional nature of burnout: emotional labour, ethical strain, and compounded marginalization. Inter-study triangulation among empirical studies, conceptual papers, and policy reports increased validity and aligned with Morgan's crystallization method. This process helped ensure that the review incorporated both global trends and area-specific nuances relevant to the Caribbean and the Global South.

The review process, including database searches, selection decisions, coding procedures and synthesis outcomes, was documented by keeping an audit trail in accordance with McLeod (2024). Reflexivity was applied throughout, while considering positionality and potential impacts of location or biased interpretations of leadership experiences across cultural and institutional settings. Further steps were taken to enhance the study's trustworthiness, including peer debriefing and accounting for limitations (geographic bias and lack of longitudinal data).

Ethical procedures were rigorously observed throughout the study. Confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent were maintained for the empirical aspect. The participants were clearly

informed about the aim of the study, the use of their data and their rights to withdraw. No identifying information was gathered and all answers were anonymised during transcription and analysis. Data were kept confidential and only accessed by the researchers. The relevant ethics committee granted the necessary ethics approval. Academic honesty was maintained by providing proper references, reporting results clearly and using secondary data ethically. These practices follow PRISMA 2020, JBI (2020) and the general academic norms in social work and leadership research (Zahid, 2024).



**Figure 1.** Flow diagram of search results [in line with PRISMA Guidelines (PRISMA’s Four Phases Flow Information Diagram of a Systematic Review)] (Page et al., 2021).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptualizing Burnout in High-Stakes Social Work

High-stakes social work leadership burnout is a complicated, multidimensional disorder that influences emotional, relational, and professional performance. Most commonly, it is measured using the Maslach model (1981), with the most prominent dimensions being emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion reflects the depletion of emotional resources, leaving professionals feeling exhausted and unable to cope. Depersonalization refers to the development of a detached or emotionally insensitive feeling towards clients, which is usually a response to excessive stress. A diminished personal accomplishment implies a sense of incompetence, in which individuals feel unproductive and unsuccessful in their work. The Maslach model remains an anchor and a popular framework for understanding burnout. Yet, emphasis is placed on individual symptoms that may follow, while overlooking broader systemic effects and intersectional issues that may influence burnout across various leadership dynamics. More recent works have developed this knowledge. As noted by Bryce et al. (2024), consistent exposure to trauma, particularly in work areas such as child protection and crisis intervention, is a strong predictor of being susceptible to secondary traumatic stress. This emotional build-up increases the risk of burnout among social work practitioners working in high-stakes settings. Social work leaders are prone to significant emotional stress, especially when they have to juggle ethical dilemmas, such as balancing client advocacy with institutional requirements. Together with high-stress caseloads stemming from understaffing and systematic negligence, these factors make them even more emotionally fragile. Bryce et al. (2024), however, focus primarily on frontline workers, and leadership dynamics remain unexplored.

Leadership in high-stakes social work environments is challenging. In addition to taking care of themselves, social work leaders are expected to care for their subordinates. Their role is to maintain organizational compliance while navigating complex, conflicting institutional expectations. Nagarajan et al. (2024) found that more than 40 % of leaders in public health and social services experience burnout. Such high prevalence is associated with severe impacts on decision-making, lack of empathy, and staff turnover. Although their meta-analysis quantifies the extent of leadership burnout, it does not provide sector granularity for social work. In their article, Powell and Mayfield (2024) provide a narrower analysis, describing leadership burnout as both a personal and systemic dilemma. They reiterate the need to intervene beyond personal coping strategies to address the broader structural factors that lead to burnout. The fact that they focus on role ambiguity and ethical strain offers a useful point of connection between personal experience and institutional context.

In these studies, some points of convergence emerge. Every source confirms that burnout is a multidimensional phenomenon and common in high-stakes environments. Social work leadership positions are often identified as where emotional and ethical pressures converge. Examples of typical antecedents of burnout in such environments are recurrent exposure to trauma, difficult ethical issues, and excessive workloads. There are also divergences. Maslach's model focuses on personal symptoms, whereas newer reports focus on structural and cultural factors. Bryce et al. (2024) focus on frontline workers exposed to trauma, and Powell and Mayfield (2024) address leadership tensions. Intersectionality and socio-political context are explicitly included only in recent theoretical reviews, which demonstrates the acute lack of literature (Orsini and Sunderman, 2024).

### Systemic Contributors to Burnout

Organizational, institutional, and policy structures are deep-seated systemic contributors to burnout. Take, for instance, unclear roles, heavy workloads, and a lack of autonomy are significant organizational stressors that contribute to burnout. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) (2025), burnout is the leading cause and nearly one-third of U.S. workers report feeling highly stressed due to poor support. Social work leaders are often required to handle administrative duties, manage employees, and occasionally deliver direct services, all amid ambiguity and limited influence. They are prone to role conflict as they must enforce institutional policies while simultaneously representing their teams and clients (Powell & Mayfield, 2024). Such dual responsibility creates constant emotional tension and is a significant cause of leadership burnout. Burnout is also worsened by institutional culture. Hierarchy may hinder teamwork and innovation, and failure to communicate can keep leaders aloof from their team. Punitive approaches to

supervision increase vulnerability and prevent introspection, creating an environment of fear rather than care. Brands-Saliba (2023) posits that relational supervision and open communication are two protective factors shown to reduce burnout. However, they pay little consideration to macro-level pressures and intersectional politics that dominate leadership burnout.

The level of pressure at the policy level is also important. Funding issues reduce program capacity and staffing, forcing leaders to do more with less. The bureaucratic requirements, such as excessive paperwork and monitoring compliance, make relational work subject to administrative survival. Here, performance measures are likely to focus on quantifiable results rather than qualitative impact, thereby undermining the principles of care and justice on which social work is grounded. The emotional and professional burden on leaders is even more intense when they are compounded with intersectional stressors: issues of race, gender and sexual identity. Here, leaders with marginalized backgrounds - especially women, racialized people, LGBTQ+ workers - experience extra scrutiny, exclusion, and emotional labour. The task of working in socio-political environments that are hostile to equity and inclusion continues to erode resilience. Barboza-Wilkes, Le, and Resh (2022) affirm that intersectionality is critical for comprehending burnout in social work leadership. They highlight that race, gender, and the socio-political context are important factors that determine burnout experiences and their consequences.

