



‘You’re Investing in People ... It’s Not a Race. It’s Not a Rush’: Youth Care Worker Emotional Labour in Inner-City Neighbourhoods Across Canada

Bilguundari Enkhtugs

University of Alberta, Canada

Kevin Walby

University of Winnipeg, Canada

Abstract

Emotional labour (EL) is the practice of managing expressions in a given work setting. Using the concept of EL, we aim to understand how youth care workers supporting marginalized youth manage work-related stress and the emotions experienced by young people. The youth supported by these workers experience the effects of secondary prisonization (i.e., indirect exposure to punishment), requiring them to engage in extensive EL. Drawing from qualitative interviews and participant-generated visual data, we show that EL is a crucial part of support work that is not yet well recognized. With the participant-generated visual data, we reveal how emotions are processed and managed. EL enables workers to continue to advocate for the needs and well-being of young people even at times of distress and austerity, at the expense of being exposed to secondary prisonization. Explaining how secondary prisonization extends beyond immediate family members and affects youth care workers at a tertiary level, we argue that one way of investing in the community (rather than expanding the criminal justice system) is by taking the importance of EL in support work seriously and providing better resources for these workers, who present real opportunities and safety for inner-city youths.

Keywords: Youth work; emotional labour; emotions; safety; secondary prisonization.

Introduction¹

Pearl was a youth care worker in a Canadian city for seven years. There was one young Indigenous woman with whom she worked for a few of those years. As Pearl described her during an interview:

She wouldn’t open up a lot. She wouldn’t trust anybody. She would always think that there are ulterior motives ... So as the first year went on, she finally opened up to me and she started trusting me ... She wasn’t very close with her family. I was kind of like an older sister to her.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was more difficult to have a routine or structure, and the young Indigenous woman started to grow distant. Pearl reminded the young woman that she could call any time and Pearl would help her:



Except where otherwise noted, content in this journal is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). As an open access journal, articles are free to use with proper attribution. ISSN: 2202-8005 (Online)

And she did call me at 3 am one time, and I missed it because I was sleeping ... I think she just thought that I was trying to ignore her or something. And then a week later, I was told that she committed suicide. One night. And that was heartbreaking.

Pearl missed one phone call in the middle of the night, and everything fell apart. This tragic account is not uncommon among youth care workers and the young people they support in some poorer neighbourhoods in cities across Canada.

In this article, we examine youth care work in two Central Canadian cities. Although other titles exist, such as ‘support worker,’ ‘mentor’ and ‘counsellor,’ we use the term ‘youth care worker’ throughout this article. These workers provide support for children and young adults in need, as well as their families. Our participants work in economically and socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where poverty and racism are factors that lead youth towards transgression and decreased involvement in education and recreation (Arnež 2022; Miller 2022). As Pearl put it, ‘the North End is very tough and even walking around, something could happen.’ Youth in these neighbourhoods are often involved in the justice system or face the consequences of their parental imprisonment (known as secondary prisonization) (Comfort 2003). Youth care work is meaningful for the workers and the people they work with, and it is impactful in these communities. Despite barriers such as criminalization and low socio-economic status, these young people still have many aspirations (Hamilton et al. 2020) that youth care workers attempt to foster. Little is known about the collateral consequences and impacts of secondary prisonization on youth care workers who interact with children of incarcerated parents on a daily basis.

Below we examine the activities of youth care workers, and we draw from the literature on emotional labour (EL) (Hochschild 1983) to explore the ways youth care workers manage their own emotions and the emotions of youths when engaging with challenging circumstances. The literature on EL helps us examine how these workers manage their own emotions and deal with some troubling work contexts, including criminal justice work (Anleu and Mack 2005; Phillips et al. 2020; Westaby et al. 2020). We argue that the young people who are supported by these workers experience the effects of secondary prisonization. Consequently, youth care workers are indirectly exposed to the effects of secondary prisonization and must engage in extensive EL. Emotions are central to their work processes, and these youth care workers do socially meaningful work even after being exposed to the effects of secondary prisonization through their interactions with the inner-city youth. We find that the emotional challenges they face are amplified by policies associated with conditions of austerity and their indirect exposure to the effects of secondary prisonization. To illustrate our findings, we first review relevant literature on youth care and emotional labour. Then, after a note on methods, we provide our analysis of interviews with youth care workers from some of the more impoverished neighbourhoods in Canadian cities.

Literature Review and Conceptual Position

In this study, we draw on the literature on youth care work. Sercombe (1998) argues that youth care workers have considerable power in their jobs, and that ethics is a crucial factor in their work. They argue youth care workers must be sensitive to issues of power and ethics in their communications with young people. Reiterating this point, Reid and Oliver (2014) contend that professional ethics and care are important in the training of youth support workers and the implementation of policies to support youth. Youth work is crucial because when youth are not supported, they can become engaged in transgression in ways that derail their life chances (Davies 2015). Whelan (2010) suggests that youth care workers must cherish the value of care in doing this work (also see Love and Hendry 1994) and, as Spence (2008) notes, communication is fundamental to youth support work. These building blocks and values of professionalism and ethics are fundamental to youth care work, as demonstrated by Zubulake (2017).

The literature on youth care work reveals that emotions and communication, along with ethics and professionalism, are fundamental to this work. However, as Davies (2013) and Price (2018) argue, government policies change over time, funding levels can decrease and support from the government can be scaled back, which makes it more challenging for youth care workers to dedicate themselves to these youths. As Hughes et al. (2014) point out, austerity in government not only decreases the number of care workers supporting youths, but increases the caseloads of workers, which makes it more challenging for youth workers to undertake emotion work and communication with youths. Clyne (2015) argues that sometimes governments can place emphasis on professionalism for youth care workers at the same time as material support and financial backing for youth care divisions are scaled back, a contradiction that makes it difficult for youth care workers to do their jobs.

Beyond government austerity, another challenge is the context within which youth care workers do their job. The context of criminalization and imprisonment creates another set of challenges for youth care workers to navigate, as the youth they care for can be facing the stigma and barriers associated with having a parent who is criminalized or imprisoned. Many young people served by youth care workers have parents who are themselves struggling with unemployment, divorce and criminalization, as

our interviewees note. In this sense, the youths and the youth care workers may experience secondary prisonization (Comfort 2003).

Comfort (2003) argues that exposure to the criminal justice system leads to the experience of secondary prisonization. When family members – and especially youths – visit incarcerated family members, they feel shame and stigma, which can result in withdrawal and barriers. This finding resonates with Brayne's (2014) argument that any criminal justice contact subsequently results in what the author calls 'system avoidance'. This means they will not only distrust and avoid police, but they will also avoid other systems such as the healthcare system, the education system, social services and the welfare system. As Condry and Minson (2021) point out, the effects of imprisonment on families are dire, and these effects extend to youth care workers. The collateral consequences and the harms of criminalization cut across social and economic factors associated with well-being. Moreover, Reizabal et al. (2021) argue that secondary prisonization can have psychological effects, which may lead to personality or behavioural issues. Bailey (2011) maintains that secondary prisonization can intersect with racism and racial discrimination, leading to further marginalization and deprivation for family members and young people with an incarcerated parent. As one staff member located in inner-city Winnipeg's North End noted, about 65% or more of the students served by workers are Indigenous – the population that is most impacted by incarceration in Canada.

Sometimes young people experience social harm or pass away by suicide. This is a far too common issue, as Pearl shared. This results in a tremendous sense of loss, grief and sadness for the youth care workers with whom we talked. Youth care workers must manage their own sadness and grief while continuing to support young people and their families in the context of secondary prisonization and, by extension, these workers experience the effects of imprisonment and criminalization. Youth care workers attempt to mitigate the negative effects and consequences of imprisonment. In doing so, youth care workers must simultaneously manage their own emotions and those of the young people with whom they work.

In addition to the literature on youth care work and secondary prisonization, we engage with the literature on emotional labour, particularly in criminal justice work (Anleu and Mack 2005; Perry and Ricciardelli 2021; Phillips et al. 2020; Westaby et al. 2020). Hochschild (1983) famously examined emotion work and emotional labour, defining emotion work as the work people do in everyday life to manage their emotions according to feeling rules, to prevent outbursts and to follow the social order as it pertains to emotions in any particular situation. On the other hand, emotional labour is the performance of emotion work within an organization, often for pay. The organization or employer may set the emotion rules in this work context (also see Walby and Spencer 2012; 2020). The example Hochschild uses is that of airline attendants, who must be kind, courteous and prompt under challenging work conditions where people are not always behaving at their best. Workers engaging in emotional labour self-regulate their private emotions and abide by feeling rules in the context of a given work setting.

Continued emotional labour can create dissonance or alienation where people become detached from their typical sense of self or their usual approach to experiencing daily life. Repeated emotional labour can do damage when one continually takes on the demands and stress of performing EL. To manage their emotions, workers in different fields of work create an emotional climate in which emotions travel in time and space through communication, making the experience of emotions a collective one. According to Rimé (2007), the collective nature of emotions is important in constructing relationships between co-workers and their clients because the collectively experienced emotions shape the overall emotion atmosphere, which helps them to avoid stressful situations. There is also a secondary set of literature on emotional labour debating the concept and some of the nuances of Hochschild's ideas (Theodosius 2006; see also Walby and Cole 2019; Walby and Spencer 2018). This literature on EL provides a framework for thinking about the nature of youth care work and how youth care workers undertake the activities of managing the emotions of young people while controlling their own emotions and experiences over time.

Literature on youth care work in the Canadian context is rare. As Barford and Whelton (2014) show in the Western Canadian context, youth care workers become emotionally exhausted from work pressure. Similarly, Karabanow's (1999) earlier research focuses on the importance of organizational culture in shaping the experiences of emotional labour among youth shelter workers in Canada. In the US context, White et al. (2020) found that levels of actual support and perceived support from direct supervisors affect the mental well-being of support workers. They also found that stress experienced at work is felt at home as these workers carry their emotions over into their private lives. In the UK context, de St Croix (2013) and Parry, Williams and Oldfield (2022) show the importance of recognition of emotional labour in human services work. Building on this literature, we examine how emotional labour is performed by youth care workers in the context of socio-economically disadvantaged communities in Canada while describing the emotional labour that youth care workers engage in, the supports they rely on to navigate these difficult moments and some of the consequences. Bringing together literature on youth care work, secondary prisonization and emotional labour, we provide a framework to analyze the connection between emotion work and secondary prisonization through tertiary relations during times of austerity.