### **Impact of Burnout on Leadership Effectiveness**

Burnout has become one of the most significant challenges in leadership. It turns a good leader into a poor leader by undermining their cognitive, emotional, and behavioural abilities. Burnout not only hurts individual leaders but also erodes team spirit, confidence, decision-making quality and performance and creates an organizational culture that may cripple an entire department or organization. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2024) concur with this, emphasizing that burnout diminishes a leader's capacity, concentration and the support they typically provide to their subordinates. Addressing leadership burnout is a valuable advantage and a major strategic necessity for organizational health and prosperity. Leaders should not only be role models for setting healthy boundaries, but also encourage structural supports, rather than relying solely on resilience training. Reform must acknowledge the intersectionality of burnout, race, gender, and class, meaning it should include inclusive policies that safeguard vulnerable employees. To reduce cognitive overload, organizations need to address inefficiencies and clarify their expectations.

Burnout is an executive dysfunction in which attention, memory, and judgement are impaired, leading to slower, poorer decisions. Muller and Kubatova (2022) researched how managerial burnout undermines strategic thinking and problem-solving, particularly under high pressure. They revealed that leaders who undergo persistent stress tend to fail at proactive planning, instead reverting to reactive decisions, lowering their effectiveness in the long run. These tired leaders are likely to cut corners or justify dubious decision-making at the expense of integrity. Burned-out leaders would thus behave impulsively and inhibit their own agency, thereby destroying trust and stability in high-pressure situations.

Likewise, burnout may cause emotional disengagement among leaders, making them apathetic and unhelpful towards their teammates. Irritability and fatigue may foster communication breakdowns and behavioural avoidance, eroding trust and cooperation. Likewise, burned-out leaders can either micromanage or detach themselves, causing confusion and frustration among employees. Santiago-Torner, González-Carrasco and Miranda Ayala (2024) examine the negative effect of emotional exhaustion on ethical leadership in compromising moral awareness and affective commitment. These are important elements of emotionally-managed, value-based decision-making. They also highlight that stressful situations reduce leaders' capacity to identify ethical dilemmas and behave ethically. Nunes and Palma-Moreira (2024) further found that burnout weakens affective commitment, which is directly related to ethical conduct and organizational loyalty.

Moreover, Satiani and Satiani (2022) underscore that toxic leadership not only undermines team unity but also promotes burnout and interdepartmental turnover. Leaders lose their zeal and direction, becoming passive or absent-minded in their work. When burnout becomes chronic, leaders are likely to resign or quit the organization altogether. This is reiterated by Bryce et al. (2024), who present burnout as a leadership issue which, when not addressed, results in stagnation and high attrition costs. A leader who is burned out will be less willing

to represent their staff or lead organizational change and therefore will have less influence and impact. Woods et al. (2024) discuss how improper or uncoordinated leadership development can unwillingly augment job demands, leading to employee withdrawal, burnout, and turnover. They present several causes of burnout as related to leadership.

Although the literature summarizes burnout's harmful effects on leadership performance, each source focuses on different aspects of the phenomenon. One similar point across the CDC (2024), Muller and Kubatova (2022), and Santiago-Torner et al. (2024) is that burnout negatively affects cognitive and emotional abilities in decision-making, ethical awareness, and relationship stability. Conversely, Muller and Kubatova (2022) emphasize executive dysfunction and strategic paralysis under pressure, and Santiago-Torner et al. (2024) stress the loss of moral intensity and affective commitment and relate burnout directly to ethical failures. On the same note, Nunes and Palma-Moreira (2024) support this emotional disengagement by linking burnout to reduced organizational loyalty and toxic leadership. The authors Woods et al. (2024) and Bryce et al. (2024), on the other hand, focus more on systemic factors, stating that inadequate leadership training and the absence of trauma-informed supervision exacerbate burnout and turnover. The CDC and Silver Linings are the only two organizations that promote structural change and inclusive policy, understand intersectionality and enforce organizational accountability. Now, although all sources concur on the corrosive impact of burnout, their scope varies: some focus on individual dysfunction, others on ethical and moral breaches, and some on systemic causes and reforms.

## Leadership Models and Resilience Frameworks

Leadership models are used to create resilience and reduce burnout in high-stakes social work settings. Transformational leadership provides visionary, inspirational and individualistic support, contributing to intrinsic motivation and team cohesion. Both of which are factors in reducing burnout among social workers. On the other hand, transactional leadership, which emphasize defined roles and performance-based compensation, provides stability but lacks the emotional depth needed to maintain morale in emotionally challenging environments (Bryce et al., 2024). Recent comparative studies have indicated that transactional leadership may be effective in bureaucratic or crisis-response contexts. In contrast, transformational leadership is more effective in flexible, client-focused contexts where empowerment and shared purpose are key.

New leadership paradigms, such as adaptive leadership and trauma-informed leadership, offer additional exposure to trauma in social work. Adaptive leadership promotes flexibility, learning, and shared problem-solving, which is why it is especially applicable in high-pressure and dynamic situations. Trauma-informed leadership is grounded in safety, trustworthiness, and empowerment, and it integrates trauma-informed care into organizational culture and leadership practice. This strategy is crucial in social work, where clients and employees might have histories of trauma, and psychological safety is most important (Fisk & Daoust, 2025). These models align with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) framework, and they are becoming key aspects of sustainable leadership in social services.