Methodology

Guided by a constructivist grounded theory approach, we explore how youth care workers perform emotional labour and cope with the stresses associated with extensive emotional labour and indirect exposure to secondary prisonization (Charmaz, 2001; Cresswell and Poth 2017). We interviewed eight participants from two non-profit community organizations in Canada from late November 2022 to late January 2023. One of the community organizations on which we report is located in inner-city Winnipeg's North End – one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country, known for its long history of being viewed as an 'undesirable place to live' (MacKinnon 2020: 203). The other organization serves cities in the Greater Toronto Area. Two gatekeepers from Toronto and Winnipeg played a crucial role in helping to recruit participants, as we maintained contact with the gatekeepers from June 2022. We also received comments and reflections on the manuscript from members of the groups. Formal approval from the University of Winnipeg's Ethics Board was obtained to conduct this study. Once the approval was issued, the gatekeepers connected participants with us by email to schedule in-person or online interviews via Zoom. Snowball sampling was used for recruitment, given the gatekeepers' role and involvement in this study. We have conducted one face-to-face interview and seven interviews on Zoom. Our interviews lasted from 0.5 to 1.5 hours. Our participants had between one and ten years of ongoing work experience (except for one who ended their employment a few months before the interview in January 2023).

The online synchronous meeting platform (Zoom) has extended the outreach of study participation (Deakin and Wakefield 2013; Hamilton and Bowers 2006). Online interviews are convenient, easily accessible and save travel time and money (Gray et al. 2020). The interviewees felt comfortable sharing their work experiences from the perspective of those working in inner-city North End, even though sharing stories about emotions online or over the phone can be problematic or limited (Madge and O'Connor 2004, cited in Deakin and Wakefield 2014: 605). We used unstructured interview questions that focused broadly on the types of emotions experienced by participants, the types of emotions displayed by the children with whom they worked, how our participants managed emotionally challenging moments, their views of the justice system and future needs and concerns.

In addition to interview questions, we used the visual techniques of object elicitation (De Leon and Cohen 2005; Willig 2016) and photo elicitation (Harper 2002). We asked participants to bring an object that represented their engagement with emotion work. Participants had a choice to describe an object or to share a picture of an item that related to emotion work. These visual techniques helped our participants to elicit in-depth responses about their emotions, stress coping skills and explore the ways they formed a collective emotion atmosphere. Further, this technique enabled our interviewees to 'think visually,' enriching their responses through visual cues (Alexander 2013). Visual methods tell a story by unpacking thick meanings, which in turn helps to foster data triangulation (Pink 2013). The visual techniques made stressful conversations a little less difficult, as visual guides were there to iterate about how our participants managed their emotions and the stress that arose from their work (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). None of the participants showed signs of stress and frustration during the interviews, though some did recall sad memories when talking about youth.

The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed using transcription software. We have edited the interview transcripts for accuracy. All responses were anonymized. We used a constructivist grounded theory approach to guide our unstructured interview questions (Charmaz 2001). The constructivist grounded theory approach was also useful for guiding our data analysis (Charmaz 2001; Cresswell and Poth 2017). Without pre-assumptions, we engaged in a memoing process for a constant comparative approach where each interview was analysed before conducting the next interview. The constant comparative approach helped us to ask additional questions during the next interview, which enabled us to obtain more-detailed responses about our participants' work duties and the context of their work. In fact, via this constant comparative method, we were able to gain insight into the challenges presented by austerity, as well as norms related to emotions and display rules. In our analysis, we used open coding to identify different aspects of support work and emotions related to this line of work. With axial coding, we identified how youth care workers perform EL through different interactions, including youth and their family members, as well as their colleagues – that is, other youth care workers. The ideas grounded in the open and axial coding approaches generated our argument that EL is a useful concept to explain how, by extension, youth care workers are exposed to and affected by secondary prisonization. Emotions are used to mitigate the effects of secondary prisonization. We recognize the importance of EL performed by youth workers to better support socio-economically marginalized youths and demonstrate that emotion work is an important practice to also advocate for investment in this line of work, which provides real safety to communities.

Findings and Analysis

Situating Youth Care Work Experience in Inner-City Neighbourhoods

Our participants work in non-profit organizations that offer educational, social, cultural and spiritual support to young people in urban communities where issues such as poverty and racism prevail (also see Arnež 2022; Miller 2022). They work with middle school and high school students who have experiences related to the youth justice system or who have experienced the negative effects of secondary prisonization in Manitoba and Ontario (Comfort 2003; Condry and Minson 2021). For example, the grassroots organization in Ontario offers children and youths (aged 5 to 25 years) a family visitation program where they have the opportunity to maintain a relationship with their incarcerated parent. Participants who provide child–parent relationship-building support are directly exposed to the kids experiencing parental imprisonment. The changes in youths' moods and emotions due to the prison visitation program expose support youth care workers to secondary prisonization:

[I]t sits with them and bothers them and then that's when we have to debrief them. They have feelings like, 'Oh, what if my dad's not safe? Like is he gonna come home?'... And they personalize everything and put the blame on themselves. And as their support workers, you have to try to get them to understand that it isn't their fault. (Kim)

Youths internalize their anxiety and distress as a result of parental imprisonment. To navigate this challenge, our participants engage in EL by managing both the youths and their own emotions. Through their work duties, Kim and others become exposed to the justice system. To mitigate the harms associated with secondary prisonization, our participants and the non-profits in which they work aim to foster welcoming, respectful and trustworthy relationships that help children and youth to build self-esteem. Interviewees create caring and secure environments for children to succeed in their school and community. In addition to providing support on site at their organization, they perform community outreach work at a local school division.

In Manitoba, most of our participants grew up in the North End, Winnipeg – the same neighbourhood where the non-profit is located. Having similar lived experiences, the participants become familiar with the situations in which young people find themselves. It is noteworthy that the 2016 census data from the city of Winnipeg indicates that 40% of the North End (or North Point Douglas area) population identify as Indigenous, whereas only 12% of the city of Winnipeg's population identify as Indigenous. Moreover, while the average household income in the city of Winnipeg in 2015 was \$86,920, the average household income in the North End was \$43,721 (the City of Winnipeg and Statistics Canada 2019). Having similar lived experiences – such as experiencing parental incarceration and growing up in the same neighbourhood – connects youth workers in Ontario and Manitoba with the young people, enabling them to gain a better understanding of their social backgrounds.

Our participants from the two non-profits indicated that Black and Indigenous youths, and youths of colour, make up the largest part of their program attendees. Growing up in the same community helps these workers to connect with the populations they serve, including both the young people and their parents. Support provided to families is crucial, as parents of young people are also in need of support. While some parents struggle 'to make ends meet' (Pearl) and seek financial support (with facing food insecurity and paying bills), some others struggle with parenting due to the history of colonization that caused intergenerational trauma and disruption in socio-cultural values (Grace, Duke). Some participants are living with intergenerational trauma from residential schooling, as their parents are survivors of residential schools struggling with traditional skills of parenting. Their lived experiences foster an understanding and non-judgemental approach to helping the youths with whom they work.

Acknowledging this common challenge, the study sites provide cultural support for youth, giving them a chance to reconnect with their traditional values and cultures in addition to providing education support. Participants cited several challenges of having young people involved in gangs, criminal activities, experiencing homelessness, addictions and substance abuse, and food insecurity. Despite the struggles they face, with the needed support, some youths grow to take on the responsibilities of parenting their siblings, attending and finishing secondary school and attending post-secondary schools. This is the context of our participants' work conditions, where the engagement in emotional labour becomes a crucial, yet informal aspect of the occupation.

Our findings extend to describing several instances of engagement in emotional labour that bring positive changes into youths' lives. We elaborate on the ways different arrays of emotions are interpreted and managed through visual methods in the next section. Then we explore participants' experiences of EL concerning community investment (and government austerity), secondary prisonization and the importance of the work they do.

Emotion Management

Our participants feel a range of emotions that are broadly grouped as positive (happiness, satisfaction, gratitude, pride) and negative (anxiety, fear, anger, sadness). When asked to describe the most rewarding aspect of their jobs, interviewees cited the events related to youths graduating, obtaining IDs for the first time, organizing community events, improving youths' attendance rates and not seeing young people being involved in gangs and other criminal activities. While positive emotions take less effort for our participants to manage, negative emotions require active emotion management, including techniques used to suppress emotions, such as fear and anger, and display positive ones (called surface acting) (Hochschild 1983). Emotion management is not recognized as part of their formal work duties, whereas our data suggest that these youth care workers manage their own as well as young people's emotions.

The participants' extensive engagement in EL relates to youths' family backgrounds and the environments in which they grew up, including instances where youths may be experiencing the consequences of secondary prisonization. In this context, our participants learn to suppress their emotions and engage in EL to offer care and support. As Turkey put it: '[A]lthough I do think that there's validity in sharing emotion with them, there's that fine line of burdening them with something that they have no control over.' Being cognizant of their personal emotions and their potential impacts on the youth, Turkey chooses to conceal and suppress her emotions, which indicates that surface acting is an important aspect of youth care work as an occupation. Another way our participants engage in the management of different rays of emotions relates to the forming of a collective emotion atmosphere (Rimé 2007). The emotions displayed by youth care workers do not have boundaries and can be conveyed through time and space, having an impact on young people's feelings and emotions:

Because they can read right through me. If you're phony ... and you're just doing this for, say you need money, you don't want to do this job. They're going to see right through you and they're going to come on it. And they won't like you. (Grace)

Similarly, Blake states: 'Youth do feed off and feel our vibes and our energy and whatnot ... you definitely need to kind of check your stuff, your personal emotions at the door.' As much as recognizing a collective emotional atmosphere is important, other workers explain why they choose to manage their own emotions by suppressing them:

I don't need to project my emotions onto the students who already have emotions that could come to me – to be able to deal with their emotions. And if they already have mine, and I just share mine, they wouldn't want to come back because they don't need my negative emotions dealing with them. (Mama)

This participant stresses the importance of effectively managing their emotions and prioritizing their work duty to help and support young people. The collective emotion atmosphere plays a central role in this emotion management. Our participants care about the well-being of the people with whom they work, which involves them performing EL. For example, young men may become hesitant to express their emotions. Acknowledging this barrier, our participants engage in non-judgemental listening and communication, performing the role of a counsellor or organizing sharing circles. In other cases, youths are referred to professional counsellors or Elders in the community. Youth workers' collective efforts offer not only emotional support, but in some cases suicide and self-harm prevention strategies to young people with experiences of secondary prisonization. Offering informal counselling, listening to their needs, and making themselves approachable are some ways participants perform emotion work because it involves suppression and control of negative emotions.