Resilience Theory also contributes to our understanding of protective leadership qualities that mitigate burnout. It focuses on how these risk factors interact with protective factors, including the organizational culture, peer support, and emotionally intelligent leadership behaviours. Empathic leaders, who can be decisive under pressure and create hope and meaning, are among those who help build a resilient workforce. The Resilience-Enhancing Stress Model (RESM) offers a valuable framework for applying resilience theory to leadership and organizational development in social work (Greene, Greene, and Corley, 2023). Leaders can inspire resilience-promoting behaviours by modelling them, which is likely to instigate the same behaviour among teams, enhancing retention and well-being.

Taken together, these leadership and resilience frameworks imply a multidimensional approach to addressing burnout and improving leadership performance in social work. Resilience theory, augmented by both transformational and trauma-informed leadership, facilitates ethical clarity, team cohesion, and long-term organizational health, all of which are needed in a high-stakes social work setting.

## Systemic Interventions to Mitigate Burnout

The systemic methods for curbing burnout in high-stakes social work environments are gradually shifting toward structural and relational change. These encompass redesigning organizational practices, enhancing support systems, promoting policy reform and integrating culturally responsive leadership models. Strategies for redesigning organizations, including participatory governance, flexible scheduling and workload redistribution, have alleviated burnout by increasing autonomy and reducing emotional fatigue. Bryce et al. (2024) found that collaborative leadership models fostered emotional resilience and lessened depersonalization among social workers. Likewise, the Social Work Institute (2024) listed inflexible scheduling and excessive caseloads among the primary causes of burnout in social work. It also established that using adaptive workload policies may improve staff retention and elevate morale. Despite this, other researchers warn that participatory governance is likely to lead to role ambiguity and decision fatigue, especially in crisis-prone environments (Bryce et al., 2024).

Burnout reduction is also largely dependent on support systems, such as peer mentoring, reflective supervision and wellness programs. According to the Resiliency-Focused Supervision Model, reflective supervision facilitates emotional regulation and self-awareness, which help prevent burnout (Mack, 2021). Peer mentoring fosters solidarity and shared coping mechanisms, and informal networks can be more effective for emotional support than formal wellness programs (Social Work Institute, 2024). Although they are popular, wellness programs have been criticized for being superficial or unrealistic in high-stakes social work settings. This tension brings out another contradiction among burnout interventions. By focusing on individual resilience without addressing system-level stressors, strategies can also place excessive responsibility on individual workers (SOM, 2023)

Policy innovations have also emerged as key tools for curbing burnout. There is increasing advocacy for trauma-informed legislation and funding for leadership development. SOM (2023) suggests policies that acknowledge secondary trauma and that organizations be responsible for staff well-being. Funding leadership development is necessary to build leaders resistant to burnout. Yet Bryce et al. (2024) observe that these investments are typically reactive rather than integrated into a long-term planning framework. As a result, implementation gaps exist, and most organizations lack the infrastructure or political will to apply trauma-informed standards consistently.

Other perspectives on burnout-resistant leadership can be found in international and regional models. One example is the Emotion Systems Model, which offers culturally adaptive methods for emotional regulation with a focus on compassion-oriented approaches (Schwanz and Paiva-Salisbury, 2022). Other regional systems, such as those in the Caribbean and Latin America, have implemented community-based leadership models. These models decentralize and instill cultural resilience. Nonetheless, little is empirically known about these models, and international frameworks tend to be contextually insensitive. Likewise, imported leadership models often clash with local values or resource constraints, especially in postcolonial or underfunded systems (Bryce et al., 2024).

Although systemic interventions can provide effective platforms for curbing burnout, paradoxes exist across different fields. Yes, participatory governance is empowering, but it may also lead to role ambiguity due to unclear boundaries. Equally, wellness programs will not be profound without structural change; trauma-focused policies must be enforced, and global leadership frameworks will run counter to regional settings. These tensions reveal that context-sensitive and multi-level approaches, which combine organizational, relational and policy levels of leadership in social work, are necessary.

Despite growing awareness of burnout in high-stakes social work leadership as a systemic and intersectional concern, significant gaps remain in research and practice. A significant gap is in the limited study of systemic interventions in the Caribbean and Global South context. Contemporary literature has largely been based on Euro-American institutional contexts. It fails to explain the structural barriers, colonial histories, and policy fragmentation that define burnout experiences in contrasting ways in postcolonial and underfunded regimes. Moreover, although leadership models such as transformational and trauma-informed leadership have proven beneficial, they are more Western-based and not culturally specific. Marginalized leaders, especially racialized, LGBTQ + and Indigenous leaders, are exposed to distinct emotional and political pressures that require culturally sensitive leadership models.

Such paradigms should include emotional management, relationship ethics, and community-related accountability to reflect the lived experience of various leadership journeys (Balogun et al. 2025). Moreover, youth-centered and justice-based leadership paradigms are presented as promising alternatives to hierarchical systems based on compliance. These novel models center on shared care, emotional intelligence and systemic advocacy, attributes that are crucial to burnout-resistant leadership. They are, however, not much integrated into mainstream leadership development. The use of youth-led movements, particularly in the Caribbean and Latin America, to inform sustainable leadership practices and transform organizational culture in social work should be explored in future research (CIWiL, 2024).

## Theoretical Framework

This paper evaluates burnout and leadership performance in high-stakes social work environments using a three-pronged theoretical approach. It incorporates the JD-R model, TLT and EST to describe the individual, relational, and systemic processes. These frameworks, combined, offer a stratified method for studying the interactions among organizational stressors, leadership behaviours, and macro-systemic forces and how these factors affect one another.