Coping Mechanisms

In the context of emotional labour, coping mechanisms are actions taken towards managing emotions (embodied by suppression or expression of emotions). One common reason to manage emotion work is the action of carrying over or not carrying emotions outside of their workplaces. Carrying emotions over includes sharing emotions with family members and close friends for solace and comfort.

For all participants, carrying emotions over to their home environment meant actively engaging in EL at home:

I would say it would be like 24/7. And every time my phone rang on the weekends, it would just be like a little heart attack like, 'Oh, God, someone's in trouble.' Because usually no one would call me on the weekends unless it was an emergency. (Pearl)

The nature of occupation requires transferring emotional atmosphere to their home and personal environments. Setting up boundaries for time off of work is a challenge for our participants, but carrying over emotions from their professional lives to

their personal lives can be helpful for youth (by helping them at times of emergency and distress) and socially meaningful for youth care workers.

While the range of positive and negative emotions experienced at work could be shared with significant others at home, some participants decide not to share these emotions in their home environment. While some workers cope with emotions with the help of significant others, others seek professional help from therapists. Participants state that they ‘[do] not dump ... things on friends and my boyfriend’ (Pearl) and ‘balance things [and] don’t want their kids to be drained with tragic stories’ (Mama). Thus, support workers learn to perform emotion work at their home by not letting emotions out on their significant others.

Coping with difficult emotions and engaging in EL do not stop with youth care workers’ decisions to carry over emotions. Youth workers provide emotional support to each other. Turkey said, ‘We absorb all of this stuff [youth facing hardships] from our students and then we just kind of [took a pause] ... If we don’t have each other to kind of vent it out to, then we bring it home to our families.’ By hosting debriefing sessions, workers help each other to overcome difficult emotions. This kind of collegial support adds to their performance of emotional labour.

Aside from learning these coping strategies, the visual data on the object- and photo-elicitation methods present another effective approach for coping mechanisms. Below, we elaborate on the in-depth visual data that helped us understand the importance of emotion work (De Leon and Cohen 2005; Harper 2002; Willig 2017).

The participants who chose to participate in the photo-elicitation technique shared photos that symbolize their personal involvement in this line of work of supporting youths. Despite the challenges they face, the photo-elicitation technique reveals the reasons why they remain dedicated to their occupation. Duke shared a picture of his hobby, which he described as keeping him grounded. He also spoke of how the ‘nurturing’ role of youth care workers could foster success among youths. Two other interviewees shared pictures of their family members that remind them about the importance of their work and their contributions to the community:

I always think of my daughter and I think of my grandkids and stuff like that. And then it reminds me why I’m doing this. I’m not doing this just for me and the kids. I’m doing it for my family. (Turkey)

Other interviewees chose to bring objects that connect to their emotions. A traditional medicine pouch, sage bundle, eagle feather and smudging bowls are the objects used for object-elicitation. Miniature artefacts made by youths were also presented as these objects connect emotional labour with youth care work. Engaging in spiritual practices helps our participants to cope with and manage emotions. In addition to the participants themselves, they find that providing cultural and spiritual support is equally important for the well-being of young people.

When asked to describe the objects, Alex and Pearl reflected on how these objects helped them and their young clients to overcome challenging moments. These objects have symbolic and spiritual meanings for Alex and Pearl to feel empowered, strong and ‘grounded’ (or calm and present). Often, they incorporate traditional teachings and share their knowledge with young people through the use of these objects. Pearl describes an object (a smudge bowl) and highlights a meaning-making process associated with the object, which would not have been shared without the use of object-elicitation (Alexander 2013):

My family has been using it as the way to cleanse away all the bad energies and the emotions that we carry. You smudge your eyes to see things better, your nose and mouth to say things better, your ears to hear things better and your mind to think things better. And then your heart, to feel to feel those better emotions or like trying to work through those emotions. It’s more of like a strengthening tool, I guess, in a way. Like a strengthening and a cleansing tool. [When] I can’t focus on something, I’m anxious. I’m scared. But when I smell the sage, I feel like, okay, I’m calm now.

With the use of photo- and object-elicitation techniques, we find that youth care workers process or cope with their emotions by engaging in EL. The visual methods consisting of object- and photo-elicitation methods are effective strategies to evoke feelings and memories (Harper 2002). These techniques helped us to strengthen our data by adding a visual component while offering our participants the opportunity to contemplate the ways in which they performed emotional labour and its social significance (Alexander 2013; Pink 2013).

Needs

Not receiving sufficient funding to function effectively defeats the purpose of the work of supporting young people while presenting numerous challenges related to this type of human-to-human work. When asked about needs and changes to improve their work performance, all participants identified the need for increased funding. Guided by a grounded theory approach, our interview questions initially focused on emotional labour, coping mechanisms and work context involving indirect exposure to

secondary prisonization. However, conditions of austerity emerged as a key challenge, with in-depth analysis urged. We report on the implications of the conditions of austerity as it adds another layer to our participants' engagement in EL. Our participants share that to see the youths successfully finish high school and pursue further education for a good future, the non-profit organizations should be able to organize extracurricular activities regularly, provide mental health support resources for students and staff members, and have a sufficient number of workers supporting young people. On any given day, our participants work with 30 to 40 youths, despite the fact they were hired to work with just 25 youths. This increase in the number of young clients is associated with the government funding cuts (similar to those described by Hughes et al. 2014). As a result, they expressed frustrations with being burnt out and stressed at work, which requires them to engage in EL more extensively. It can result in poor mental well-being, which affects their work performance. Grace states that, 'Staff mental well-being is important to be productive and serve the youths better. Otherwise we start falling apart.'

Grace prioritizes her mental health, as mental health could become an issue impeding work performance. This will affect the collective emotion atmosphere. We also noticed that our participants expressed greater concern about the mental health of young adults and the need for mental health first aid training for staff members to better support the kids who had experienced secondary prisonization. However, this type of special training is limited due to constraints in funding and resources.

Besides the mental well-being of staff and youths, maintaining contact with youths' families is another challenge related to the shortage of staff members (which is directly impacted by conditions of austerity). With the insufficient number of youth care workers, young people become disengaged from the program, and more interested in engagement in delinquent behaviour with street-based social groups. Youth care workers must perform emotional labour to prevent youths from making thoughtless decisions. To do this, they also need to stay in touch with parents and teachers. Youth workers undertake home and school visits to become familiar with youths' social backgrounds and establish positive relationships with their parents. However, it takes multiple attempts for youth workers to connect with families and build positive relationships due to the parents' practice of 'system avoidance' (Brayne 2014). Given the shortage of staff members, creating and maintaining positive relationships with every family presents a challenge for our participants.

We have focused on emotion management, coping strategies and common challenges of the occupation. Adding to these challenges, young adults' family situations related to poverty, social disadvantage and criminalization undoubtedly present a distressing challenge that calls for community reinvestment. In fact, Blake identified one of the main causes of youths being involved in criminal activities and why investment in the community is needed:

Sometimes they get so desperate for money and for groceries and for just resources or help that they will go to extreme lengths and they will go sell drugs. They would go find a gang to join ...

Put otherwise by Turkey, the social environment affects youths' attendance and future success:

Because even if our students don't pay the hydro bill, if they go home and there's no lights on and then they can't eat because they can't cook or there's no heat on because they're freezing in the wintertime or they're on limited heat in the wintertime and stuff like that, then they're freezing. And how can they be successful?

Duke also shares how the exposure to secondary prisonization and youths' social environment shape their behaviour:

Well, I don't think it's totally unique to having a parent inside [a prison or jail]. I think it's as much of that as it is the environment they grew up in. So it's lived experience in the sense that they live in poverty ... I heard the comment. Well, like, 'Why can't I do that? My dad stole and he's in jail, so why can't I steal?' type of comment. So, I knew that it's the lived experience type of thing. But also I think they witnessed a lot of poor behaviours in the community they live in.

Blake, Turkey and Duke identified the root cause of the youths' behaviours and revealed why inner-city youths and their families should receive the support they need – whether it is financial, or parenting skill, or cultural and traditional – that is beyond what our participants workers can offer. Youth care workers must engage in EL to help young people struggling with their own emotions regarding the structural barriers they face in their lives. At the same time, in this work setting they are exposed to the effects of secondary prisonization. Thus, one way to mitigate this challenge and to improve the lives of inner-city youths and their families relates to the initiative of investing in the community rather than implementing policies towards austerity.

We also find that the value of EL is not recognized by their communities or government funders of youth care organizations, which can have an impact on future funding prospects. The quality of the work they do is not diligently assessed due to the

measurement of success rates that our participants find ineffective. Blake shares their insights on the measurement of success that affects funding decisions:

They [funders] want to see $A + B = C$. Instant results, fast results ... I think that the crucial part about [the program] is like the stuff that can't be measured. It's the relationships that students have with us ... The relationships that students have with schools and their parents are a lot different than with us ... Lots of the kids trust us ... They [funders] want to see the report cards and they want [them] to be decent ... But there's more to grades and attendance ... These kids are so special and so nice. And there's more than just names on papers ... You're investing in people, you're investing in time. It's obviously you serve like a four-year term, but that's kind of an investment that we're putting in these young people to four to six years ... It's not a race. It's not a rush ...

In a sense, the respondent is recounting an experience with the government demand for fast policy (Peck 2002). Their frustration and disappointment in the way work performance is measured stem from the austere government funding decisions. Result-driven rushed decisions may be ineffective and may fail the most vulnerable youths. These youth care workers build positive relationships that take significant effort, time, emotional labour and even exposure to secondary prisonization. We argue that investment policies and the recognition of the EL conducted by non-profit youth care workers can provide community safety and positive changes in youths' lives. These organizations are independent of the police and the criminal justice system. As our data on emotional labour in youth care work suggest, we advocate seeing more funding being allocated to the communities where the workers are adequately compensated while looking after the young people who experience negative consequences of secondary prisonization and who need educational, spiritual and cultural support.

Conclusion

We have brought together literature on youth care workers, secondary prisonization and emotional labour to examine youth care work in Canadian cities, and the ways youth care workers manage their emotions and those of the young people they support. We have found that youth care workers develop strategies to support young people emotionally and feel supported emotionally themselves, especially in times of austerity when staff numbers are lower than necessary and caseloads are higher than optimal.