According to the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001), burnout is the outcome of a long-term strain associated with excessive job demands such as emotional labour, caseloads, and bureaucratic pressure. Practitioners are at an increased risk of emotional burnout and disengagement when work demands exceed available supports, such as supervision, autonomy and peer connections. This disparity is especially acute in crisis-based social work environments, where practitioners are chronically exposed to trauma and institutional inflexibility. The JD-R model has recently been extended to include broader applications of leadership theories. Lee et al. (2023) examined the impact of various leadership styles, including authoritarian and moral paternalistic, on burnout and social service involvement in a social service setting. In the same vein, Kinman and Grant (2020) investigated the interaction between life demands and organizational support in determining the mental health outcomes of care professionals. These developments highlight the model's diagnostic applicability across various areas of human services. Nevertheless, the JD-R's perspective tends to favour individual and team-based dynamics. It fails to sufficiently highlight the structural and policy-based factors that contribute to the organizational stress environment.

The TLT (Bass, 1985) complements the JD-R model by demonstrating how motivational and relational leadership activities mitigate burnout and enhance practitioners' well-being. It emphasizes vision, inspiration, personalized attention and intellectual stimulation as core mechanisms for instilling resilience and engagement among staff. Leaders with these qualities develop resiliency, contribute to meaning-making, and increase staff collective efficacy. Transformational leadership has been found to reduce emotional fatigue and improve job satisfaction among human service organizations professionals. These impacts are most frequent when staff members encounter excessive work pressures (Kyambade & Namatovu, 2025). Additionally, TLT has been criticized for being an idealistic description of leadership, despite its strengths. It tends to overlook structural barriers and systemic inequities that may constrain a leader's capacity to implement transformational strategies. Transformational leadership ideals would be difficult to practice in a setting characterized by austerity, policy reforms and scarce resources. In the absence of effective institutional support, leaders might struggle to translate visionary practices into sustainable organizational change (Northouse, 2021).

Bronfenbrenner's EST (1979) provides a multi-level perspective on burnout and leadership performance. These processes are embedded in systems that define personal and group experiences. They range from the immediate team (microsystem), organizational structures (mesosystem), policy environments (exosystem) and the wider societal norms (macrosystem). The ecological approach further expands the discussion by connecting macro-level forces with social work practice on the ground. Neoliberal policies, cultural practices, and inter-agency dynamics affect practitioners' lived experiences and leadership abilities within their organizations. The ecological model promotes policy-sensitive interventions and multi-level inquiry in high-stakes social work settings, where practitioners frequently work through complex intersections (Germain and Gitterman, 2024). Its conceptual richness, however, makes it difficult to operationalize empirically, necessitating interdisciplinary data sources and systems-level mapping (Barbrook-Johnson and Penn, 2023).

These three frameworks provide complementary but distinct insights. The JD-R model offers a diagnostic prism for understanding stress-resource interactions at the organization level. TLT introduces a relational and motivational buffer that mediates these processes. EST extends the field of analysis to include distal systemic factors. Yet, tensions persist. Although JD-R and Transformational Leadership focus on proximal aspects, Bronfenbrenner's model requires consideration of structural and cultural pressures that can inhibit leadership agency. Also, the JD-R model, with its focus on individual resources, might conflict with ecological views that emphasize systemic inequalities; therefore, it is necessary to integrate these approaches carefully. This combined framework enables the design of interventions grounded in organizational realities and policy contexts. It is critical for fostering resilient leadership and maintaining the well-being of practitioners who work in challenging social work settings.

## FINDINGS

From the 20 interviews and the systematic literature review, burnout was identified as a systemic, multi-level phenomenon affecting social work leaders in the Caribbean and beyond, in the Global South. It is influenced by organisational, structural and socio-political pressures that shape leaders' daily lives and well-being. Themes that emerged were highly congruent with those reported in the literature and what participants described. This convergence was particularly evident in issues like emotional labour, cognitive overload, resource scarcity, institutional rigidity, role ambiguity, and intersectional inequities.

### Emotional Labour and Cognitive Overload

Throughout the interviews, leaders repeatedly indicated feeling overwhelmed, having heavy workloads and being called upon to deal with crises without much organisational support. Leaders frequently were required to "take in a lot of distressing client information, help staff when they were troubled, and deal with crises every day" (Interview Data), as one participant described. Many reported cognitive overloads, such as "concentration problems, forgetfulness, and mental fog due to extended stress" (Interview Data). Some also reported feeling numb, detached and unable to connect emotionally with staff or clients. These results are consistent with the literature that identifies emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and decreased personal accomplishment as key components of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Bryce et al. (2024) also report in the literature that emotional labour, exposure to trauma and crisis work are significant factors in burnout among leaders and frontline practitioners. Another area of cognitive strain, including reduced concentration and judgment during chronic stress, is well documented in the literature.

### Role Ambiguity and Role Overload

Common issues that surfaced in the interviews included unclear expectations, conflicting instructions, and dual roles. One leader encapsulated this challenge as "I'm the supervisor, I'm the counsellor, I'm the driver, and I am the data clerk. All in one day." (Interview Data). The literature also indicates that role ambiguity and role conflict are key organisational factors that contribute to burnout (Powell & Mayfield, 2024). This pattern is exemplified through the JD-R model, which states that high job demands and low resources increase the risk of burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

### Institutional Rigidity and Bureaucratic Overload

One predominant theme from the interviews was the frustration caused by bureaucracy, such as delays in approvals, slow decision-making, and rigid procedures. Leaders commented that they were spending more time on documentation and compliance than on client work. These were also echoed in the literature, with burnout being attributed to several factors, including bureaucratic overload, compliance-driven cultures, and inflexible systems (Brands Saliba, 2023; SHRM, 2025). The Ecological Systems Theory provides a framework for understanding how organizational structures and macro-level policies influence everyday leadership constraints.

## Resource Scarcity and Infrastructure Limitations

One of the most prominent findings in the interviews was limited resources. The leaders reported the following as problems they encountered: limited vehicles for fieldwork, inadequate office space, insufficient technology, and chronic understaffing. These resource constraints posed an ethical challenge, caused delays in crisis responses and heightened emotional stress. The literature shows that resource scarcity is a critical element of burnout in the Caribbean and Global South, where job demands are exacerbated by small teams and limited funding (Ravalier et al., 2024; Ballout, 2025).