Learning about youth care workers' duties, we have expanded the literature on youth support work and emotional labour. Drawing upon the interviews we conducted in two urban neighbourhoods, we conclude that youth care workers should be supported more fully in terms of financial supports to staff and their offices, as well as in terms of emotional or social supports, given the stresses of the work and the exposure to secondary prisonization. Empirically, we have found that they work carefully with young people and invest a lot of themselves in the lives of young people.

It hurts youth care workers when horrific events happen to young people. Many of these horrific incidents relate to the effects of imprisonment and criminalization on the families of the young people, as well as their social environments. Thus, we have found that these youth care workers are not only navigating the emotions of young people, but also navigating the effects of secondary prisonization and criminalization (Comfort 2003). Given these workers' lived experiences, socio-cultural background and efforts at creating community betterment, these grassroots groups' efforts to build relationships with young people to provide real safety in impoverished communities should be recognized and fully supported by funders.

In addition to these important findings, methodologically we have combined the use of interviews with a focus on object- and photo-elicitation methods. We made a point of asking youth care workers about objects that are important in their work or that help them with emotional labour (Hochschild 1983). Some of them brought objects that had a sacred quality to them. These objects have a cleansing and healing quality in Indigenous culture. Others shared photos and artefacts from which they found solace and comfort. We have made a contribution by suggesting that talking about objects and looking at photographs, through visual methods, can be a useful methodological supplement in research on emotional labour.

Finally, in conceptual terms, we have argued that emotional labour and secondary prisonization intersect in ways that deserve more research attention. Secondary prisonization extends beyond the immediate family of criminalized persons and affects those in tertiary relations, such as youth care workers. Therefore, emotional labour is undertaken at this tertiary level, suggesting that the effects of imprisonment run deeply in our social networks (also see Clear 2007). The literature on youth care work should continue in this vein to look not only at ethics of care and professionalism in youth care work, but further branch out to assess emotional labour in order to examine emotions themselves and reveal what emotions and emotional labour can tell us about the effects of the criminal justice system.

Acknowledgement

We thank Janet Nowatzki for her insightful comments and suggestions. We thank the reviewers for their constructive comments.

Correspondence: Bilguundari Enkhtugs, Centre for Criminological Research, Department of Sociology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. enkhtugs@ualberta.ca

¹ Bilguundari Enkhtugs, Centre for Criminological Research, Department of Sociology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada; Kevin Walby, Department of Criminal Justice, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Canada.

References

- Alexander V (2013) Views of the neighbourhood: A photo elicitation study of the built environment. *Sociological Research Online* 18(1): 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.2832>.
- Anleu S and Mack K (2005) Magistrates' everyday work and emotional labour. *Journal of Law and Society* 32(4): 590–614. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-6478.2005.00339.x>.
- Arnež J (2022) *Negotiating class in youth justice: Professional practice and interactions*. London: Routledge.
- Bailey H (2011) Secondary prisonization: The effects of involuntary separation on families of incarcerated African American men. PhD thesis, University of Kansas.
- Barford S and Whelton W (2010) Understanding burnout in child and youth care workers. *Child and Youth Care Forum* 39(4): 271–287. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-010-9104-8>.
- Brayne S (2014) Surveillance and system avoidance: Criminal justice contact and institutional attachment. *American Sociological Review* 79(3): 367–391. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0003122414530398>.
- Charmaz K (2001) Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In Gubrium JF and Holstein JA (eds) *Handbook of Interview Research*: 675–694. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- The City of Winnipeg and Statistics Canada (2019, 24 July) *2016 Census data – North Point Douglas*. <https://legacy.winnipeg.ca/census/2016/Community%20Area>.
- Clear T (2007) *Imprisoning communities: How mass incarceration makes disadvantaged neighborhoods worse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Clyne A (2015) Uncovering youth ministry's professional narrative. *Youth & Policy* 115: 19–42. <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/clynne-115.pdf>.
- Comfort M (2003) In the tube at San Quentin: The 'secondary prisonization' of women visiting inmates. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 32(1): 77–107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241602238939>.
- Condry R and Minson S (2021) Conceptualizing the effects of imprisonment on families: Collateral consequences, secondary punishment, or symbiotic harms? *Theoretical Criminology* 25(4): 540–558. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480619897078>.
- Cresswell J and Poth C (2017) Five approaches to qualitative inquiry. In *Qualitative inquiry and research design* (4th ed.): 65–108. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Davies B (2013) Youth work in a changing policy landscape: The view from England. *Youth and Policy* 110: 6–32. <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/bernard-davies-youth-work-in-a-changing-policy-landscape.pdf>.
- Davies B (2015) Youth work: A manifesto for our times – revisited. *Youth and Policy* 114: 96–117. <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/davies-youth-work-manifesto-revisited.pdf>.
- Deakin H and Wakefield K (2013) Skype interviewing: Reflections of two PhD researchers. *Qualitative Research* 14(5): 603–616. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794113488126>.
- De Leon J and Cohen J (2005) Object and walking probes in ethnographic interviewing. *Field Methods* 17(2): 200–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05274733>.
- de St Croix T (2013) 'I just love youth work!': Emotional labour, passion and resistance. *Youth and Policy* 110: 33–51. <http://www.youthandpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/tania-de-st-croix-i-just-love-youth-work.pdf>.
- Gray L, Wong-Wylie G, Rempel G and Cook K (2020) Expanding qualitative research interviewing strategies: Zoom video communications. *The Qualitative Report* 25(5): 1292–1301. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2020.4212>.
- Guillemin M and Gillam L (2004) Ethics, reflexivity, and 'ethically important moments' in research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 10(2): 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360>.