## Ethical Strain and Fear of Decision-Making

Respondents reported being afraid of making the wrong decisions, particularly when there was no clear protocol or few or no resources. Leaders were frequently under time constraints and pressure, making decisions without sufficient information. In line with the literature, burnout has been found to decrease both ethical awareness and moral intensity and increase the likelihood of ethical compromises (Santiago Torner et al., 2024; Nunes & Palma Moreira, 2024).

## Intersectional Pressures and Identity-Based Stress

Women, LGBTQ+ leaders and racialized practitioners experienced more emotional labour as a result of identity-based expectations, criticism or being overlooked. Many felt they needed to “prove themselves” in a male-dominated or socially conservative environment. These results were also echoed in the literature, which has demonstrated that intersectional stressors - those associated with gender, race, sexuality, and socio-political context - exacerbate burnout symptoms (Barboza Wilkes et al., 2022; Orsini & Sunderman, 2024).

## Macro-Level Structural Pressures

Macro-level systemic factors contributing to burnout in small-island and resource-limited settings were identified in both interviews and the literature. These include: 1) Funding constraints; 2) Politicization; 3) Colonial legacy in administrative systems; and 4) Fractured policy environments. Such structural pressures impact organisational culture, leadership behaviour and service delivery.

**Table 1:** Depicting the Themes and Findings from the Interview and Literature Review

Theme	Interview Findings	Literature Review Findings
<b>Emotional Labour</b>	Leaders reported that they had “absorbed a lot of distressing client information,” helped staff when they were at a place of distress, and had felt emotionally numb and exhausted. Numerous persons reported mental cloudiness and/or a lack of emotional control.	One of the main attributes of burnout is emotional exhaustion. Bryce et al. (2024) found that exposure to trauma and crises intensifies emotional stress. According to Maslach’s model, emotional exhaustion is a key element of burnout.
<b>Cognitive Overload</b>	Participants reported forgetfulness, concentration problems and decision fatigue. Leaders said they have experienced “mental overload from constant crises.”	According to Muller and Kubatova (2022), burnout negatively affects an individual’s executive functioning, which impairs decision-making and strategic thinking.
<b>Role Ambiguity</b>	Leaders often had more than one role (“supervisor, counsellor, driver, data clerk”). Unclear expectations and conflicting	“Role conflict and role ambiguity are two key burnout factors” (Powell & Mayfield, 2024). The JD-R model predicts burnout when demands exceed resources.

	instructions were reported by many.	
<b>Bureaucratic Overload</b>	Leaders voiced frustration over delays in approvals, too many forms and compliance requirements. One commented: “I spend more time proving that I did work than doing the work itself.”	Burnout is reinforced by bureaucratic overload and rigid organisational procedures, which increase administrative demands and reduce time for core pedagogical work. These inflexible systems create role strain and heighten stress, consistent with the JD-R model and ecological perspectives on organisational constraints (Brands Saliba, 2023; SHRM, 2025)
<b>Resource Scarcity</b>	Persistent lack of vehicles, personnel, office space, and technology. Ethical strain was described by leaders, who were unable to respond adequately because of resource constraints.	Ravalier et al. (2024) and Ballout (2025) found that small-island and Global South settings have significant resource limitations that contribute to burnout.
<b>Ethical Strain</b>	Leaders were concerned that they might be making wrong decisions, particularly if there were vague protocols or insufficient resources. Emotional distress resulted from ethical dilemmas.	Burnout decreases ethical awareness and moral clarity (Santiago Torner et al., 2024). Nunes and Palma Moreira (2024) associate burnout with a decline in organisational commitment and ethical engagement.
<b>Intersectional Stressors</b>	Women and LGBTQ+ leaders mentioned being subjected to additional challenges such as “proving themselves”, emotional labour and scrutiny. Burnout was exacerbated by identity-based stress.	Barboza Wilkes et al. (2022) point out that burnout experiences are influenced by race, gender and socio-political contexts. Intersectionality is under-studied but critical, according to Orsini and Sunderman (2024).
<b>Leadership Strain</b>	Leaders explained that they became less patient, apathetic and, at times, withdrew from staff. There were some instances of reported reactive decision-making due to exhaustion.	Leaders who suffer from burnout lose the ability to support their teams, which negatively affects team cohesion and organizational stability, according to the CDC (2024) and Bryce et al. (2024).
<b>Political and Structural Pressures</b>	Political interference, delays resulting from centralized systems and pressure from external stakeholders were mentioned by the participants.	It explains that the colonial administrative legacy, political factors, and financial restrictions influence burnout in the Caribbean and the Global South.
<b>Protective Factors</b>	Leaders appreciated reflective supervision, peer support and collaborative decision-making. Resilience practices, such as boundary setting, were described by some.	Transformational leadership, reflective practice and trauma-informed supervision are protective practices supported in the literature (Chaaban et al., 2025; Bakker, Demerouti & Sanz-Vergel, 2023).

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that burnout among social work leaders in the Caribbean and wider Global South is a systemic, multi-level condition shaped by organisational, structural, and socio-political pressures. This aligns with the study's conceptualisation of burnout as "a systemic issue that directly impacts leaders' functioning and the functioning of organizations". By integrating the JD-R Model, Transformational Leadership Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory, the discussion below critically examines how the empirical findings relate to existing scholarship and how they address the research questions.

### **Burnout as a Systemic, Multi-Level Phenomenon (RQ1)**

**Research Question 1:** *What systemic factors contribute to burnout among leaders in high-stakes social work environments?*

The interviews revealed that the causes of burnout are: emotional labour, cognitive overload, role ambiguity, bureaucratic rigidity, resource scarcity and intersectional pressure. The results of this study are consistent with the JD-R Model, which suggests that burnout occurs when work demands exceed resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Leaders stated that they experienced high emotional demands, frequent crisis management and excessive administration, all of which support the model's premise that a lack of supervision, autonomy and staffing causes high demands on their emotional and cognitive energy.

The literature review also highlights unclear roles, excessive workloads and a lack of autonomy as key stressors within the organisation (Powell & Mayfield, 2024). The interviews confirm this; respondents frequently describe being given conflicting instructions and having multiple roles. This convergence reveals that role ambiguity not only exists within the organisation but rather as a structural problem exacerbated in small-island and resource-limited environments.

Ecological Systems Theory also sheds light on the influence of macro-level factors, such as political interference, funding limitations and colonial administrative legacies, on burnout. Participants described delays in accessing resources, political pressure in decision-making and rigid bureaucratic systems. This is supported by the literature, which has highlighted that SIDS experience chronic labour shortages and system constraints (Ballout, 2025; Ravalier et al., 2024).

Although global studies recognize systemic pressures, this empirical research reveals that these pressures are more severe and more interwoven in the Caribbean and Global South than in the literature. This indicates a need for more research on burnout in the region.

### **Burnout's Impact on Leadership Effectiveness (RQ2)**

**Research Question 2:** *How does burnout affect leadership effectiveness in decision-making, team cohesion, and ethical practice?*

The results indicate that burnout negatively affects leaders' cognitive abilities, ethical perception, and relational leadership. Leaders reported signs of forgetfulness, difficulty focusing, and even being afraid of making the wrong decision, findings that aligned with research indicating that burnout affects executive functioning (Muller & Kubatova, 2022). The literature further states that those who experience burnout are less likely to make strategic decisions and more likely to make reactive ones. This was also echoed by participants who described feeling compelled to "put out fires" rather than make decisions proactively.

Ethical strain was a significant theme that developed. Participants reported that ethical decision-making was more difficult due to unclear protocols and insufficient resources. This is consistent with Santiago Torner et al. (2024), who found that emotional exhaustion lowers moral consciousness and ethical sensitivity. The interviews go beyond this to reveal the internal and structural nature of ethical strain, particularly when leaders are faced with making decisions in high-stress situations without support.

Leaders’ relational effectiveness was also diminished by burnout. Participants reported the following changes: becoming less patient, apathetic and more withdrawn, which can be interpreted as depersonalisation in Maslach’s model. In the literature, burnout is also reported to affect team cohesion and team member turnover negatively (CDC, 2024; Bryce et al., 2024). The results, however, do add colour, as it was found that there were intersectional pressures, with women and LGBTQ+ leaders experiencing relational strain with extra pressure and emotional labour.

These empirical findings show that burnout is not limited to emotional exhaustion but also manifests as structural and ethical dilemmas, identity pressures, and resource pressures, and that these are underrepresented in the global literature.

### Systemic Interventions and Leadership Resilience (RQ3)

**Research Question 3:** *Which systemic interventions mitigate burnout and enhance leadership resilience?*

The participants highlighted 4 areas as protective factors: reflective supervision, peer support, collaborative decision-making and trauma-informed organisational practices. These results are aligned with Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasize supportive, ethical, and relational leadership behaviours that improve team resilience. Leaders who were provided with reflective supervision felt more supported, grounded and able to manage emotions, as the literature highlights, suggesting that relational supervision helps prevent burnout (Brands Saliba 2023).

The findings are also supported by the JD-R Model, which suggests that higher levels of resources, including supervision, autonomy and team support, can mitigate the impact of high demands. Participants’ focus on collaboration and shared decision-making is consistent with the model’s principles of reducing emotional strain through resource-enhancing interventions.

These results are consistent with the need for multi-level interventions as identified in the Ecological Systems Theory. Leaders emphasized that individual coping mechanisms were not enough if the structural issues of staffing shortages, bureaucratic delays and political interference were not addressed. This calls for “trauma-informed policy transformation and culturally responsive leadership development.”

These findings indicate that resilience is not a personal characteristic but a structural phenomenon, influenced by organisational culture, leadership models and socio-political context. This is a challenge to literature that focuses heavily on personal coping.

**Table 2:** Showing how the Findings Answer the Research Questions

Research Questions	Answers Based on Findings
RQ1: Systemic contributors	Emotional labour, role ambiguity, overburdened bureaucracy, limited resources, and intersectional pressures are key factors that increase the risk of burnout, all heightened by political and colonial structural factors.
RQ2: Impact on leadership	Burnout affects cognitive functions, ethical values, and relational leadership, which, in turn, leads to poor decision-making, less team unity, and organizational instability.
RQ3: Effective interventions	Burnout can be reduced and leadership resilience enhanced through reflective supervision, collaborative supervision, trauma-informed organisational practices and resource-enhancing strategies.

This study provides evidence that burnout in high-stakes social work leadership is not a personal problem but rather a structural and systemic issue impacted by organizational culture, resource limitations and socio-political environments. Combining the JD-R Model, TLT, and EST offers a holistic understanding of how burnout develops, its impact on leadership and the systemic interventions needed.

The findings build on existing literature by revealing that burnout in high-stakes social work leadership is more complex and influenced by intersectional and political forces in the Caribbean and the Global South than what has been documented. They also demonstrate that, apart from emotional exhaustion, ethical strain can form when structural factors limit a leader's capacity for ethical behaviour. Likewise, the results suggest that resilience is a group and system process rather than a personal one, as the organisation's culture, supervision and resource environment influence it. Lastly, the study highlights the importance of resources and the lasting impact of colonial administrative traditions, making this work a significant contribution to social work leadership studies globally.