- Hamilton S, Maslen S, Best D, Freeman J, O'Donnell M, Reibel T and Watkins R (2020) Putting 'justice' in recovery capital: Yarning about hopes and futures with young people in detention. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 9(2): 20–39. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v9i2.1256>.
- Hamilton R and Bowers B (2006) Internet recruitment and e-mail interviews in qualitative studies. *Qualitative Health Research* 16(6): 821–835. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732306287599>.
- Harper D (2002) Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies* 17(1): 13–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725860220137345>.
- Hochschild A (1983) *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Hughes G, Cooper C, Gormally S and Rippingale J (2014) The state of youth work in austerity England: Reclaiming the ability to 'care'. *Youth and Policy* 113: 1–14. <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/yandp113.pdf>.
- Karabanow J (1999) When caring is not enough: Emotional labor and youth shelter workers. *Social Service Review* 73(3): 340–357. <https://doi.org/10.1086/514427>.
- Love J and Hendry L (1994) Youth workers and youth participants: Two perspectives of youth work? *Youth and Policy* 46: 43–55. <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/youthandpolicy107-1.pdf>.
- MacKinnon S (2021) Post-secondary education in the inner-city: Breaking barriers and building bridges in a divided city. *International Journal for Talent Development and Creativity* 8(1–2): 203–211. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1076757ar>.
- Miller E (2022) *Race, recognition and retribution in contemporary youth justice: The intractability malleability thesis*. London: Routledge.
- Parry S, Williams T and Oldfield J (2022) Reflections from the forgotten frontline: 'The reality for children and staff in residential care' during COVID-19. *Health and Social Care in the Community* 30: 212–224. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13394>.
- Peck J (2002) Political economies of scale: Fast policy, interscalar relations, and neoliberal workfare. *Economic Geography* 78(3): 331–360. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4140813>.
- Perry K and Ricciardelli R (2021) Working with incarcerated youth: Emotional labour and moral wages. *The British Journal of Criminology* 61(4): 1026–1043. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azaa107>.
- Phillips J, Waters J, Westaby C and Fowler A (eds) (2020) *Emotional labour in criminal justice and criminology*. London: Routledge.
- Pink S (2013) Making meanings in visual ethnography. In *Doing Visual Ethnography*: 141–160. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Price M (2018) Youth practitioner professional narratives: Changing identities in changing times. *British Journal of Educational Studies* 66(1): 53–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2017.1332334>.
- Rimé B (2007) The social sharing of emotion as an interface between individual and collective processes in the construction of emotional climates. *Journal of Social Issues* 63(2): 307–322. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2007.00510.x>.
- Reid H and Oliver J (2014) Beyond rhetoric: Asserting the importance of professional ethics and values in the training of youth support workers in challenging times. *Youth & Policy* 113: 31–47. <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/yandp113.pdf>.
- Reizabal L, Garcia I, Sansinenea E, Sarrionandia A, Fernández E and Lopez-de-Ipina K (2021) Psychological effects of secondary prisonization on older parents. *Trends in Psychology* 31: 16–30. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-021-00127-6>.
- Sercombe H (1998) Power, ethics and youth work. *Youth Studies Australia* 17(1): 18–23.
- Spence J (2008) What do you youth workers do? Communicating youth work. *Youth Studies Ireland* 2(2): 3–18.
- Theodosius C (2006) Recovering emotion from emotion management. *Sociology* 40(5): 893–910. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038506067512>.
- Walby K and Cole D (2019) Beyond emotional labour: Emotions and peer support in a Canadian prison. *Emotion, Space, and Society* 33: 100631. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2019.100631>.
- Walby K and Spencer D (2012) Objects, organizations and the emotional climate of a mass spectrometry laboratory, in Spencer D, Walby K and Hunt A (eds) *Emotions matter: A Relational Approach to Emotions*: 181–200. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Walby K and Spencer D (2018) Tree planting as neo-tribalism: Ritual, risk boundaries, and group effervescence. *Emotion, Space, & Society* 28: 60–66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2018.06.006>.
- Walby K and Spencer D (2020) Circus aerialism and emotional labour. *Emotions and Society* 2(2): 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1332/263169020X15943015197376>.
- Westaby C, Fowler A, Phillips J and Waters J (2020) Conformity, conflict and negotiation in criminal justice work: Understanding practice through the lens of emotional labour. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice* 61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcrj.2020.100390>.
- Whelan M (2010) Detached youth work, in Batsleer J and Davies B (eds) *What is youth work?:* 47–60. Exeter: Learning Matters
- White A, DeMand A, McGovern G and Akiva T (2020) Understanding youth worker job stress. *Journal of Youth Development* 15(1): 47–69. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jyd.2020.817>.

Willig C (2017) Reflections on the use of object elicitation. *Qualitative Psychology* 4(3): 211–222.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/qap0000054>.

Zubulake D (2017) Building blocks of professionalism: Values, principles, and ethics in youth work. *Journal of Youth Development* 12(1): 9–17. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jyd.2017.483>.