Despite all of these, there are some limitations to be noted. Firstly, the empirical component was based on 20 semi-structured interviews that, although richly detailed, may not represent the diverse leadership experiences in all Caribbean and Global South settings. Secondly, the study relied on self-reported accounts, which could be subject to recall bias and/or personal interpretations of organisational events. Third, the systematic review was restricted to English-language publications, which may have excluded relevant studies from non-English-speaking areas. Fourth, the study did not contain longitudinal data; therefore, it was hard to monitor the development of burnout and leadership effectiveness over time. Last, although the study brings together three theories, it has not tested the causal relationships between systemic factors and leadership outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationship between systemic pressures and burnout, and its leadership effectiveness in high-stakes social work settings through a systematic literature review and empirical data from 20 Caribbean and Global South social work leaders. The results illustrate that burnout is a structural issue arising from chronic resource shortages, institutional inflexibility, emotional labour, role ambiguity, and intersectional inequity. These pressures have a direct impact on leaders' capacity to make ethical choices, lead their teams and foster stable organisational cultures. Together, the JD-R model, TLT and EST help shed light on how high demands and low resources combine at personal, organisational, and socio-political levels to reduce leadership capacity.

Practitioners' voices echo these theoretical patterns. Leaders explained that they were constantly overwhelmed and experienced cognitive overload, emotional numbness, and fear of making decisions. This was particularly true when there were unclear protocols or when there was a lack of resources. These pressures were exacerbated by Caribbean and Global South circumstances, including colonial administrative legacies, political interference, understaffing and inadequate infrastructure. The results provide answers to the study's research questions, describing the systemic causes of burnout, its effect on leadership capabilities and the organisational and structural settings that need to be changed to foster sustainable leadership.

The findings of this research are relevant for theory, practice, and policy. The results support the theoretical integration of JD-R, TLT and EST to understand burnout as a multi-level phenomenon, impacted by emotional, organisational and socio-political factors. In practice, these outcomes underscore the critical need for trauma-informed supervision, reduced bureaucracy, and enhanced leadership to foster ethical decision-making and emotional regulation. The study highlights the need for policymakers to address chronic resource shortages, reform administrative processes, and craft policies that align with the realities of small island nations and post-colonial governance models. Regional implications involve addressing the colonial administrative past, assertive community-based leadership models and culturally and context-sensitive resource allocation frameworks.

Ultimately, this study confirms the need for systemic change, cultural responsiveness, and context-sensitive approaches to strengthen leadership in high-stakes social work, particularly in small-island and resource-constrained settings. Individual resilience, however, is not enough to enable sustainable leadership. It requires organizational transformation, fair policy design and a justice-based approach that safeguards practitioners and the communities they serve.

The study's findings underscore the need for systemic, context-sensitive reforms across social work agencies in the Caribbean and in the wider Global South. First, leaders often indicated experiencing emotional

exhaustion and cognitive overload; there is a need to strengthen trauma-informed and reflective supervision. Agencies should, therefore, ensure that they regularly supervise, offer trauma-informed check-ins and allow protected time for debriefing to alleviate emotional stress and avoid ethical fatigue. Similarly, solving resource challenges is vital, as chronic lack of vehicles, staff, office space, and technology was found in interviews. Resource allocation strategies should be adopted and adapted to the realities of SIDS, such as community-based infrastructure, mobile units and shared services. It is crucial to lessen the administrative burden and provide greater autonomy in decision-making, since participants reported delays in approvals and paperwork.

Reducing administrative procedures, delegating routine decision-making and streamlining reporting systems will enable leaders to allocate more time to client-focused work. Thus, leadership development should be grounded in transformational and culturally responsive practices, and training on ethical leadership, emotional control, crisis decision-making and relational communication. This training should also emphasize colonial legacies, gendered expectations and inequities in leadership experiences in the region. Finally, it is crucial to promote participatory governance and staff voice, as many leaders felt undervalued and unsupported. Policy, resource allocation and organisational reform should be influenced by participatory decision-making structures, staff advisory groups and mechanisms that enable frontline leaders to have a voice in decision-making.

## REFERENCES

1. Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using Zoom Videoconferencing for Qualitative Data Collection: Perceptions and Experiences of Researchers and Participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596>
2. Ballout, S. (2025). Trauma, Mental Health Workforce Shortages, and Health Equity: A Crisis in Public Health. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 22(4), 620. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph22040620>
3. Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2017). Job demands–resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 273–285. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000056>
4. Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Sanz-Vergel, A. (2023). Job Demands–Resources Theory: Ten Years Later. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 10(1), 25–53. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-053933>
5. Balogun, A. K., Atta, J. A., Oyetubo, O. M., Ibiam, V. A., Bakare-Adesokan, K. A., & Ojo, T. O. (2025). Developing culturally competent models for inclusive social work and healthcare interventions. *International Journal of Science and Research Archive*, 14(1), 1396–1406. <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2025.14.1.0226>
6. Barboza-Wilkes, C. J., Le, T. V., & Resh, W. G. (2022). Deconstructing Burnout at the Intersections of Race, Gender, and Generation in Local Government. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 33(1), 186–201. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muac018>
7. Barbrook-Johnson, P., & Penn, A. S. (2023). *Seven methods for mapping systems*. Integration and Implementation Insights. <https://i2insights.org/2023/02/28/systems-mapping-methods/>
8. Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: Free Press.
9. Brands-Saliba, E. (2023). *Relational supervision: A preventative tool for practitioner burnout*. CYC-Online. <https://cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cyconline-feb2023-saliba.html>
10. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
11. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
12. Bryce, C., Povey, R., Oliver, M., & Cooke, R. (2024). Effective Interventions to Reduce Burnout in Social Workers: A Systematic Review. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 54(8), 3794–3819. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcae115>
13. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2024). *Burnout Intervention Planning Guide*. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/learning/publichealthburnoutprevention/module-10/guide.html>

14. Chaaban, Y., Badwan, K., & Arar, K. (2025). Educational leadership for social justice: A systematic review of empirical evidence. *Review of Education*, 13 (2), e70077. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.70077>
15. CIWiL. (2024). *Youth Lead Toolkit: Learning to Lead*. Caribbean Women in Leadership. <https://ciwil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/CIWiL-YOUth-Lead-Toolkit-Learning-to-Lead.pdf>
16. Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2001). The job demands-resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 499–512. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0021-9010.86.3.499>
17. Fisk, G. M., & Daoust, L. E. (2025). Advancing a trauma-informed approach to leadership in the workplace: A conceptual review and theoretical extension. *Psychology of Leaders and Leadership*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/mgr0000172>
18. Germain, C. B., & Gitterman, A. (2024). *The Life Model: Applying Ecological Systems Theory in Social Work Practice*. Social Work Institute. <https://socialwork.institute/origin-development/life-model-ecological-systems-social-work/>
19. Greene, R., Greene, N., & Corley, C. (2023). *Resilience enhancement in social work practice: Anti-oppressive social work skills and techniques*. Springer. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-38518-6>
20. Joanna Briggs Institute. (2020). *Checklist for qualitative research appraisal*. *JBI Manual for Evidence Synthesis*. <https://jbi.global/critical-appraisal-tools>
21. Kinman, G., & Grant, L. (2020). Emotional demands, compassion and mental health in social workers. *Occupational Medicine*, 70(2), 89–94. <https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqz144>
22. Kyambade, M., & Namatovu, A. (2025). Pleasurable emotional states in health-care organizations: the mediation role of employee wellbeing on transformational leadership and job satisfaction. *Leadership in Health Services*, 38(2), 299–317. <https://doi.org/10.1108/lhs-06-2024-0052>
23. Lai, M., Jian, M., & Wang, M. (2025). Emotional labor of social workers and associated factors resulting in positive/negative outcomes: A systematic review. *The British Journal of Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaf228>
24. Lee, M. C. C., Kee, Y. J., Lau, S. S. Y., & Jan, G. (2023). Investigating aspects of paternalistic leadership within the job demands–resources model. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 30(6), 1900–1919. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2022.95>
25. Mack, B. M. (2021). Resiliency-Focused Supervision Model. *Advances in Social Work*, 20(3), 596–614. <https://doi.org/10.18060/23897>
26. Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. *Journal of Occupational Behavior*, 2(2), 99–113. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030020205>
27. McLeod, S. (2024). *Audit trail in qualitative research*. *Simply Psychology*. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/audit-trail-in-qualitative-research.html>
28. Müller, R., & Kubátová, J. (2025). A systematic review of managerial burnout and personal crisis: Navigating the interplay of individual, organizational, and environmental factors. *German Journal of Human Resource Management: Zeitschrift für Personalforschung*, 28(4), 567–584. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23970022251315650>
29. Nagarajan, R., Ramachandran, P., Dilipkumar, R., & Kaur, P. (2024). Global estimate of burnout among the public health workforce: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Human Resources for Health*, 22(30). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-024-00917-w>
30. Northouse, P. G. (2021). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (9th ed.). Sage Publications.
31. Nunes, A., & Palma-Moreira, A. (2024). Toxic Leadership and Turnover Intentions: The Role of Burnout Syndrome. *Administrative Sciences*, 14(12), 340. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14120340>
32. Orsini, J., & Sunderman, H. M. (2024). Leadership identity development, meaning-making and the intersection of marginalized social identities: A scoping review. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 23(2), 155–170. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOLE-01-2024-0020>
33. Page, M. J., McKenzie, J., Bossuyt, P., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T.C., Mulrow, C.D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J.M., & Moher, D. (2020). *Updating guidance for reporting systematic reviews: development of the PRISMA 2020 statement*. <https://doi.org/10.31222/osf.io/jb4dx>
34. Pazer, S. (2025). Burnout among social workers structural causes, coping strategies, and organizational interventions. *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies*, 7(1), 583–587. <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648652.2025.v7.i1h.233>

35. Perlman, S., Ben-Sheleg, E., & Ellen, M. E. (2025). Making sense of conducting a critical interpretive synthesis: A scoping review. *Research Synthesis Methods*, 17(1), 30–41. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rsm.2025.10041>
36. Powell, M., & Mayfield, L. R. (2024). Burnout in Social Work Field Education. In SpringerBriefs in Social Work. *Springer International Publishing*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-45922-1>
37. Ravalier, J. M., McFadden, P., Jones, D., & Truell, R. (2024). A Three-Year Comparison of Global Social Worker Working Conditions. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 55(1), 575–593. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcae159>
38. Santiago-Torner, C., González-Carrasco, M., & Miranda Ayala, R. A. (2024). Ethical Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion: The Impact of Moral Intensity and Affective Commitment. *Administrative Sciences*, 14(9), 233. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14090233>
39. Satiani, B., & Satiani, A. (2022). Recognizing and Managing a Toxic Leader: A Case Study. *Physician Leadership Journal*, 9(5), 23–27. <https://doi.org/10.55834/plj.6849841215>
40. Schwanz, K. A., & Paiva-Salisbury, M. (2022). Before They Crash and Burn (Out): A Compassion Fatigue Resilience Model. *Journal of Wellness*, 3(3). <https://doi.org/10.55504/2578-9333.1100>
41. Social Work Institute. (2024). *Identifying and combating burnout in social work*. <https://socialwork.institute/practicum-and-supervision/combating-burnout-social-work/>
42. Society for Human Resource Management. (2025). *Burnout and leadership: The hidden cost of poor management*. <https://www.shrm.org>
43. SOM. (2023). Managing stress, burnout and fatigue in health and social care. *Society of Occupational Medicine*. [https://www.som.org.uk/Managing\\_stress\\_burnout\\_and\\_fatigue\\_in\\_health\\_and\\_social\\_care.pdf](https://www.som.org.uk/Managing_stress_burnout_and_fatigue_in_health_and_social_care.pdf)
44. Woods, S. A., Ahmed, S., Zhou, Y., & Agneessens, F. (2024). The perils of leadership development: unintended consequences for employee withdrawal behaviour and conflict. *Work & Stress*, 38(4), 399–419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2024.2332174>
45. Zahid, H. (2024). *Ethical and legal guidelines in data sharing*. UK Data Archive, University of Essex. <https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/app/uploads/ethicalandlegalguidelines2024-10-10.pdf>